

Chapter V

5. Women In Work And Decision-Making

In the chapter dealing with the socio-economic, conditions of Bhutia women in Sikkim, it is observed that majority of them also participated in various activities outside the house, like attending to farm labour, horticulture, post harvest operations and tending domestic animals besides their household chores. The work structure of women has a lot of effect on decision making (Lodha, 2000). Number of studies conducted in third world countries reveal significant variations about women's economic activities outside the home. With the exception of Malaysia, women in South – East Asia enjoy relative freedom to engage in and out of house economic activities. Kallgren, (1977) observes that in South Asia female non – familial activities are restricted by cultural constraints of female mobility and female seclusion. However, according to Durand (1975) Women's participation is greater in agriculture than in the non – agriculture sectors. A similar trend is also observed in Bhutia society of Sikkim in the present study. A study in Pakistan also indicates that approximately 73 percent of women belonging to agricultural household are in labour force. Among them 54 percent are engaged in agricultural work on their family farms (United Nations 1993). In another study, Boserup (1970) observes that the proportion of women as agricultural wage labourers are 44 percent in India, 40 percent in Sri Lanka, 39 percent in Malaysia and 35 percent in Thailand. Palileo (1995) observes that the proportion of female working population engaged in agricultural and related activities range from over 50 percent in Korea and Sri Lanka to 80 percent in India, Pakistan, Thailand, Malaysia and Nepal. Thus, the nature and magnitude varies from region to region and even within a region their participation changes according to social hierarchies, farming pattern, socio- economic status and even ecological zones

(Swaminthan, 1985). In the hill areas tribal women are much heavily burdened. Hutton (1922) describes how among the Lhota Nagas in Nagaland, women work side by side with men. However, among them in the field as well as at home work is divided between the sexes. Lama (1994) notes that among the Lepcha and Bhutia households, heavier works are often performed by men. Except ploughing women are actively involved in agriculture. Both men and women run small business and shops. Women also work as porters. Thus there is hardly any activity which women do not perform. However, there is a dearth of studies, which show the relationship between work structure of Bhutia tribal women and its impact on her position in her decision – making role especially in Sikkim.

This chapter tends to examine the availability of work opportunities for the Bhutia women in the study area, the nature of their work participation and it also deals with the direct indicators of autonomy and their impact in the decision making processes. The participation of women in work depends upon their education, socio – cultural values attached with their work and availability of work. In the traditional Bhutia society, women share agricultural work equally with men but development of new social conditions have changed their working conditions. An enquiry with regard to availability of work reveals that Bhutia women work in Government services, as Traders or in Handicrafts / Handloom sector. Most of these women mainly work in agriculture, yet jobs in Government services like teaching, nursing are also available to them. The educated Bhutia/ Lepcha is getting more and more interested in joining administrative services. Even the young Bhutia / Lepcha woman with peasant backgrounds is migrating to urban areas to seek white-collar jobs in government, semi- government and other offices (Bhattacharya, 1994). Bhutia women's participation outside their homes has

Table: 3a (i)**Employment opportunities**

Employment	Number	Percentage
No response	1	0.5
Agriculture	120	60
Trade	20	10
Government service	50	25
Handicraft/handlooms	3	1.5
Others	6	3

Source: Field survey

Table: 3a (ii)**Nature of work participation**

Nature of work	Number	Percentage
Govt. service and household	40	20
Household, agriculture, horticulture	60	34
Household, agriculture, Trader	68	30
Student and household	10	5
Household	22	11

Source: Field survey

Table: 3a (iii)

Average hours of work in the household

Hours of work	Number	Percentage
Not applicable	6	3
3	0	0
4	6	3
5	126	63
6	50	25
8	12	6

Source: Field survey

Table: 3a (iv)

Average number of hours spent on work other than household

Hours of work	Number	Percentage
Not applicable	6	3
3	3	1.5
4	5	2.5
5	100	50
6	76	38
8	10	5

Source: Field survey

increased due to increasing urbanization which is reflected from the opportunities which are available to them.

The field survey [Table: 3a (i)] reveals that in the North, South and West districts of Sikkim, agriculture is the main occupational opportunity available to the Bhutia women. This is mainly due to the fact that agriculture is widely practiced in these districts. In the East district women have some degree of occupational diversification, whereas in case of other districts opportunities remain limited. However, women's twin role of housekeeper and also a contributor to family income restricts their mobility in and around the village as they pursue these opportunities very close to their residential places. Along with the availability of employment opportunities, the analysis of nature of work participation of the respondents is also done. The data [Table: 3a (ii)] indicates that majority of the women are involved in the household, agricultural and horticultural activities. Women in the East district are involved either in household, government activities or even just household activities.

The question about the number of hours they spend on carrying out their household activities reveals that most of the women are hard working. The data [Table:3a(iii)] indicate that 63 percent women, on an average spend 5 hours in household and 25 percent women spend 6 hours in meeting their household needs. The number of women spending more than eight hours is only 6 percent. Bhutia women after spending time in the household activities, utilizes the remaining time for other income supplementing activities. In comparison to data in the above table the data in table [Table:3a(iv)] reveals that in addition to their household work 50 percent of the Bhutia women spend an average of 5 hours work in other than the household activities.

Table: 3a (v)

Men's attitude towards women's work

Attitude	Number	Percentage
No appreciation	33	20
Appreciation	74	34
Do not say anything	93	30

Source: Field survey

Table: 3a (vi)

Women's Attitude towards women's work Outside Home

Attitude	Number	Percentage
High	64	20
Medium	86	34
Low	50	30

Source: Field survey

About 38 percent women spend 6 hours in work other than household activities. The number of women spending 3 hours is only 1.5 percent, which means that Bhutia women in Sikkim are doubly burdened. Similar results are also reported by Rath et al. (1988) in a study of tribal women in Orissa where out of the total 16.50 working hours per day of women, 7.50 hours are allocated to field and forest related activities. Similar result is also reported for farmwomen of Sikkim by Lapche (1987). Women's work participation also depends on the attitudes which men have towards their participation because only when women have the consent from the males they can work without any pressures.

The table [Table: 3a (v)] discerns that 20percent men do not appreciate women working outside and 30percent generally do not have any problem with the women working. This indicates that generally Bhutia men in Sikkim appreciate women working outside. In a civic society, the progress of women in the society also depends upon the work being appreciated by women themselves because unless and until women perceive a high status for themselves they will not have it.

Women are given a high position and a score of 3, if they work for economic independence, a medium position and a score of 2 if they work for supporting their family and a low position and a score of 1 if they feel it is only a compulsion. The data in [Table: 3a (vi)] provides a clue that women's work outside home has a medium level of appreciation amongst the women themselves. A high level of appreciation is felt by 20 percent women who feel that working outside gives them economic independence and helps in their personal growth. 30 percent of women have a low level of appreciation. This is indicated by those women who feel that there is no alternative but it is an economic compulsion. Women however generally feel that their work should be

recognized and this recognition should be forthcoming from the members of their families.

The data with regard to women's occupation, their work participation and the attitude of men and women reveal that most of the women are found participating in work irrespective of the attitude of men. Bhutia men however, do not indicate a pessimistic attitude towards women's participation. Do women's work participation outside home and the contribution they make to the family income enables them to have a say in the decision making in the family? Economic freedom provides women self – assurance and self – confidence, resulting in changes in their attitudes, aspiration and effective participation in different walks of life. Therefore, the impact of her work participation should be felt in their field of decision making.

5a. Decision making:

Decision making involves allocation of resources and distribution of roles within family. In other words, the extent to which women have equal voice in matters affecting themselves and their families, their control over material and other resources, the authority to make decisions, and freedom from constraints on physical mobility. They are all included under decision making. These are also important indicators of autonomy. Autonomy has been defined as 'the degree of women's access to, and control over material resources (including food, income, land and other forms of wealth) and to social resources (including knowledge, power and prestige) within the family, in the community, and in the society at large' (Dixon, 1978). Decision making is one component that reflects women's position in different areas of household, managements, economic participation, access to resources (Upadhyaya, 1991).

These alternate dimensions of autonomy have rarely been measured empirically and what have been routinely used for analyses are education, marriage age, profits of economic activity etc. which are regarded as inadequate for measuring dimensions of female autonomy. According to Dalhstrom (1967) one of the most important objectives of the feminist movement is removal of various external barriers to ensure equal influence and participation in decision making by women with men in family as well as public life.

When a woman works she increases her ability to sanction or control; because of the financial contribution she makes to the family she wants to have a say in family affairs and wants herself to be involved in decision making regarding children's education, shopping, budgeting or financial matters.

In the course of interview with Bhutia women they were asked a battery of questions concerning their autonomy and decision making power within the household. The inclusion of these dimensions will allow a better understanding of the position in the various decision making processes. Four dimensions of autonomy are selected and indices for each were created. Economic decision making authority and child related decision making; mobility; freedom from threat from husband; access to economic resources and extent of ownership right over material possession are taken into consideration.

5a (i) Economic decision – making authority:

Economic decision – making authority is represented by information on the participation in three economic decisions: the purchase of food, major household goods and jewellery. When a woman has not been consulted or does not buy any asset she is given a score of 1 or low. If the woman has been consulted she is given a score of 2 or

medium and if a women has chosen these articles on her own she is given a score of 3 or high.

5a (ii) Children related decision:

Children related decision making authority is represented by information on whether the woman is the main decision maker on issues as what to do if a child falls ill, discipline, how far to educate children and what type of school should children attend. The women is given a score of 1 or low when she has no say at all, 2 or medium if she makes a decision on any two or three issues and she is given a score 3 or high if she is a major decision – makers in all four. A sample of 200 respondents was taken separately for this study.

5a (iii) Mobility:

The mobility sums five places – the health centre, the home of a relative or friend, the market, cinema and the neighboring village. She is given a score of 1 or low if she can go only if escorted, 2 or medium if she goes unescorted but needs permission for going to some of the places and if she can move about unescorted without permission to every place, she is given a score of 3 or high.

5a (iv) Freedom from threat:

The index of freedom from threat ranges from 1 to 3. 1 or low is assigned to women who fear their husbands and are beaten by them; 2 or medium if they fear and are not beaten; 3 or high if they neither fear nor suffer beating at the hands of their husbands.

5a (v) Access to financial resources:

Access to financial resources is summed up in four questions: (a) having a say in how household income is to be spent; (b) getting cash to spend; (c) operating bank accounts; (d) being free to purchase small gifts or items of jewellery. A woman is given a

Table: 3b (i)

Bhutia women in decision making (access to economic assets)

District	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)
East	6	66	28
North	20	50	28
West	30	56	14
South	30	70	10

Source: Field survey

Table:3b (ii)

Role of Bhutia women locational awareness and status of mobility

District	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)
East	0	0	100
North	0	4	96
West	4	4	92
South	4	4	92

Source: Field survey

score 1 or low if she has no control over any of the resources and everything is looked after by her husband, in-laws or parents, 2 or medium if she has access to some resources but jointly with husband, parents or in-laws and a score 3 or high if she has independent access.

5a (vi) Control of ownership over material possession:

This includes questions like (a) whether any of the family's valuable (land/jewellery) belongs to the women (b) whether she can support herself through her own savings. This is measured with the help of giving score 1 or low if others (husband/in-laws) have ownership rights; 2 or medium if it is jointly owned and 3 or high if wife / respondents have sole right.

All these indicators of autonomy were used to analyze Bhutia women's position in society.

Economic decision-making is an important indicator of women's decision-making power in terms of their position in the household. Women's participation in work outside the house is conditioned by various regional and cultural factors and in most cases it is the compulsion of economic pressures that women go out to work. This fact has been acknowledged in a number of studies conducted on women's participation in work force in the developing countries (Niranjna 2000). Bajwa (1983) pointed out that women's economic role affects their position in the family. It is apparent from the respondent's response that in all the four districts women have a medium level of control when it comes to decision making on their economic assets. It was noted during the interviews that although she had control over decision on day today cooking/ procuring items but when it came to buying expensive items she did not have much say. The data [Table: 3b (i)] show that the women hadve medium position in access to economic assets in Sikkim.

Fig: 5 Physical mobility of Bhutia Women (Average of Four districts of Sikkim in 2004-2005)

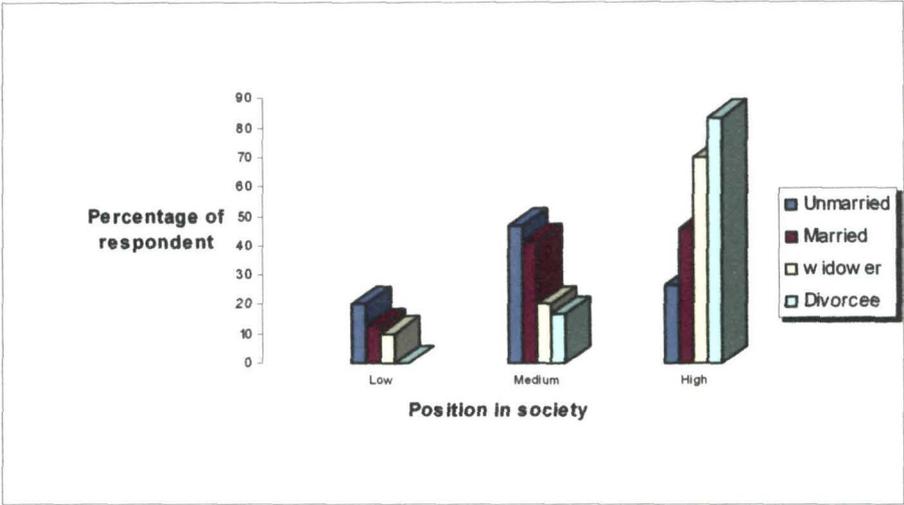
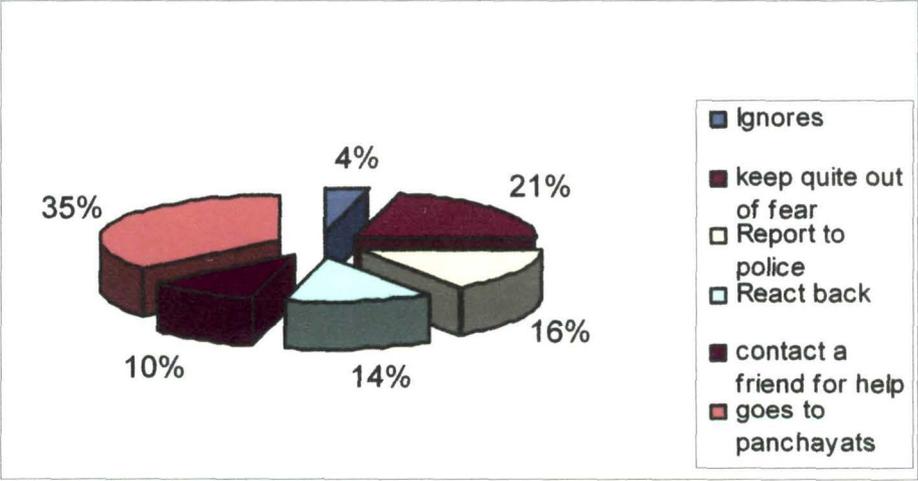


Fig: 6 Response to the victimization of Bhutia women by men and their family



Acharya and Bennett (1982); Badigar and Rao (1980); Parthasarthy (1988) have documented that women wage earners have better status within the household because their economic contribution to the family has greater visibility and their independent earning gives them a higher bargaining power enhancing their status in terms of decision making power. This may also be applicable to the Bhutia women of Sikkim. After the analysis of the economic contribution, information on their locational awareness and freedom of mobility is sought. The study (Fig.5) reveals that the unmarried and married women are allowed to move alone with prior permission either from parents/husband that means they have a medium degree of freedom when it comes to their freedom of mobility. However, the divorcees and the widows in the Bhutia society score a high degree of freedom as they did not seek permission from anybody in the family since they have no questioning authority in the family. There is not a single instance in the sample area where the Bhutia women are not allowed to move out at all.

Female mobility out of the household for economic reasons increases their awareness and knowledge about the outside world. Acharya and Bennett (1982) reports that higher female mobility is associated with greater input in market economy increasing power over resource allocation and thus enhancing her status. Mobility also makes a women watchful about the general information of the locality and locational awareness. Several questions on location of important places like post office, bank, police station, hospital, children's school and husband's working place are made and it was found that the level of locational awareness is high and this could be related some what to the mobility, because female mobility is relatively high [Table: 3b(ii)] in Sikkim. The position of women in a particular society is also dependent upon the treatment which is meted out to her by her men folk. Therefore, a study was conducted to find out the same.

Table:3b (iii)

Response of Bhutia women to freedom from threat

District	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)
East	0	0	100
North	0	2	98
West	0	2	98
South	0	3	97

Source: Field survey

Table: 3b (iv)

Role of Bhutia women in decision making (financial matters)

District	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)
East	30	46	24
North	22	58	20
West	30	50	20
South	28	52	20

Source: Field survey

It is evident from the data [Table: 3b(iii)] taken, regarding the position of Bhutia women on the matter of domestic violence that more or less the Bhutia women neither fear nor are subjected to any violence. In East, district 100percent women respondents are found free from domestic violence. Generally, Bhutia men treat their women with respect and did almost never indulge in physical abuse. When questioned what should be the response of the women to the seldom victimization by men and the family, the following result was obtained.

In general the result shows that in Bhutia society, the women believe in equality and that reflects in their day today living. They retaliate when victimized by their men and family and very seldom they keep quiet out of fear. In case of very bad situation only, they are found to be reporting to the Panchayats. In rest of the minor cases, they usually are able to solve the problem with dignity. When questioned about why women were oppressed? It is the general opinion that alcohol is the main cause and under its effect only men sometimes misbehaved with their wives. Another reason cited was suspicion about the character of the wife. Such situations generally resulted in unpleasantness (Fig.6).

Ghai (1981) reported that women's ownership over productive resources increases their decision making power. One who controls the family property occupies an important position in the power hierarchy. Power over money is an important factor in decision-making and control over finances reveals one's position within the household.

In Sikkim, in the Bhutia society it is generally observed [Table: 3b (iv)] that in the entire four districts the women have a medium degree of hold over the financial matter in the family. Majority of the women could not draw money without the consent

Table: 3b (v)

Role of Bhutia women in decision making regarding children

District	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)
East	16	48	36
North	20	62	18
West	34	60	6
South	36	60	4

Source: Field survey

of their husbands which shows their lack of control in the family financial resources. Though, their self determined decision in operating bank account would have indicated greater degree of financial autonomy, it does not apply in many cases in Sikkim. Children- centered decision making is also an important indicator which affects women's position and autonomy in the family.

Among the Bhutias, because of the patriarchal of the society, women are free to take independent decision with some control over the decision-making about the education of children. Therefore, it can be summarized that she enjoys a medium position and generally takes decision with concurrence of her husband. The result [Table: 3b(v)] presented in all the tables confirms that Bhutia women have a medium level of decision making authority.

5b.CASE STUDY:

1.Tshering Wangchuk Bhutia a is 32 year old married woman and a resident of Tathangchen, Gangtok. Her husband works in one of the Government Offices in Gangtok. She is a housewife and spends her time looking after her children and her household. She freely moves to the market to purchase articles for the household and is well aware of all the important places in Gangtok like Post Office, Hospital, and Police Station etc. She goes to pick up her children from school and teaches them. She is a dropout after class twelve. She has no idea as to how her husband makes investments because she never operates the bank account but he does give her money to run the house. Her parents stay in West Sikkim so she goes once a year to visit them with her children. She has no desire to work because her husband earns very well. She is very repelled with

the idea how husbands beat up their wives. Her Nepali neighbour faces this problem but never asks anyone for help. She tries to help her out with the intervention of women commission but the torture continues for this woman. She feels women's position in society is very much dependent upon the attitude of her parents before marriage and her husband after marriage.

2. Karma Doma Bhutia is 25 years old and is a resident of Gyalshing (West Sikkim). She is unmarried and works as a teacher in primary school in Gyalshing. She did her graduation from Gangtok and after her mother expired she returned to be with her father. She has two elder brothers who are staying in Gangtok, both of them have married girls of their choice. Karma represents modern Bhutia women, who lives life on her terms and conditions. She wants to marry of her own choice and is also ready to marry a boy of another community but he will have to stay in her father's house because he does not want to leave her father who is a cancer patient. She is very sure about the number of children she wants to have and will opt for a permanent birth control method after she has had two children. She feels women are responsible for the bad treatment they are meted out, she had even filed a complain against a Nepali man who used to beat up his wife. She feels it is cowardice to bear and not revolt. She feels her education has done a lot of good to her and feels every woman should be educated.

3. Noki is 34 years old and has two children. She is a resident of Tingchim (North Sikkim) and is a teacher by profession. She was working even before marriage in Dzongu. She had a love marriage which was traditionally performed and she moved to Tingchim and started working here in the primary school. She gets up

at 6'0 clock in the morning and after completing her household chores leaves for her school at 8:30a.m. She stays in an extended family, so she also has to look after her in-laws. She is working not because she gets economic freedom but for passing her time because her husband remains out of station for several days, as he is a driver by profession. She feels that economic independence does not exempt any woman from household chores. She can spend her money according to her own choice and even operates the bank account because her husband and in-laws are not educated. However, in important family matters it is always her in-laws who take the decisions. Her husband does not say anything about her working outside. She moves outside the house but always needs permission from her in-laws. She however does not feel that economic freedom amounts to a high position in society.

4. Pema Lahmu is 28 years old, unmarried and a resident of Barfung (South Sikkim). She works in her small field where she grows vegetables to sell in Rabong Bazar. She has had education till class 5 and because she was not a bright student she had to drop out of school. She has two elder brothers who are married and stay in Gangtok with their families. She stays with her parents and her younger brother. She spends 5 hours doing the household chores and devotes on an averages 6 hours in her own agricultural field. Her parents are very appreciative of her hard work and want that she should marry someone from Barfung so that they do not lose her labour. She is able to move freely in nearby areas and sometimes she is accompanied by her father or brother but most of the time she travels alone. Since she stays with her parents, they look after most of her requirements. She can cook food of her choice and even

purchase articles for the household of her own but she can never buy valuables like jewellery. She has some money which she can spend on her own, but she never visits any bank or takes any interest in any of the financial matters. Her parents want to give her some share in family property because she is the one who is looking after them. She commands a good position in the family.

5. Choden Bhutia is a 68 years old widow and a resident of Singyang (West Sikkim). She has four children who are all married, but she lives with her eldest son who is a farmer in Singyung. She does not do any household chores because she is very old now and has also developed cataract in her eyes. Her daughter in-law treats her with respect and her son always gives her some money for her personal use. Earlier she was very fond of weaving carpets but now because of her eye problem she is not able to do so. Once in a while she goes and sits in the shop which is jointly run by her middle son and his wife. She has visited Gyalshing which is the nearest town but has no idea about any of the important places like Post Office, Public Health Centre etc. She moves freely without permission to her neighbour's place and also visits her sister who stays nearby. She has some traditional jewellery, which she wears for special occasions, she wants to keep it because she wants to give it to her daughter. The land has already been divided between her three sons when her husband was alive so she feels she should give something to her daughter. She regrets not having any formal education but otherwise she is happy with her position in the family.

6. Rinzing Lhamu Bhutia is 35 years old and a resident of West Sikkim. She was eighteen years old when she married a Nepali boy (Rai) from East Sikkim. Her marriage was an inter community marriage and her parents refused to accept

her. She moved to Gangtok with her husband who was a driver and her two children were born within a span of four years of her marriage. Her husband started inflicting abuses on her and started quarrelling with her over small matters and finally one day he left her and started living with another girl. Rinzing took up a job in SITCO Watch factory and started looking after her children. In her extra time she makes hand knitted pullovers on order. She spends 5 to 6 hrs on her household work and approximately 6 to 7 hrs in the factory. She freely moves about and is aware of all the important locations of the society. She never asks her parents for any help but feels that she should have got her husband punished. She freely spends money because she says she has earned it. She wants to give the best of education to her two children who are now studying in Standard III and IV respectively. She feels education is a must. Although she does not have any assets to boast about yet she is happy with her life. She has her friends circle and feels that at some point of her life her parents will forgive her because that is one thing that she really misses.

* Names of the respondents have been changed

5c.Summary:

There is a definite pattern to the kinds of decisions in which women participate and they are generally not threatening in patriarchal context. All the dimensions of autonomy appear closely related and none of them are weak or less consistent. Bhutia women in almost every index of autonomy decision-making authority, mobility, access to and control over resources experience freedom as such. A highly gender- stratified culture was not seen and relations were equal. However, in most of the cases women do not take

decisions independently but always do with their husband's or in-law's parent's consent. Despite women working in economically gainful activities, they enjoy a moderate status in the economic as well as social affairs of the family. Wherever women enjoy a higher position it was because of a level of education. Education level which is a cognitive component can affect qualitatively. The time spent on work structure also increases awareness regarding access to resources. Acharya and Bennett (1982); Agarwal (1986); Kaur, (1987); Oberoi and Sandhu (1991) have also reported that women's involvement in decision making is associated with her educational level. With education and employment, her role in total management becomes very significant and she does not suffer from onerous and equitable position. The data with regard to their participation in household, agriculture, horticulture work indicate that the life of Bhutia women is burdened with these works. These women work on an average for 6 hours a day and these works supplement their household income and earn them the recognition from their men and family. It is therefore obvious that women's work gives them good social standing and also the right in decision making process of the family and in turn adds to their empowerment.

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