

Chapter VIII

8. Concluding Observations:

The position of a woman in a society cannot be determined without taking into consideration the social setting of the society because the social structure helps to shape the social and economic attributes of an individual. For studying the objectives of the present study, instead of formulation of hypotheses research questions were framed which became imperative from methodological point of view. These questions were related to the nature of social structure of the Bhutia Society in Sikkim and the position of Bhutia women in education, occupation and income, women's share in family property, women's autonomy in social, economic, decision making processes, the nature and type of marriage along with the nature of family planning practices, her level of political participation and finally her religious position. At the conclusion of the study an attempt is made to examine how far the research questions which were formulated have been validated.

The population of the state is not homogenous and in the absence of any empirical study on the Bhutia society the observations could not be made beyond a certain limit and could not be substantiated on the basis of census data. Sikkim has experienced a great deal of social and economic change which has affected the social structure and also the position of the women. The socio-economic profile reveals that the Bhutia women have experienced an educational and occupational change. Awareness is felt about the importance of education and its impact on the occupation that would follow, but a lacuna is felt. The presence of amenities in the study villages remained almost the same and most of respondents even have access to these. All the places in the study sample have a primary health centre, primary or middle school and all the places are linked with means

of transport and communication such as post office, motorable road and even telephone facilities. However the access to all these facilities depends upon the economic conditions in which these women and their households are placed.

The central position of the family in the life of the individual women and the society as a whole means that a change in women's position in a society cannot be accompanied without basic modifications in the character of a family. Bhutia women enjoy freedom and respect in the family. In the analysis of marriage and knowledge of family planning, it was found that in the contemporary times people, by and large, go for monogamous marriages. The marriage is solemnized as per the culture and tradition of Bhutia society. Bhutia women have consent in the selection of life partners and with the changing times, people also go in for love marriages or marriages by one's own choice. Marriage within the community still remains the first preference. However, inter community marriages are on the rise. The data about the ideal number of children and actual number of children do not match, but this is not due to social or cultural factors. No sex preference is seen and some even show desire for having daughters. This reflects the high social position of the girl child in society. With regard to the knowledge about methods of family planning, it was found that most of them had opted for one or the other method but it was generally not for spacing or planning an ideal family size but as per the decision of the husband, thus pointing towards the patriarchal nature of the Bhutia society.

Highly gender-stratified cultures have long been recognized to be characterized by patrilineal descent, patrilocal residence, inheritance and succession practices which exclude women and hierarchical relations in which father or his relatives have authority over family members. In Sikkim, the Bhutia society also believes in male line of

succession and generally the girls are deprived from the property. Since, there are no such laws this norm cannot be defied although in modern times Bhutia families are also giving share to girls of the family.

Bhutia women in general have decision making authority. There is a definite pattern to the kinds of decisions in which they participate: they are involved in decisions that are not perceived as threatening to the family economy, that is, those relating to children and child care rather than those pertaining to major purchases. However, in almost every index of decision making like mobility, access to and control over resources, freedom from threat by husbands Bhutia women commanded a fairly good position in society. Patriarchy distinguishes authority at home and outside but the new economic roles assumed by Bhutia women has helped in transforming the intra-family distribution of role relationships thus emphasizing the multidimensional nature of her position in society.

The political position of women can be defined by the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in the shaping or sharing of power. A good deal of social legislation and socio-economic policies have been sought to strengthen the position of women. Despite this, political participation of women is very meager and peripheral. Bhutia women are however, politically aware. Women respond positively on the value of voting as a right. From the data it is revealed that women believe in political participation but could not make it to main line politics. They however, do meet politicians and even ask for assistance. This shows their sense of confidence and duty towards their gender. Most of the women have a high positive attitude towards political participation of women, because they feel that participation plays a role in shaping civic orientation. Education and occupation have favourable effect on women's electoral participation but

women were influenced in casting their vote, which is confirmed by the women themselves. The political attitude of Bhutia women reveals that they are also in favour of campaigning activities because their involvement would help them get a better position in society. However, women still need to cross obstacles to achieve the highest level of decision making within formal and informal political bodies.

Religion is an important institution in the life of an individual because by its ethical mode it controls the framework of life. Bhutia women in general and the nuns (Anis or Bikshunis) have been somewhat disadvantaged in their religious life. Being quite humble and self effacing by nature, nuns have remained quietly in the background. The order of nuns is not of particular influence in the Bhutia society but it is essential for the well being of some individual women. Bhutia women are very religious minded but in the ritual and ceremonial spheres men dominate and currently Bhutia women are deemed separate from a more egalitarian model and they need to shape the content of their spiritual quest in the contemporary setting.

In traditional Bhutia society women occupy an important position and have an important role to play. The concept of patriarch which prevails does not create a gender divide but gives respect to the women. However, Bhutia women occupy an anomalous position because they enjoy a traditional ascribed position and role but still have to achieve an important one. There is thus a need for formulation of schemes and programmes that would help to improve Bhutia women's position in society because any universal conclusion cannot be drawn from such a micro study. However, it may be hoped that this study will contribute to some extent in promoting the knowledge about the position of women in Bhutia society of Sikkim.