

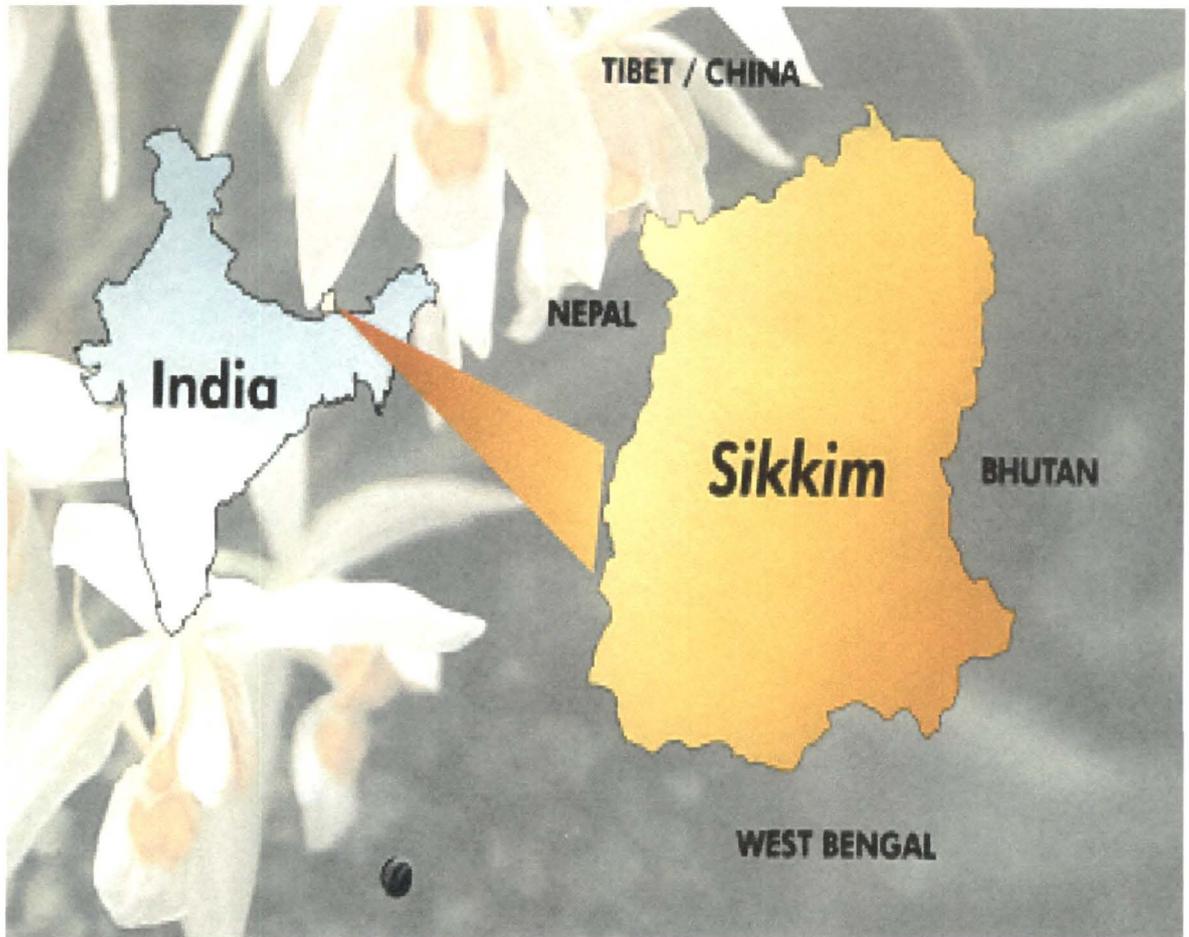
## Chapter I

### **1(a) Introduction:**

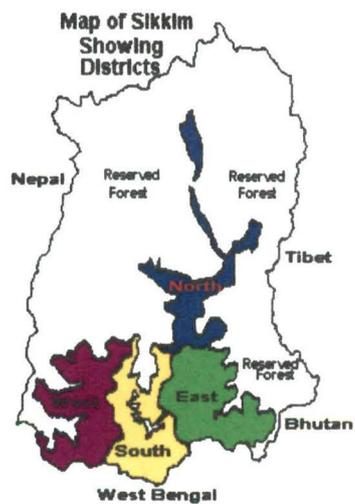
It cannot be denied that women who compose almost half of the total population, still remain the most neglected lot. Women constitute the only 'group' which is treated unequally as a whole, in spite of their comprising the largest group in the world. As one views the achievements of the Indian women, we see that it is fixed to liberation of women, empowerment of women and gender equality. The subject of women's studies is gaining grounds in recent years, the main objective of which is to create consciousness about the role of women in society (Bagchi, 1995). Generation of serious research materials on women's studies as a discipline is still in its infancy. However, this does not mean that serious thinking regarding women's problems did not exist in the earlier centuries or till recent times (Bagchi, 1995).

There is a commonplace observation that mainstream social and political thought has commonly accepted and confirmed women's subordinate position in social and political life. This view is legitimized by describing them as the "weaker sex". However, with more and more women joining various occupations, this view is changing. The whole pattern of male-female roles is undergoing a considerable change. The change in social conditions and pattern of living has been responsible for women going out for jobs and this is responsible for the shift towards their 'outdoor-ness'.

According to another view point, women did enjoy certain privileges and were dominant at some stage of evolution of society as seen in matriarchal society of Khasis in Meghalaya. But women's position has never been consistent, in some societies they occupied a high social position and in other societies at the same time they had a low social position.



**Plate 1 (A):** Map of India showing the state of Sikkim (Not to scale)



**Plate 1 (B):** Map of Sikkim showing the four Districts (Not to scale)  
(source: NIC Gangtok, Sikkim)

The position of women in society can be explained by taking into consideration various socio-economic and socio-cultural dimensions. According to Marx (1963), the position of women will vary from society to society and time to time according to prevailing economic and political relationship. Marx places women in mode of production of society and interprets them as forming a class which is subordinate to and oppressed by the superior class formed only by men under certain historical circumstances. Possibility of women's exploitation historically, can be explained by the argument that nations and women are not spared in their unguarded hours, particularly when a more adventurous warrior is around (Marx, 1963). While developing a view on women's position, Engels (1948) argues that property management, patriarchal system and the government are all related. According to Engels, the capitalist production process is responsible for the subordinate position of women. Engels rationale is that, human societies in all times were dependent equally on men and women in manners of production and procreation. However, it is difficult to say whether prior to capitalist production, men and women occupied equal position.

According to anthropological point of view, the subordinate position of women is due to the process of social evolution. As society came into existence, interaction started taking place between groups, and because of interaction a material exchange of goods became possible. In this process, the women, for the material exchange value attached to them, acted as a source of facilitation of social interaction between groups (Strauss, 1953). Niranjna (2000) mentioned, "This material exchange takes place not merely in terms of women as a human body meant for sexual pleasure and carrying on the reproductive activities. Rather it acts as a medium of cultural patterns and practices, ancestral rights and social structural aspects of different groups between whom the

exchange takes place". Hence, women were compared to physical objects which further undermined their position.

Some aspects of culture and social structure of society also help to determine the image of women. Nature endows human beings with an unalterable biological makeup by classifying them into male and female. However, the definition of femininity and masculinity is bestowed upon humans by culture and society. In some cultures femininity is associated with a number of socio-economic, political roles, while in some other cultures femininity is almost entirely associated with functions of a domestic nature. There are perceived differences between men and women based on the kinds of relationship possible, the degree of female sexual purity and norms regarding the division of labour. The role of women is multidimensional involving spiritual, sexual, intellectual and managerial aspects but still a lot of emphasis is placed on female sexual virtue, as in most societies the sexual conduct of a women reflects on the honour of the entire social conduct. Therefore, it is not really possible to have a true community of interest which transcends sexual considerations.

Many cultures perceive women as basically emotional and thus inferior to men. The inability of women to cope with decision making has been used as a justification for paternalism and for the treatment of women as minors throughout their lives. It is assumed that women's intellectual aptitude is inferior to men, so they are suitable for only stereotyped jobs. Another dimension of cultural, which gives women a subordinate position in society, is power. Power, in all societies has been regarded as a male prerogative. Irrespective of other elements in their role definition, women have been socialized to consider themselves unsuitable for leadership or have been taught that it is not feminine to desire power (Rathschild, 1974).

Religion is the source of many laws and customs in society and because of its association with rituals it marks important occasions in the life of the individual. The spiritual image of the women has many components. In religious systems with a tradition of world denial and preoccupation with salvation, such as pre- Islam Buddhism and Hinduism of Bangladesh, the Buddhism of Japan, and the Medieval Christianity of Poland and France the spiritual worth of women depended on their faculty for achieving personal redemption (Giele and Smock, 1977). In India, from the point of view of religion the husband is equated to God, and as a result women here are further subdued. Some cultures emphasize the difference between male and female without placing sexes in hierarchical order, others clearly mark male superiority and male inferiority and the third view male and female as relatively equal. In hierarchical relationships, women were given a domestic role and were under the supervision of men. The modified hierarchical system of relationship is flexible and there is smaller degree of sexual segregation (Giele and Smock, 1977). However, relative equality remains a theoretical possibility.

It is important to discuss some major structural variables that influence the position of women in the society. Some of these variables are the effectiveness of the family as an institution and the manner in which female and male roles relate to each other, the access of girls to education on equal terms, the type of economic system and the nature of the economic opportunities it offers to women.

The family because of its centrality in social organization influences women's position. A woman always subordinates her needs to the interests of the family because she is an integral part of family system and this limits her ability to act independently. However, equal educational opportunities when given to women can have both macroscopic and microscopic implications, because it transforms the attitude of women,

by endowing them with greater skills and resources. The greater the personal resource a woman brings into a marital relationship in the form of her education, employment experience and a range of social contacts – the closer her resource base approximates to that of her husband – the greater is the chance that she will be able to influence family decision making (Rodman, 1972).

Women empowerment depends on economic participation, which depends on their ability to accept the employment with their domestic responsibilities. Because of which, on one hand women from upper class backgrounds have more protection and prestige, whereas families of humbler origin cannot afford the luxury of excluding women from the labour force.

The foregoing discussion points to the fact that there are cultural, social and economical constraints of the society on the life of women.

It is very difficult to place the concept of women's studies as an independent discipline because women's role is now no longer confined to home caring and rearing children but they are now a part of a broad spectrum. Much of the studies so far have been conducted on middle class and urban women, leaving out the rural and tribal counterparts. Anthropologists have long been interested in the study of women in tribal society. However, the tribal communities have remained outside the purview of social demographers and not enough work has been done. The research work available is mostly on family, marriage among tribal, tribal customs, movements or tribal administration. Singh (1988) has concluded that there is "need for generating studies which can fill the information gap about variation that exists and about role and status of tribal women from one region to another and from one community to another". There is no published work

known about the status of Bhutia women and therefore there is a need to explore their social structure which may bring out the position of women in Bhutia society.

Sikkim, situated in the Eastern Himalayas represents a meeting ground of several cultures manifest in the distinctive lifestyle of its several tribal communities. According to the 2001 census Sikkim has a population of 540,493. Ethnically, the state comprises of three groups mainly, the Bhutias, the Lepcha and the Nepalese. The women of Sikkim are unique in many ways. "Like everything else in Sikkim they also truly manifest the influence of the siylvan serenity of the august hills of the Himalayas and the deep pervasive influence of the quintessence of Buddhism. These influences have made their lives free from many discriminatory inequalities from which the women suffer elsewhere" (Bhattachrya, 1994).

### **1b. Review of literature**

Studies on women's behavior started in 1960's with the advent of feminism in the U.S.A with the presumption that there prevails a gender bias in society and women's position is not what it should be. Publication like, 'The Subjection of Women' by John Stuart Mill (1912) and 'The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and State' by Engels (1948) are the first serious discussion on women related issues. In India, we started using the term more frequently after 1975, which was declared as the International Women's Year. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century a comprehensive literature has been published which identified the grievances and problem areas of the women. Studies relating to the role, socio-economic status and political status have been conducted both at micro and macro level and in this perspective some of the literature are reviewed.

Chitins (1975) stresses on redefining women's role in the family and society.

Promotion of equality between men and women not only comes from economic and

political participation but by redefinition of sex roles. Women's position can not be stereotyped into a rearing and caring role only. Chitins, mentions that the one way of enhancing the contribution of women towards economic development of the country is by improving in the quality of their output

Kaur (1983) critically analyzes the different aspects of the socio- economic realities of the society and the changing value orientation of the educated middle class Hindu women towards marriage, employment and religion. Sharma (1984) feels that the changing socio – economic status of the women requires a structural and attitudinal transformation in the society. He feels that there is a need for interlinking the strategies made by the government and the society so that it becomes possible to deal with various social and economic inequalities.

Dhruvarajan (1989) and Chaudhary (1991) have studied the changing aspect of women's position in the society with two different aspects. Dhruvarajan (1989) tries to examine the reason why in a Hindu society, a women is not accorded equal status to that of a man although female Gods are worshipped along with the male Gods. But, women still are humiliated and subordinated. Chaudhary (1991) discusses how higher education is able to bring about some changes in traditional social values, which are attached with the Institution of marriage, family and decision making process.

Assessment of women's position and role cannot be done outside the social structure. Therefore, social structure along with its cultural norms and values is an important area of study among researches and these affect the women in different ways. Studies by Desai (1957) and Bakshi (1964) are conducted on these parameters.

A number of studies have been conducted on the problems faced by women. These problems are linked with marriage and its related issues like custom of dowry,

bride wealth, procedure of acquiring mate and remarriage etc. Studies by Srinivas (1842), Baig (1958) and Kapadia (1958), broadly examine the position of women in joint family, marriage and customs.

Studies by Majumdar (1978), Acharya and Bennett (1982), Bhardan (1983) and Kaur (1986), highlight the economic worth of women's work. There have been a number of studies undertaken regarding the attitude towards work of working women. Various aspects such as profession, employment, participation in economic development by women and the impact of these factors on women status in Indian Society after independence are well documented by Sengupta (1960), Kalarani (1976). According to Sengupta (1960), the raise in the economic status of Indian middle class women is characteristic of India as a free nation. Kalarani (1976) tries to find out the reasons and issues of role conflict and also tries to bring about reconciliation. On the basis of her studies, she also tries to see whether the role conflict is related to income or occupational level and observes that almost 88percent of working wives adhere to the view that their marital life has not affected their work.

Works on income security of women with regard to equal status in society have been done by Sharrif (1990), Ahuja (1991) and Banerjee (1991). Ahuja (1991) points out that woman are at a disadvantage as compared to the men because they are paid less and enjoy lesser autonomy even though they work for longer or equal hours. Sharrif's (1990) work focusses on women entrepreneurs and the usefulness of the Government policies and the services available to them. He states that there is a need to ensure for women a fair share in matters of employment and opportunity and also bring about an increased participation of women in the work force. Banerjee's (1991) work which deals with the economic status of contemporary women, focuses on the factors

affecting employment of women in the industry. According to her study, a small number of jobs become highly capital intensive due to new technologies while a large number of them become mechanical and repetitive.

Earlier, Lenoard (1979) while looking into the current research on women in India felt that there was a gap which needed filling. She has stated that most of the work today pertains to women of the upper classes leaving the others out. Kumari (1992) talks about the present global situation where there is a growing awareness to bring about gender equality and equal opportunities should be provided in sharing of resources. She concludes by saying that women issues need to be given importance not just by policy makers but also by women themselves. Singh (1975) has attempted a comprehensive and critical view of methodological problems inherent in women studies and mentioned three kinds of categories (i) treating women as an isolated category (ii) attitude studies (iii) survey research. Sharma and Majumdar (1979) also talk about the changes in perception and in academic research regarding women's contribution to society and their need in relation to modernization, development and social change. Regarding the theoretical concept for understanding of women's situation, they talk about three areas that determine the status of women as perceived by women themselves and by others i.e. family links, sex roles, values and socialization process and women's perception of oppression and the need for the change.

'Women in Indian Society' by Ghadially (1988), is a collection of twenty-one research articles that examine and challenge the role of women in society. These articles are related to women's subordinate position according to traditional and mythical order and how this subordination leads to the violence against women. Singh (2000) has worked on changing pattern of women's status since independence and how

a women's status is affected by numerable factors such as class, caste, religion, family and education. He also analyses the role of various social organization and their efforts to create a favourable environment for women. Upreti (2000) highlights the struggle of Indian women for gender justice. According to her, status of women in society not only denotes her position with respect to others in terms of right and obligation but also in terms of gender justice. Indian women cannot be treated as a homogenous category and are divided on the basis of urban, rural, background, region, caste and class. The educated urban women are more conscious but the illiterate rural women are less conscious of their rights. In a recent work, Sharma (2001) highlights the various parameters that help in the emancipation of women and give her autonomy. According to him, 'Empowerment', is the way by which there will be redistribution of powers and therefore a change in the nature and direction of systemic forces which marginalize women. Women's empowerment is based on the premise that it is an enabling condition for reproductive rights and hence controls the population.

Various studies have been conducted which deal with the political status and position of the women.

Kirkpatrick (1974) has made a valuable contribution by studying the political role of women in American state legislative. She has chosen to examine women and their relationship to power. She has described the political role of women and the four factors which limit the participation of women in politics. These are psychological, cultural and role constraints combined with male conspiracy. Pomper (1975) draws a contemporary portrait of American women's changing political participation. He states that with education becoming widespread, there is likelihood of more women representatives in politics.

Lipset (1959) points out that in America women vote less than men because they are preoccupied with the traditional idea that women's place is at home. This traditionalism and conservative outlook of women has confined them to the domestic sphere. These pressures prevent the voting turn out of women. There are some studies which deal with the reasons for the poor participation of women in the legislative bodies and elections. According to Lee (1976), the lack of female participation in politics is due to three factors, these are sex discrimination, societal perception that certain things are not proper for women to do and the presence of children at home . Khan (1991) points out that due to social factors and burden of work, women seldom think about participating in politics. The socialization process and social traditions engulfed with various taboos keep women confined to the domestic sphere. In a male dominated society where the personality of the women is controlled, regulated and maintained by the male members, the attitude of the men is very important. Rajlakshmi (1985) has sought to examine the reasons why women are still under represented in legislature bodies despite their formal equality with men. In another study, Vallance (1979) in her book, 'Women in the House' in which the study has been conducted on the women members of European parliament tries to explain the reasons behind poor participation of women in politics. She has also worked on physiological, sociological and domestic problems for poor participation in National politics. However, no single reason points towards their little representation. Kaur (1983) opines that the women are passing through a transitional stage which is not wholly in accordance with traditional values. Due to higher education, self-awareness and national consciousness women are aspiring for equal status with that of men. As a result participation of women in politics can be seen in parliament, state legislative assemblies and in decision

making bodies. There is thus a positive change in the outlook of women. Sethi (1988), Shahida (1977) have studied the participation of women in the representative bodies of the country. Saxena (2000) in 'Women and Politics' talks about women's struggle for political power, which is one of the important gestures, how she can achieve a rightful place.

The books, 'Politics of Women's Liberation' by Freeman (1975), 'The Feminist Movement' by Carden (1974) and 'Women Power and Policy' by Parth (1982) all deal with the development of women's political movement and its relationship in establishment of public policy. These authors feel that there is a need to delineate strategies, social action politics to eradicate sexism from politics. Newland (1975) in an informative study shows that although all the countries in the world grant women the right to participate in political activities and also exercise their franchise, yet their political rights are hampered by inadequate education and absence of communication channels. This results in poor representation of women in politics. Chafe (1972) finds that discrimination is rooted in the society. The sexual division of labour has restricted women's movement to the domestic sphere and only when there will be a structural change in the traditional views of male and female roles will there be a symmetry in political status of men and women.

The changing role of women in Social, Political and Economic life have been dealt with by Joyce and Palley (1982) in their book 'Women and Public Policy', by Newland (1978) in 'The Sisterhood of Man' and by Rothman's (1978) in 'Women's Proper Place'.

Women played an active role in socio – economic emancipation and participated in national politics even though the ideology prevailing those days was very conservative.

Some studies which focussed on the role of the women in the struggle against oppressed masses have been made by Gupta (1977) and Sen (1985). Gupta (1977) analyzes the part played by women in the Tebhaga Movement and explored the factors which determined the role of women in the society. Sen (1985) too throws light on the growth of women's movement in Bengal and the problems faced by the women in male dominated society. He also highlights the role played by women in the agrarian and labour movement of Bengal. Number of studies such as Kaur (1946), Bagal (1953), Chattopadhyoy (1958), Agnew (1979), Sengupta (1976) discuss the part played by women in freedom struggle. They state that the ideology prevailing at that time was very conservative, despite the fact that women played a courageous role by participating even in extremist politics as well as non violent movement led by Gandhi on Civil Disobedience Movement. Devi (1986), Ghosh (1991) Gupta (1977) have made a valuable contribution to understand nature the of women's movement and also explored the factors which determine the status of women in society.

Apart from these studies, there are some articles which dealt with the socio-political position of women. Articles like 'Changing the role of women', by Pollock (1972) describes that there should be more humane means of classifying human beings rather than sex. In another article 'What does equality between the sexes imply', Linner (1972) argues that because of modern technological era women roles are also changing. Mezey (1978) in her article, 'Does sex make a difference'? pointes out that woman need a societal change before they can be treated equally. It is presumed that because women have different assets and liabilities; their behaviour is different from men. Men feel that the problems women face as office holders stem from the emotional weakness and inadequacies of women and sex does make a difference in politics.

Academic interest in women's issues is a very recent development in India. In the post independence period research and studies on women were mainly on women's role in the family, kinship and other institution. Realizing the importance of study of women in India, Government of India conducted a study on the status of women. The main purpose of this study was to analyze the impact of constitutional, legal administrative provision on the status of women. The report entitled 'Toward equality' (1974), recommended remedial measures for the proper role of women in nation building process. The book, 'The symbols of power' edited by Vina Mazumdar also deals with the political status of women in the three states of India i.e. Gujarat, Maharashtra and West Bengal. Pandey (1990) has conducted a survey on the women in the city of Jaipur and made observations on the changing role of women in political participation. Mazumdar in her article 'Reservation for women', supports thirty percent reservation for women in self-governing institutes. Ghosh (2000) opines that political participation of women and their attitude towards politics can be understood only by a comparative analysis made with men.

Dealing with the voting behaviour of women Goel (1974) finds that women are less likely to take interest in politics, discuss politics or attend public meeting. Their voting percentage is also lower than that of men. Only a few educated women feel confident about making policy decisions rest do not even try. Kingston and Finkel (1987) state that married and single persons consistently differ in their political interest. The married are relatively more conservative on a number of issues. However, they have higher turn out rates than singles, but the latter are more inclined to political participation beyond the act of voting. Campbell *et al.* (1967) point out that married women vote more often than single women and frequently in consonance with their husbands. Feltner

and Goldie (1964) are also of the view that a woman who often votes in agreement with her husband shows a low level of political involvement.

As for literature on Sikkim, most of the work on its society and physical features are in the form of Government reports or travelogues written by British officials. H.H Risley edited the first and only Gazetteer of Sikkim that gives detailed historical, geographical, botanical and zoological accounts of Sikkim (1894).

John Claude White (1909), the first British political officer to be posted in Sikkim has given an account of the origin of its people in his book 'Sikkim and Bhutan: Twenty-one years on North- East Frontier 1887-1908'. The History of Sikkim written by the Miwang Chogyal of Sikkim, Sir Thutob Namgyal and Gyalmo (queen) of Sikkim, Yeshey Dolma (1908) offers a fascinating account of the origin of Sikkim and of the Namgyal dynasty that ruled over Sikkim between 1641-1975. However, the account is till 1908, i.e, the year this text was compiled. It also gives interesting accounts regarding various important places including the setting up of various monasteries in Sikkim .It offers valuable insight into the history of various communities of Sikkim, and also gives the pedigree of leading families of Sikkim. It is perhaps the only authentic indigenous work on Sikkim, with its sources including the holy Buddhist (Pechaas) scriptures of Sikkim. 'Excerpts from History of Sikkim' by Joseph F.Rock (1953) has also published excerpts from the main body of the book, 'The History of Sikkim'. He also gives an ethnographic profile of the Bhutias, Lepchas. Limbus and Mangars. C.De Beauvoir Stocks (1925) has written a book 'The Folklore and Religious Belief of the people of Sikkim' it is an anthropological study which deals with religious rites and customs of the inhabitants of Sikkim. 'Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal,' by Dalton (1872) deals with the ethnology of different types of tribes of Bengal. For the purpose of this study, he has divided the tribes

according to their geographical positioning. While describing the tribes occupying the Northern barrier of Assam, on crossing the border of Bhutan he came across the Bhutias, the Lepchas, the Limbus and the Kirants. He touches upon their history, physical traits, religion and marriage customs. 'Reflection on Tibetan Culture', Essays in memory of Turrell.V.Wylie contains an essay upon the traditional political institutions in Sikkim under the Namgyal Dynasty and the changes that took place in Sikkim because of contact with neighbouring states of Tibet, British India and Nepal. In fact he makes a historical perspective of modern Sikkim. Many anthropologists and ethnographers from the west have studied various ethnic groups of Sikkim. Morris (1939) and Gorer (1984) visited the Dzongu of North Sikkim to study Lepchas. Morris's book, 'Living with Lepchas: A Book about Sikkim Himalayas' covers the origin of Lepchas, Lamaism, religious customs and dwellings etc. and is documented with photographs and bibliography. Gorer's 'Himalayan Village'- An account of Lepchas of Sikkim describes the Lepcha society, as it existed in Lingthem. Bose (1966) of the Anthropological Survey of India has written exclusively about the Bhutias of North Sikkim. He describes their agricultural practices and the changes in their economy as a result of Chinese occupation of Tibet. In 'Caste and Kin in Nepal, India and Ceylon', Nakane (1966) studies the Bhutia and Lepcha society and interrelationship with Nepali. The study reveals how the Nepali community penetrated into the Bhutia and Lepcha communities. Rahul (1973) studies the frontier countries of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan, and the role Bon, Buddhist and Hindu religion played on these settlements. 'The Sikkim Saga' by Das (1983) deals with the period of unrest in Sikkim from 1973 to 1975 until its merger with India. It also highlights the role of women taking examples of Indira Gandhi, Hope Cook and Elisa Maria. Bhasin (1989) has a micro-approach to study the Dzongu reserve inhabited by Lepcha and Lachen/

Lachung valley inhabited by Bhutias. Her study focuses on the interplay between ecology and socio-cultural environment. Kotturan (1983) in his book 'The Himalayan Gateway' has depicted Sikkim's history, culture and its nature. He has also collected 'The Folk tales of Sikkim' in (1989) which are tales of mythological nature, some of which have moral teachings and some are humorous. How Buddhism which was the religion professed by Bhutias changed when it came in contact with alien communities and religion has been described by Awasty (1978) in her book, 'Between Sikkim and Bhutan'.

Anthropologists have been interested in the study of women in tribal society. There are a number of studies on tribal communities, but only a few focus on tribal women. Among these, 'women in tribal India' by Choudhary (1978) talks of different phases of womanhood. According to him, there are four phases of womanhood, namely girlhood, adulthood, widowhood and old age. According to him, there is no marked difference between a boy and a girl in tribal society; a woman has more freedom and is considered an economic asset but there are certain areas in which she is not accorded high position. While studying the status of women among Tribes, Sen (1978) concludes that status of women is different in different tribes. The difference is seen in pattern of descent, inheritance, level of education, marriage and divorce. Gupta (1978), while analysing the status of 'Tribal women in Northeast India' concludes that because women are involved in economic activities, they do not suffer from inequalities and are free from street vigilance of male folks. A high social status of women has been reported by Haimendarf (1988), Hunter (1973) and Firth (1964) among Tharus of U.P., Nagas and Garos of the North East. Rivers (1973), Dalton (1872) and Grigaon (1938) have reported low status of women among Todas, Kherias and Mariya Gonds with References to certain taboos



during certain period or ceremonies. Some of the scholars are of the opinion that the primitive people give high status to women. Lowie (1921) has pointed out that position of tribal women was different in theory and practice. In tribal societies theoretical or legal status may not be found to be translated as social behaviour (Majumdar and Madan, 1955). Majumdar (1973) has reported a higher status of tribal women on some indicators while lower on others, while Shashi (1978) has concluded that the status of tribal women varies from tribes to tribes. Acharya and Bennett (1982) have studied various demographic, economic, socio-cultural and situational variables which affect women's status in society. They state that women who participate in market and subsistence economy have a stronger say in decision-making. They also state that age is positively related to women's work burden, therefore economic work participation of women decreases with increase in age. The freedom to select life partner also gives women greater autonomy affecting their work participation and greater input in decision making.

The status of tribal women is better than that of the Indian women in general. The tribal women in general and in comparison with higher caste women enjoy more freedom (Hutton, 1921; Majumdar, 1973; Hunter, 1973; Sarana, 1986; Singh, Vyas and Mann, 1988). Chauhan (1990) has made a comparative analysis of various indicators such as political, economic and religious among the different tribes of India. He states that the status of tribal women has gone from bad to worse as a result of social change which has affected the structure of tribal society.

Basu *et al.*, (1993) and Vidhyarthi, (1983) have studied the level of literacy among the tribals and found that it varies from one tribe to the other. Kashatriya (1992) has found that cultural norms regarding marriage, age at marriage, all determine to tribal women's place in family, her access to medical care, education, nutrition and other health

resources. Niranjana (2000) has studied the status of women belonging to Kinnaura, a scheduled tribe of Himachal Pradesh. She has made an attempt to analyse the social and cultural values affecting the status of women and its influence on the reproductive behaviour.

Dhamala, (1985) while analyzing the socio-economic role of women in Sikkim has found that the authority, socio-cultural autonomy varies from community to community. In an article, 'The Bhutia –Lepcha women of Sikkim: Tradition and Response to change' Bhattacharya (1994) has focused on family system, health care system, educational and professional facilities provided to Bhutia Lepcha women and their response to these facilities. In another article ' Status of Bhutia Women of Darjeeling Himalayas' Sekh Rahim Mondal (1998\1999) has focused on the social status and the role of Bhutia women from a multi dimensional axis. He states that there is a need for formulation of a realistic program so as to meet the real need of Bhutia women so that their ascribed status can be an achieved one.

Different religions have accorded women a separate position and place. There is some literature available, which focuses on position of women in Buddhism. Horner (1975) in the book 'Women under Primitive Buddhism', and Paul (1975) in 'Women in Buddhism' have studied the place of women in Buddhism. Kumar and Singh (1997) after studying 'Buddha's Approach towards Women Status' have conclude that Buddhism is a liberal religion alike the orthodox Hindu religion. Swarna (1988) in her lecture delivered at Mid Lands, Buddhist society U.K has described the Pre-Buddhist position of women, the order of Bhikkhunis and the role of women in early Buddhism.

From the review of the above literature it is seen that the work on Bhutia women of Sikkim is very inadequate. Work has been done on women, some also on tribal women

but a void is seen concerning Bhutias in general and Bhutia women in particular, and hence a deeper research is much needed.

### **1c. Rationale of Study:**

The focus of the current study is to investigate the social structure and position of Bhutia women in the Bhutia society. There is a dearth of studies which brings out the position of tribal women in the social structure of the tribal society. The drawback is particularly glaring in the context of the Bhutia tribal women in the state of Sikkim. From the literature reviewed, it was found that although quite a number of studies have been conducted on the economic participation of middle class and urban women in particular, about their position in work structure, participation and its effect on their decision making status, yet there is hardly any work done on their tribal counterparts. There is a need to analyse the social structure of Bhutia society and study the position of Bhutia women in the society of Sikkim. Whether a Bhutia woman has accessibility to material and social resources within family and society is to be identified. Similarly her position regarding inheritance of property, decision making and her place in the realm of religious practices and rituals are to be studied. Therefore, the aim of the study is to highlight the social status and true position of Bhutia women. Once these parameters are identified, it will help to identify a Bhutia woman's position in society.

The above rationale resulted in investigation of the areas where a paucity of adequate information exists. Specific research queries which necessitated the need for conducting the present research are:

1. What is the nature of social structure of Bhutia society in Sikkim?
2. What are the changes that have taken place in the social structure because of modernization?

3. What is the position of Bhutia women in terms of education, income, occupation, access to health facilities, etc?
4. Whether Bhutia women enjoy autonomy in making decision with regard to her own life, particularly in selection of mate, solemnization of their marriage and bearing of Children?
5. Does a Bhutia women have access to family property and resources?
6. What is the position of Bhutia women in the realm of Buddhism as a religion and in religious rituals?
7. Whether Bhutia women enjoy autonomy in work participation and decision making processes?

**1d.Objectives:**

To study the above-mentioned questions, the objectives of the present work were framed as follows:

1. To study the socio economic profile of the Bhutia women to analyse her position in society.
2. To study education level of the Bhutia women.
3. To study some of the important social institutions of Bhutia society like family, marriage and kinship and to examine the position of women in these institutions.
4. To study the barriers faced by Bhutia women in accessing legal entitlements like inheritance of property and divorce etc.
5. To study how much access a Bhutia woman has in controlling the material and social resources within the family and also in society.
6. To study participation of Bhutia women in decision making processes.

7. To study the political participation of Bhutia women in relation to her political interest and political awareness.
8. To study position of Bhutia women in religious rites and rituals and also find religion biased social norms.

Social research is the systematic observation of social life for the purpose of finding and understanding pattern amongst what is observed (Babbie, 1992). Every sociological research problem has two aspects namely, conceptual and procedural. The conceptual aspect of research problem deals with defining of key concept used in the study and their operationlisation in the field setting (Sharma, 1997). In other words, this implies making clear the conceptual connotations of the concepts used in the empirical settings (Niranjana, 2000).

The procedural aspects refer to the techniques, tools used for the collection and analysis of data. Since this study makes use of the concept of social structure, there is need to define the social structure.

#### **1e. Social Structure -A Theoretical Perspective:**

Since the focus of the study is on social structure, it is necessary to examine this term in sociological and anthropological literature. Briefly defined, social structure is the web of interacting social forces from which have arisen the various models of observing and thinking (Mannheim, 1940). According to Mannheim, structure is the most comprehensive feature of reality. Every phenomenon should be understood in terms of the structure of the whole, a component part does not have structure. Structure does not consist of a network of static relationship it is dynamic and consists of the configuration of antagonistic forces. Although a configuration of antagonistic forces, structure involves not a blind dynamism but goal directedness.

Social Structure refers to the institutions of the society and the way these institutions are arranged. According to Ginsberg (1947), “the study of social structure is concerned with the principal forms of social organization, i.e. types of groups, associations and institutions and the complex of these which constitute societies. A full account of social structure would involve a review of the whole field of comparative institution”. By social structure, Nadel (1965) means the arrangement of parts into some total entity or whole and by whole he meant, the society and its subdivision. According to Brown (1952) “the components of the social structure are human beings, the structure itself is an arrangement of persons in relationship, institutionally defined and regulated”. The Social structure is therefore constituted by social relationships, which are regulated and controlled by social norms, rules and patterns.

The concepts of social structure can also be referred to as an arrangement of activities among individuals. Therefore, it can be said that in dealing with the structure of a community one simultaneously deals with the system of social position. According to Brown (1952), the study of social structure means the study of certain number of individual human beings in a certain natural environment. We can observe the acts of behaviour of these individuals including their acts of speech and the natural product of past actions.

Pritchard (1991) uses the term social structure for the inter-relation of groups, excluding interpersonal relation. In other words social structure would refer to social groups such as nations, tribes and clans, who retain their identity as an individual group irrespective of the changes taking place in membership.

Eggan (1950) considers the components or units of social structure in the inter-personal relations, which become part of the social structure in the form of status and

position enjoyed by individuals. According to Fortes (1949), social structure also contains parts and relations of diverse nature and variability and pertains to social events and organization as their variable aspects. Therefore, inter-personal relations are elements of social structure.

Leach (1953), defined social structure as a network of social relations in which are involved the members of a community at a particular time. However, Strauss (1953) does not agree that social structure can be used to describe the ensemble of social relations in a society. According to Brown (1952), social structure includes all person to person social relations. He gives the example of an Australian tribe whose social structure is based upon a network of person to person relations, which is established on the basis of genealogical connections. Brown includes in social structure the differentiation of individuals and of classes by their social role. The differential social position of men and women, of Chiefs and commoners, of employers and employees are just as much determinants of social relations. There are however, other Anthropologists, who argue that social structure is comprised of relations among major groups of society i.e. such groups as clans, compound families etc. According to Firth (1961), the concept of social structure is an analytical tool designed to serve us in understanding how men behave in their social life, i.e. those social relations which seem to be of critical importance for the behaviour of members of the society. Thus, social structure may include basic relationships arising from a class system based on relation with the soil.

The social structure should also examine how the basic forms of social relations are capable of variation. It is necessary to study social adaptation as well as social continuity, because for the analysis of the structural aspects, it is necessary to analyse the organizational aspect also (Firth, 1961).

According to Brown (1952), social structure includes two divisions social morphology and social psychology. In social morphology, we study the network of relations connecting the inhabitants with themselves and with the people of their religion. For this purpose we take a locality of a suitable size and study the structural system as it appears in that locality. Closely connected with this conception of social structure is the conception of “social personality” as the position occupied by a human being in a social structure and the complex which is formed by all his social relations with others.

Social life constantly renews the social structure. People to people relation and group to group relation continuously witness change and this is an important aspect of social structure. Changes in the social structure occur due to various factors such as birth, immigration, marriage, death, divorce etc. Thus, while social structure undergoes continuous change, the general social structural form remains relatively constant over a longer period of time. However, the structural form may also experience changes caused due to various reasons, for example when tribals and non tribals come into contact.

Social relations can also be studied with References to the reciprocal behaviour of the persons involved. Social structure can therefore be described with References to those patterns which are prescribed and controlled by customs and traditions e.g. the rules of etiquette, morals and law that form a part of society. Interest and values also constitute another aspect of the social structure, as they are also one of the determinants of social relation. It can therefore be said that “the social institutions in the sense of standardized modes of behaviour constitute the machinery by which a social structure, a network of social relations maintain its existence and its continuity” (Brown, 1952). A social relation does not result from similarity of interests, it is dependent upon mutual interest of persons. Therefore, it rests upon one or more common interests or a combination of both.

When two people have a common interest in an object, that object gets a social value e.g. if all members of society have an interest in observance of laws, then laws have a social value.

Firth (1961) distinguishes four constituents that are essential to social existence. These are social alignment, social control, social media and social standards. Firth, defines social alignment as the method of grouping and grading of people for effectively carrying out various kinds of activities for common existence. It includes groups based on sex, age, kinship and association. Firth, also talks about social control which refers to the system of beliefs and procedures which guide and control the lives and activities of people in a community e.g. rules of etiquette, law, morality, ritual, technical knowledge, magical and religious behaviour of people. Firth refers to social media as another constituent of social life. This means both material goods as well as language, which serve as a means of communication, thereby providing the material basis for activity. By social standard, Firth means the preference quality assigned to an object in virtue of a relationship between means and ends, in a social action. Value involves grading on a preference scale, which is applicable in regards to the following major types of quality – technological, economic, moral, ritual, aesthetic and associational.

Finally, social structure defines the very nature of a society. Structural studies are of special and basic interests since most of the complexities of societies can only be understood on their basic structural terms.

### **1f. Methodology:**

To study the procedural aspects a research design is necessary. Research design refers to the planning of scientific inquiry. In other words, it is a strategy to find or explore a phenomenon. However, due to scarce and unrepresentative work on Bhutias it became

somewhat difficult to develop and finalize the research design to streamline the present work. Since the present study as the title suggests, primarily concerns with the social structure and position of women it is imperative to follow both exploratory and descriptive research design with an analytical base. An exploratory research design is followed when the phenomenon under investigation has not been researched earlier. It is exploratory in the sense that unexplored areas have been put to scrutiny to develop a comprehensive profile of Bhutias and overcome problems of unrepresentative data on the subject. This is therefore quite appropriate to follow an exploratory design in this research. Along with exploration, it is important to describe the researched and observed patterns. At this point it is also worthwhile mentioning that since there have been studies on position and status of women in general in areas other than Sikkim, instead of having some tentative hypothesis, certain research questions are framed on the basis of secondary sources.

The cumbersome task of developing the profile of a community is incomplete without the clear understanding of the community. In order to understand and analyze the elements of social life of a tribal community (in this case Bhutias), an intensive study or more precisely an intensive field study is required.

## 1f (i) .DIAGRAM

### ILLUSTRATING RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

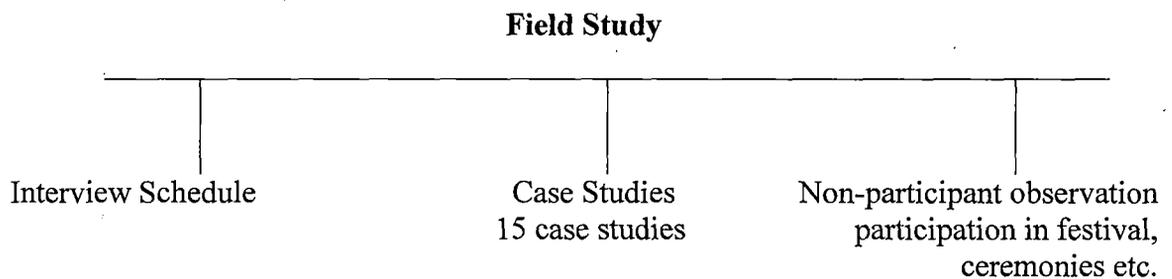
**Research Design:** Exploratory cum Descriptive

**Universe:** Bhutias in Ralong and Barfung Lingtem (South Sikkim) Navey, Tathangchen Upper and Lower (East Sikkim), Tingchim (North Sikkim), Sindrang, Singyang, Gyalshing (West Sikkim).

**Sample:** 200 respondents/families

**Data Collection:** I- Review of secondary material in the form of books, journals, monographs etc.

II- Field study



#### **First Stage:**

- Preparation of tentative interview schedule (TIS-I)
- Administering TIS-I on ten families.
- Analysis of TIS-I

#### **Second stage:**

- Developing tentative interview schedule II (TIS-II)
- Administering TIS-II on 15 families.
- Analysis of TIS-II

#### **Third stage:**

- Standardization of TIS-II
- Finalization of schedule for the purpose of study i.e. Interview Schedule (IS)
- Administration of Interview Schedule on 150 families.
- Collection and interpretation of data.

### **1f (ii) Selection Of Informants**

To obtain necessary and relevant information at field situation the informants were selected from the areas under study. In the selection of the informants, it was decided to depend on their sincerity and reliability of providing correct information. The informants were both male and female and were of two types, viz key informants and occasional helpers. The help of key informants was taken for furnishing most of the data on the basis of set of questions framed for this study. Occasional helpers were the senior males and females of the village.

### **1f (iii) Tools, Technique And Method Of Data Collection**

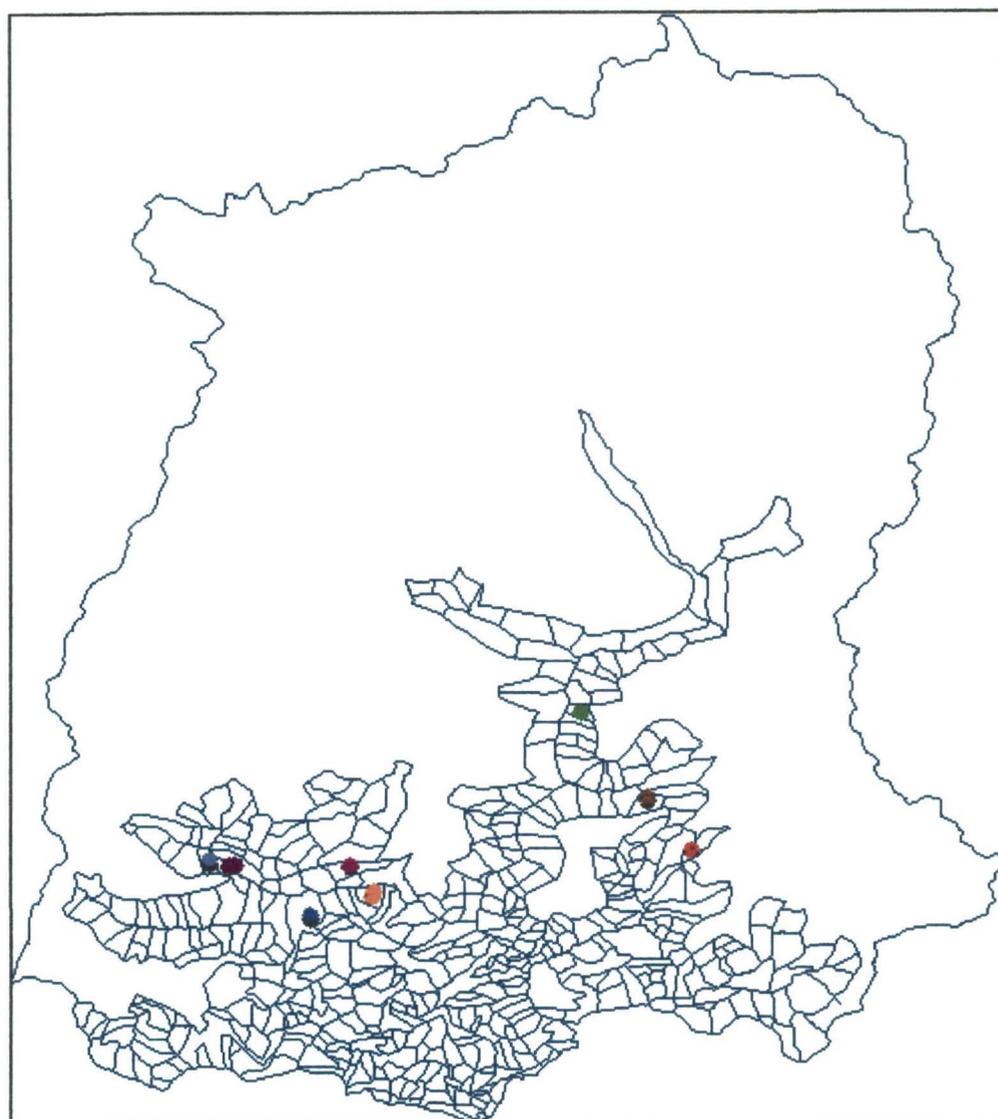
The data was collected through conventional anthropological tools and techniques viz census study, case study, group discussions and observation. To obtain preliminary and comprehensive data an interview schedule was prepared. The interview was conducted with the senior women as well as other women in the household. A sample of 200 families was randomly selected from the field areas by administering a structured interview schedule. The interview schedule for the purpose of study and drawing of inference was pilot tested. The structured interview was developed in three stages. In the first stage, on the basis of literature and casual exposure to the field, a tentative interview schedule was prepared. This interview schedule was quite open ended in nature and was administered on 10 Bhutia households. In the second stage, the data thus collected was analyzed to identify the gaps and finer facts were incorporated in the schedule. Accordingly, a more tentative structured interview schedule was developed for pilot study. A total of 15 households apart from those selected in the first stage but falling in the field area were taken to test the effectiveness of the interview schedule. In the third stage on the basis of the experience while administering the tentative interview schedule,

the tool was standardized and finalized for purpose of data collection. At this stage, it is pertinent to mention that the sample of 200 selected families was exclusive of 25 families covered in the process of developing the interview schedule. The interview schedule consisted of status variables, which included age, education, occupation, income, living conditions, facilities and household assets. In order to examine the life chances accessible to the study, questioning pertaining to certain infrastructure facilities such as health, education, transport etc were also included. The main part of the interview schedule included questions on physical mobility, freedom in mobility, decision making process in family, marriage and child bearing practices. Questions were also asked pertaining to socio-political and general awareness of the respondents. The field work was undertaken in two phases, first phase was from January 2004 to June 2004 and the second was undertaken from August 2004 to April 2005.

#### **1f (iv) Selection Of The Study Area**

The study was undertaken in all the four districts of Sikkim i.e. East, West, North and South. From each of the four districts, villages and areas with maximum Bhutia population were considered as ideal choice as they provided a somewhat homogeneous cultural setting. The level of development was also taken into consideration as it provided variation in the socio-economic status of women. A number of 50 samples (respondents) was taken randomly from the study area in each district.

From North district, (headquarters at Mangan) Tingchim was selected for the purpose of study. The study area spreads over 595.5 sq. hectares; besides this, its growing population has been experiencing social and economic development. Growth and development can be seen by the facilities and amenities in the area. These included a primary and middle school, a primary health centre, provision of safe drinking water etc.



**INDEX**

District	Field Area	Color
East	Navey	●
	Upper & Lower Thathangchen	●
North	Tingchim	●
South	Ralong	●
	Barfung	●
West	Gyalshing	●
	Sindrang	●
	Singyang	●

**Plate 1 (C):** Map of Sikkim showing the study area (Not to scale)  
 (source: NIC Gangtok, Sikkim)

Post and telegraph facility is available at a distance of 5 km. The main and only transport facility is the road. The people depending upon their affordability use state transport buses and private taxis. There is a bus stop in the village and the village is approachable by a motorable road and the nearest town i.e. Mangan is located at a distance about 16 km from Tingchim. From the East district (headquarters at Gangtok and which also is the state capital) three areas were selected i.e. Navey, Uppper Tathangchen and Tathangchen. Both Upper Tathangchen and Tathangchen are very close to Gangtok i.e. 5 km away, however Navey is 21 km away from here. The purpose of this selection was to compare the changes as a result of modernization in the study area and also their impact on socio-economic development of women. Navey is spread over 425.3 sq. hectares. There are two primary schools and one middle school. There is no public health centre but the nearest hospital is available in Gangtok. There is provision of safe drinking water, and post and telegraph facilities are available within 5-10 km. Tathangchen is spread over an area of 191.03 sq. hectare. Because of its close proximity to Gangtok it has primary, middle and high school. It also has a college. Upper Tathangchen spreads over 38.67 sq. hectare and it is also enjoys all the amenities and facilities like Tanthangchen. From the South district (headquarters at Namchi), Barfung and Ralong were selected as the field. Ralong is spread over an area of 413.72 sq. hectares. There are three primary schools, medical facility is available about 10 km away at Barfung where there is a public health centre. There is provision of drinking water and a post office. Barfung occupies a total area of 404.9 sq. hectare. There are four primary schools and one middle school. There is drinking water facility, a public health centre and a post office. The nearest town for both Barfung and Ralong is Namchi which is about 40 km away.

From West district (headquarters at Gyalshing), Singyang and Sindrang were selected as study areas and some samples were also collected from Gyalshing. Singyang occupies an area of 231.6 sq. hectare and Sindrang has 229.17 sq. hectare respectively. Singyang has a public health centre but no educational institution and Sindrang has a primary school but no medical facility. Medical help is available at a distance of 5-10 km. There is no post and telegraph facility and the nearest post office is at Gyalshing. Although the approach road is not very good but movement is possible by bus and private taxis.

### **1g. Data Analysis:**

A Likert-type scale was used for measuring the continuous variables and this divided the respondents in the relevant cases into categories marked high, medium and low on the basis of the score obtained by them. (Kothari, 2004)

### **1h. Contribution of the Study:**

The major contribution of the study is to gain an insight of the social structure and the position of Bhutia women in Bhutia society of Sikkim. By this, planners, policy-makers, women activities, family resource management experts, extension workers and researchers can have ideas regarding the position of Bhutia women for further studies and application. These findings can help make corrective measures and higher academic institutions can utilize these findings when dealing with gender Issues/Women Development in Sikkim chapter.

### **1i. Limitation of Study:**

The present investigation has limitation of research facilities which are faced by a single researcher. The hilly terrain, remoteness of regions and language acted as barriers, however meticulous care has been taken in selecting respondents and help of translators

was taken from the local community to minimize the errors so that all the objectives of study could be satisfactorily fulfilled.

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