

## Chapter VI

### **6. Political Participation Of Bhutia Women:**

Political participation is a criterion for political development. Active participation by citizens in political affairs is necessary in democracy because it is characterized by decentralization of power and authoritative decision making. Leighley (1991) is of the view that participation in national problem solving and campaign activities enhances political conceptualization (individual's information about politics) as individuals are exposed to the conflict of ideas, through participation they develop more understanding of the political system. Political participation thus fosters stability and re-enforcement of the legitimacy of the political authority and it is the most effective method of institutionalizing participation through representative government. This helps not only in controlling the system but also the individuals.

Nie and Verba (1975) argue that political participation gives some kind of mental satisfaction to the citizens – satisfaction with the Government and satisfaction with one's own role. McClosky (1968) also expresses the same view because according to him participation enables men by giving them a sense of their own responsibility and dignity, alerts both ruler and the ruled and broadens political development. Participation is of particular importance in societies where some groups are categorized as weak. This results in mobilization of power at all levels and helps to restore a democratic set up. Political Participation is thus, the hallmark of democracy. Almond and Verba (1965) state that "Democracy is characterized by the fact that power over significant authoritative decisions in a society is distributed among the population. The ordinary man is expected to take an active part in governmental affairs, to be aware of how decisions are made, and to make his views known". When an individual participates in political

affairs, he also casts his vote on the basis of rational judgment. Orum (1978) has sought to identify the channels through which the citizens attempt to influence the leaders as well as isolate those citizens who use these channels on a regular basis. According to Verba *et al.* (1971), participation is not a single undifferentiated entity. The modes of participation, which relates the citizens to the Government, differ significantly. Voting is accepted as the standard political act. However, other modes like campaign activity, co-operative activity and citizen initiated contacts are also mentioned. Milbrath (1965) adds protest and communication to these modes mentioned by Verba, bring these activities under three categories: 'Gladiatorial activities', 'Transitional activities' and 'Spectator activities'. Gladiatorial represents the small number of party workers whose association with political parties keeps them engaged in a series of direct party activities like holding party offices, fighting election as party candidates, raising party funds, attending party meetings, and joining the party campaigns. Transitional activities include attending party meetings as party supporters or party sympathizers or just neutral and making contribution to the party fund. Spectator activities, on the other hand, include voting, influencing others to vote in a particular way, making or joining a political discussion. However, it is observed that more people participate in political discussion than vote and many more vote rather than join parties or do campaigning.

Some empirical studies suggest that most of the people are not politically oriented. Some people who participate in political activity are in a minority. The study of Fakin's (1972) reveals that only ten percent in all democratic countries belong to a political class, which is a very small percentage and do not constitute a large majority of adults.

Political Participation is a complex phenomenon because it varies from country to country and from society to society. These variations are due to some determinants of

participation like education, access to information etc. Some situational factors in individual countries like history and tradition also influence political participation. Therefore, generalizations derived after research in Western countries may not be equally the same for India. Female citizens of whichever society or whatever educational background they may come from find it very difficult to exercise political influence because passivity is perceived as a norm for women.

Political Participation of women is considered as an indicator of a developed society but equal participation of women in political process is a recent development. Although women are directly related to various operations of society, yet they remain subject to inequality and oppression. Equality of men and women in matters of right has been established by constitution, laws and codes, but this does not give automatic rights to women. Chafe's (1972) study dealing with the social, economic and political role of women points out that discrimination is rooted in the fabric of society and sexual division of labour confines women to her domestic domain. Aristotle separates public sphere of activity from private sphere, he includes political institution, law and rational in public sphere and the household as private. Since man and women are characteristically different, hence man is confined to public sphere and women to private sphere. This state is treated as the highest order of social organization to which other orders are subordinated. Thus politics is regarded as a male domain and the subordinate position of a woman is not questioned. However, Mill (1980) questioned the unequal position and maintained that position of women is an unwarranted exception to principles of liberty, equal justice, equal opportunity; a world in which authority and privilege are linked to merit. Subjugation of women has led to under estimation of the significance of women and sexual division of labour has resulted in partial and one sided development of the

characters of man and women .Women have been forced to suffer repression in some direction like becoming more self sacrificing and this has resulted in the man becoming more aggressive. According to him, 'complete equality' between man and women in all legal, political and social spheres would create conditions favourable to democracy. Although constitution has given equal political status yet social and cultural conditions assign her a secondary position in society. Mill emphasized enfranchisement of women, reforms in marriage laws to strengthen the independent position of women; however, he was not able to raise the question that a man must accept the responsibility of the household and the children. According to Milbrath (1956) in almost all societies, politics is mainly a male prerogative and women should fall in line with them politically. The changes brought by modern industrial societies are bringing a change in the sex difference but impact of tradition is still visible. The prevailing patriarchal ideology, which promotes values of submission and sacrifice, undermines attempts made by women to assure themselves. Engel's (1977) work on women and politics observed that the "barriers between the two sexes will only be removed when in the field of politics women are regarded as citizens in the first place and only then as members of their sex".

Mass mobilization and participation of women in politics are identified as parameters of political consciousness. However, according to Lasing (1975) women are less interested politically and less politically informed since they are less politically efficacious and less likely to join politics. Men continue to believe that political activity is a masculine prerogative; women are granted the right to vote because the old theory of female incapacity has been replaced by a functional theory. In its modernized form, the functional theory recognizes the right of women to work outside the home and participate

in civic and political affairs, yet emphasizes that home caring and rearing is almost obligatory for all women in society.

Many interrelated factors that affect women's ability to participate are lack of experience in campaigning public debate, prevailing negative attitude towards women, lack of confidence and support for female candidate as politicians, difficulties in combining a political career with traditional women's role in family and society, economic dependency and insufficient education. According to the Marxists, the lower degree of participation in politics is due to the existing ideology which discourages women from participating in politics. Women have been taught from ages to subordinate themselves. The constitution gives right to the women but the traditional attitudes are incongruent with political socialization. As a result, women find it very difficult to adjust to the democratic political set up. According to Kirkpatrick (1974) "A woman entering politics risks the social and psychological penalties so frequently associated with non-conformity, disdain, internal conflicts, failures are widely believed to be her likely reward". Due to these social factors like curtailed socialization, male retaliation and pragmatic demand of family roles prevent women participation. In this chapter, an attempt is made to analyze the nature and extent of participation by Bhutia women in the political life of Sikkim. According to records of Sikkim Legislative Assembly from 1974 to 1999 there was no woman representative in the assembly. In Sikkim, a detailed study on political participation of women especially "Bhutia women" is lacking. This study will bring out her exact political position by studying her electoral participation, political awareness and attitude of women towards women participation.

**Table: 4a (i)**

**Age and electoral participation of Bhutia women in the study sample (in all the four districts of Sikkim) in 2004-2005**

Age	North			East			South			West		
	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)
Upto20	72.727	18.181	9.090	50	33.333	16.666	18.181	0	81.818	70	10	20
21-30	4.761	9.523	85.71	21.739	34.782	43.478	50	50	0	43.715	37.500	18.750
31-40	0	0	100	33.333	50	16.666	66.666	16.666	16.666	37.500	0	62.510
41-50	0	0	100	100	0	0	57.142	42.857	0	0	33.333	66.666
51-60	0	100	0	100	0	0	100	0	0	16.666	16.666	66.666
61-70	0	25	75	100	0	0	100	0	0	0	50	50
71-80	50	0	50	100	0	0	100	0	0	33.333	33.333	33.333

**Table: 4a (ii)**

**Marital status and electoral participation of Bhutia women in the study sample (in all the four districts of Sikkim) in 2004-2005**

Marital status	North			East			South			West		
	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)
Unmarried	33.333	33.333	33.333	30.434	4.347	65.217	31.250	62.510	6.250	53.333	13.333	33.333
Married	37.037	37.037	25.925	0	14.285	85.714	46.875	46.875	6.250	46.666	20	33.333
widower	0	0	100	0	0	100	0	100	0	33.333	33.333	33.333
Divorcee	100	0	0	0	0	100	0	0	0	0	100	100

Source: Field survey

## **6a. Electoral participation:**

The degree of electoral participation was analyzed in terms of various socio-economic variables of the respondents. Most of the researchers examining participation have sought to relate the degree and the type of participation to socio-economic variables (Verba, and Nie, 1972).

### **6a (i) Age and electoral participation:**

These variables suggest the type of socialization experience an individual has had and gives clues about the social definition of a person. An attempt is made to examine the association between socio-economic variables and voting turnout of the respondents in the study area. For measuring the degree of her electoral participation women have been classified into the categories high, medium and low. Women who participated in voting and campaigning activities and cast votes by their own choice have been put into high level of electoral participation and given a score 3. Those who just participated in voting and cast vote on advice of others were put into medium category of electoral participation and were given score 2, those who did not participate in voting either due to some reasons or non eligibility of voting right were put into low category of electoral participation and were given a score 1. Voting turnout is an important indicator of political participation of women in India. It is to be noted that it require very little effort and present cultural attitude is not that much negative towards participation of women in such simple citizen activities.

The data [Table: 4a(i)] presented here shows that out of 200 respondents only 9.09percent had a high degree of electoral participation in North, however in East and South and West districts 16.66 percent, 81.81 percent and 20 percent of respondents respectively had a high degree of electoral participation in the age group of 20. It was

**Table: 4a (iii)****Occupation and electoral participation of Bhutia women in the study sample (in all the four districts of Sikkim) in 2004-2005**

Occupation	North			East			South			West		
	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)
Student	33.333	22.222	44.444	50	21.428	28.571	71.428	28.571	0	20	50	30
Housewife	44.444	50	5.555	9.090	9.090	81.818	55.555	33.333	5.555	42.857	42.857	14.285
Trader	0	0	0	0	50	50	0	0	0	50	50	0
Artisan	0	0	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	0
Agriculturist	42.857	28.571	28.571	0	0	0	69.230	23.076	7.692	0	0	0
Govt.job	0	0	100	0	0	100	0	0	100	0	0	100
Others	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

**Table: 4a (iv)****Education and electoral participation of Bhutia women in the study sample (in all the four districts of Sikkim) in 2004-2005**

Education	North			East			South			West		
	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)
Illiterate	100	0	0	20	0	80	65.217	26.086	8.695	54.545	9.090	36.363
Primary	90	0	0	0	33.333	66.666	81.250	18.750	0	0	0	0
Middle	23.076	76.923	0	55.555	0	44.444	66.666	33.333	0	60	20	20
High	9.090	31.818	59.090	17.857	10.714	71.428	0	0	0	25	25	50
Graduate	0	0	100	0	0	100	69.230	23.076	7.692	0	0	0
Post Graduate	0	0	100	0	0	100	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Field survey

noted that South district had the maximum electoral participation and this could be due to the reason that the ruling party of Sikkim has its hold in this district. However, no uniform pattern of relationship was noted between the age and the interest in politics, still in this study a sharp decline in electoral participation was noted from younger to older generations in all the four districts. The low degree of electoral participation noted in the women of older generation may be due to the fact that they are preoccupied with the household managements .In some cases it was also noted that they were also not conscious of the importance of their votes and found the voting procedure as such very irrelevant.

#### **6a (ii) Marital status and electoral participation:**

Another parameter that influences people's electoral participation is their marital status. However, while considering this parameter no correlation was found between the respondent's marital status and their electoral participation in all the four districts [Table: 4a(ii)] . This is contrary to the popular belief that the unmarried status of the people helps them in giving more time to politics than the others. This hypothesis may find some validity in rest of India, but in Sikkim, particularly in Bhutia society, the marital status of women appeared to have little impact on political participation, at least as far as the study area is concerned. It can be summarised that Bhutia women in Sikkim have a moderate electoral participation.

#### **6a (iii) Occupation and electoral participation:**

It is a general belief that occupation is one of the most important factors that influences people's electoral participation, especially in women. The occupation is more strongly related to the political interest of the female respondents because this provides the opportunities to the respondents to interact with others; to be involved with others and

this helps to build political orientation. Occupation of the women has a great influence on their overall personality and in turn motivates them in participating in the mainstream activities of the society and politics is one of them. Data [Table: 4a (iii)] presented here shows that the women who were in the government jobs had 100 percent electoral participation in all the four districts. A high electoral participation was also noted amongst the students and the housewives in East and North districts. However, in West and South districts the trend was towards the lower side. This may be due to the fact that the respondents in the East and North districts were closer to the capital (Gangtok) and were more exposed to the political accomplishments and therefore showed higher electoral participation.

#### **6a (iv) Education and electoral participation:**

Education provides much of the cognitive material on which our evaluative orientation towards the political role, the political system and the political institutions are based (Ghose, 2000). It is expected that education would have a positive impact on determining the electoral participation. Milbrath (1965) pointed out that an educated person is a different political actor than a person who has only a little education or not at all. Similarly, Almond and Verba (1965) felt that the educated classes are more likely to be aware of politics and consider themselves competent to influence the government and engage in political discussions. In Sikkim, the data [Table: 4a (iv)] taken to correlate the education and electoral participation also holds the above proposition. It was observed that in all the four districts the degree of electoral participation increased with the increase in the respondent's level of education. So the assumption that education plays an important role in electoral participation is found to be true in the case of Bhutia women of Sikkim also.

**Table: 4b (i)****Marital status and political Awareness of Bhutia women in the study sample (in all the four districts of Sikkim) in 2004-2005**

Marital status	North			East			South			West		
	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)
Unmarried	14.285	61.904	23.809	4.347	26.086	69.565	43.750	56.250	0	20	60	20
Married	7.407	62.962	22.222	9.523	42.857	47.619	48.387	41.935	9.677	23.333	60	16.666
widower	100	100	0	0	50	50	0	0	0	33.333	66.666	0
Divorcee	100	100	0	0	0	100	0	100	0	0	0	100

**Table: 4b (ii)****Occupation and political Awareness of Bhutia women in the study sample (in all the four districts of Sikkim) in 2004-2005**

Occupation	North			East			South			West		
	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)
Student	0	66.666	33.333	21.428	28.571	50	71.428	28.571	0	20	50	30
Housewife	5.555	94.444	5.555	9.090	63.636	27.272	55.555	33.333	5.555	42.857	42.857	14.285
Trader	0	0	0	0	50	50	0	0	0	50	50	0
Artisan	0	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	0
Agriculturist	14.285	64.285	21.428	0	0	0	69.230	23.076	7.692	0	0	0
Govt.job	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	0	100	0	0	100
Others	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Field survey

## **6b. Political Awareness:**

Women have less knowledge about politics, not because of lack of intelligence but because they do not master the political world with the same eagerness as they approach other fields (Hona, 1981). Studies on political participation show that there is a gap in the level of political participation and information regarding various political issues, which implies that there is a little political awareness.

To test the political awareness of the respondents they were asked simple questions like names of the contesting candidates, the names of the M.L.As, their respective party affiliation and on the basis of these they were placed into trichotomized category. Political awareness was rated high and given a score of 3 when they had all the information, medium and given a score of 2, when they had heard just their names and were able to answer some of the questions, awareness was rated low and given a score 1 when they were not able to answer any of the questions.

### **6b (i) Marital status and political Awareness:**

In trying to correlate [Table: 4b (i)] the marital status and political awareness, it was found that in East district the unmarried respondent had high (69.56percent) degree of political awareness. This may be due to the reason that generally the unmarried respondents were studying and that is why they were interacting more with outer world. Another reason to this may be the fact that unmarried respondents were comparatively freer and had more time to raise their political knowledge as also stated by Ghosh (2000). However, in North the result showed a different trend. In this district, the respondents showed medium degree of electoral participation irrespective of their marital status. Similar trend was also observed in West and South districts. All these three districts are geographically distant from the Capital of Sikkim. Therefore, the reason for such a

**Table: 4b (iii)****Education and political awareness of Bhutia women in the study sample (in all the four districts of Sikkim) in 2004-2005**

Education	North			East			South			West		
	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)
Illiterate	65.217	8.695	26.086	0	0	100	65.217	21.739	4.347	54.545	60	0
Primary	0	0	0	0	0	100	28.571	71.428	0	11.111	88.888	0
Middle	60	20	20	0	0	100	66.666	88.888	0	7.142	92.857	0
High	25	25	50	3.846	53.846	42.307	0	100	0	10	55	35
Graduate	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	0	0	0	0	100
Post Graduate	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	0	0	0	0	0

**Table: 4c (i)****Age and Attitude towards women participation in politics of women in the study sample (in all the four districts of Sikkim) in 2004-2005**

Age	North			East			South			West		
	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)
Upto 20	33.333	66.666	0	45.454	9.090	45.454	81.818	18.181	9.090	50	30	10
21-30	21.739	65.217	13.043	4.7619	4.761	90.476	71.428	28.571	7.142	31.25	37.5	31.25
31-40	33.333	50	16.666	11.111	11.11	77.777	25	75	8.333	25	50	25
41-50	66.666	33.333	0	0	0	100	57.142	28.571	14.281	66.666	33.333	0
51-60	50	50	0	0	100	0	100	0	0	33.333	66.666	0
61-70	50	50	0	25	25	50	100	0	0	50	50	0
71-80	50	50	0	50	0	50	100	0	0	66.666	33.333	0

Source: Field survey

difference in the result can be attributed to the fact that the respondents in these parts would be having less exposure to the political activities as compared to the respondents in the East district which covers the Capital city Gangtok which is also a political hub.

**6b (ii) Occupation and political Awareness:**

In examining the relationship between the occupation and political awareness, no definite pattern between the occupation and its effect on political awareness was observed. However, in East district women in government jobs showed a high level of political awareness as is apparent in the table [4b (ii)].

**6b (iii) Education and political awareness:**

Most of the researchers believe that educated people were more aware of the performance of the government, paid more attention to politics, had more information about political process and manifested a higher degree of political competence. This is presumably the effect of both manifest transmissions of political knowledge and of the development of general awareness of one's social environment. However, the above statement does not hold too good for the results observed in present study. In Bhutia society, it was observed that even the illiterates showed their indulgence in politics especially in East district. Here, the respondents who were illiterate or had primary and middle school education showed a hundred percent awareness towards politics [Table: 4b (iii)].

**6c. Attitude towards Women's participation:**

Attitude pertains to an internal state, which affects an individual's choice of action towards some objectives, persons or events (Patrick, 1977). Attitude according to Allport (1985) is a mental and neutral state of readiness organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects

and situations with which it is related (Allport,1985).Therefore, attitude affects the individual's acquisition of knowledge by influencing his selection of information (Conway,1985)

Equal participation of women in political process is a recent development and very recently some empirical studies have been conducted upon the political participation of women in India. One such investigative report was found in the article 'Women and Political participation' (Country paper, 1985). The case study sought to examine the level of representation in legislature and extent of participation of the level of ordinary citizens and voters and the extent and nature of their participation in polity.

Political socialization of men is a continuing process whilst most women, for a crucial period of their lives roughly between 18 and 35 years of age, operate in a more apolitical environment (Dowse and Hughes, 1971). Aristotle separated public sphere of activity from private sphere. The household is a private sphere and the political institution, the law and rational discussion on public affair is included under public affair. In this regard Sapiro (1983) also observes that the public and private spheres approach defines two end points of value continuum which shapes men's and women's relationship with politics. Therefore the separation of public and private institutions for women is very important for the understanding of her political behavior.

There is very scanty research work on the attitude towards participation of women in politics .A systematic study in this area started only in 1950s in the United States. It found there in the first nation wide opinion poll conducted in the 1930s, that the public attitude towards the participation of women in politics was decidedly negative. Subsequent polls conducted in the 1950s-1960s found only small changes in the overall picture of people's beliefs. Most people continued to agree that women could or should

take part in school affairs, but more than 40 percent of those interviewed in 1955, 1963 and 1969 said that they would not vote for a woman for Presidential Office (Country paper, 1985). But, due to current women's movement, a marked change has been noticed between 1972 and 1980. Despite the removal of legal barriers there still exists an inequality when it comes to political participation.

**6c (i) Age and the attitude towards women's participation:**

An attitudinal pattern of society towards women's participation in politics will help us to know her position in society. The respondents were asked whether they thought that women should participate in politics and likert scale was constructed with several parameters. Those who supported women's participation in full were given higher scores of 3, those partially favoured were given medium score of 2 and those who did not favour women's participation were given a low score of 1. It has been argued that women do not appreciate change anywhere because by nature they are conservative (Goode, 1963). The data present here is reflection of the above argument. A mixed result of the age and the attitude towards women was observed in all parts of the study area in Sikkim. Still, with the growing awareness and the exposure of the Bhutia Women to the modern world, in a few areas a high to medium degree attitude was noted. In East district [Table: 4c(i)] 90.47percent respondent in the age of 20-30 years had high degree of appreciation and in North the same age category 65.21percent respondent had medium degree of appreciation when it came to their participation in politics. In West, 37.5percent respondents in the same age group had high degree of appreciation while in South 71.42percent of respondents in the age of 21-30 had a low degree of appreciation towards women participation in politics. It is generally expected that the younger people would

**Table: 4c (ii)**

**Occupation and Attitude towards women participation in politics of women in the study sample (in all the four districts of Sikkim) in 2004-2005**

Occupation	North			East			South			West		
	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)
Student	22.222	66.666	11.111	14.285	28.571	57.142	75	12.5	0	60	30	10
Housewife	27.777	66.666	5.555	18.181	18.181	72.727	50	50	0	35.714	57.142	7.142
Trader	0	0	0	0	50	50	0	0	0	50	50	0
Artisan	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	0	0	0	0	100
Agriculturist	50	35.714	14.285	0	0	0	61.538	38.461	0	62.5	31.25	6.25
Govt.job	0	0	100	0	9.090	90.909	0	0	0	25	25	75
Others	25	50	25	0	0	0	0	66.666	33.333	0	33.333	66.666

**Table: 4c (iii)**

**Education and Attitude towards women participation in politics of women in the study sample (in all the four districts of Sikkim) in 2004-2005**

Education	North			East			South			West		
	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)
Illiterate	40	0	60	38.095	61.904	0	85	5	10	60	40	0
Primary	0	0	100	33.333	66.666	0	82.352	17.647	0	60	40	0
Middle	55.555	11.111	33.333	38.461	46.153	15.384	88.888	11.111	0	23.076	76.923	0
High	11.538	19.230	69.230	30	0	70	0	100	0	10	60	30
Graduate	0	0	0	0	33.333	66.666	0	0	0	0	0	100
Post Graduate			100									

Source: Field survey

have more positive attitude as far as participation of women's in politics is concerned (Ghosh 2000). The decreasing scores in the present data support the above hypothesis.

#### **6c (ii) Occupation and Attitude towards women's participation in politics:**

As discussed above, occupation plays a major role in defining a specific structure of the society. The political participation of the Bhutia women in the present study [Table:4c (ii)] highly appreciated by women working in the government sector with 90.90percent, 100 percent, 75percent and 100 percent in East, North, West and South districts respectively. It was seen that women were assertive on their views that there should be an increase in the number of women politicians and the latter should contribute in cleaning politics and promoting women's development.

#### **6c (iii) Education and attitude towards women's participation in politics:**

One of the most widely documented research findings in political science is that participation in political activities increases as the educational level of the respondents rises. However, this generalization about political participation is derived from researches conducted in other countries (Chaudhuri, 1995). In Bhutia society, the impact of education was not uniform among all participants. But it was noted that in the three districts i.e. East, West and North respondents generally appreciated women's participation in politics, although a very high level of appreciation [Table: 4c (iii)] was not recorded among any of the respondents irrespective of their level of education.

#### **6d. Case Study:**

1. Tshering Doma is a 28-year-old woman and is a resident of Thathangchen, Gangtok. She is a graduate and is having a government job. She is married and has one child. She is very happy with her economic independence and at some point of her life wants to enter politics because her father's side is politically inclined (her uncle is an

M.L.A.). She always casts her vote independently and keeps herself well informed about all the political developments and openly discusses it with her colleagues in the office. She feels the Bhutia community is not adequately represented in the assembly and women representation is very important. According to her, there is nothing wrong with women being a part of the political system but women have to be educated before they can plunge into such responsible activities. She participates in political rallies and openly works as a party member during election.

2.Tashi Lhamu is 45 years old and is a resident of West Sikkim. She is a panchayat member. She is a widow and became a member of the panchayat after her husband's death. She attends all the panchayat meetings and feels it is very important for women to be active politically and aware of her rights. She tries to listen to all the grievances of the women. When her husband died, she did not get anything from his property because she had no children. Her parents did help her economically but once they died she realized her brothers were not willing to support her. Since she was educationally not too qualified (could not clear her class seven), she did a nursing training and finally became a panchayat member (she said 'destiny' made her a panchayat member).

3.Yeshey Dolma is a 18 year old, unmarried, student of class ten and is a resident of Gyalshing. She spends very little time in doing household chores and attends her school regularly. This time she got a chance to cast her votes for the first time and she found the whole experience very fascinating. She however casted her vote on the advice of her parents as her parents told her that she was not politically aware of the candidates and the vote should be a family vote. She feels women should come forward in the political arena because only they can make a difference to the society.

\* Names of the respondents have been changed

## **6e. Summary:**

According to the findings regarding awareness, contesting elections, voting or deliberate abstention from voting and decision-making, Bhutia women's participation in politics has been quite impressive. Women generally participate in a large number in voting and even in political activities such as attendance at political rallies and membership of social and political organization. However, it was observed that the voting behaviour of Bhutia women was an extension of voting behaviour of the head of the family and they lacked independent decision making. This passive dependent orientation of women voters is a part of the social structure. Women who were politically active had either husbands or other relatives already in politics which provided them support. Education, occupation or marital status did not have much influence on her political participation. However, the women's attitudes towards women's participation was quite favourable. In Sikkim no stigma is attached to it and women were not discouraged because of domestic responsibilities, fear, shyness or even violence at polls. Men's attitude towards women's leadership is also favourable and therefore they are relatively free to participate in politics. However, it was noted that political behaviour of Bhutia women of Sikkim as voters was only an extension of the voting behaviour of the head of the family. Therefore, just the increasing participation of them as voter is not sufficient to achieve equal political status as that of men. Bhutia women still lack the essential level of political consciousness, which is essential for her participation in the political process as independent voters. Bhutia women are optimistic that if women could organize themselves into pressure groups and lobbies, they could extract promises from the government.

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