

Chapter III

3. Bhutia Women: A Socio-Economic Profile:

This chapter aims at eliciting social, economic and demographic characteristics of the respondents in the study sample. An analysis of the socio-economic characteristics throws light on the present social position of the Bhutia Women. The variables included for the understanding of socio-economic characteristics of the respondents include age, education, occupation, living conditions and family assets. These variables are of significant importance in present research.

The age wise distribution of the respondents (Fig.1) as per selection criteria ranges from 20 years to 80 years. The reason for this is that the behaviour of an individual changes from generation after generation, even though the socio-cultural and economic attributes may be the same. Knowledge and attitude of an individual grow with every successive generation and in modern times, its diffusion is faster due to well-developed means of communication and network. In the elder age groups people are relatively less influenced by the changes in the society, because their value orientations are different and they are rigid in accepting changes because of their relatively low level of education and exposure. The younger age groups on the other hand are more susceptible to change and in accepting it because of their increase in level of education and diffusion is faster due to well-developed means of communication network.

In the study sample, respondents in various age categories according to the marital status were randomly taken. and the the result showed that respondents that were from married category were in the age group of 21-30 followed by age group 31-40 (Fig 1). The maximum number of unmarried was in the 21-30 category. Most of the women in the

Fig. 1 Agewise distribution of Bhutia women in the study sample according to marital status in all the four district of Sikkim in 2004-2005

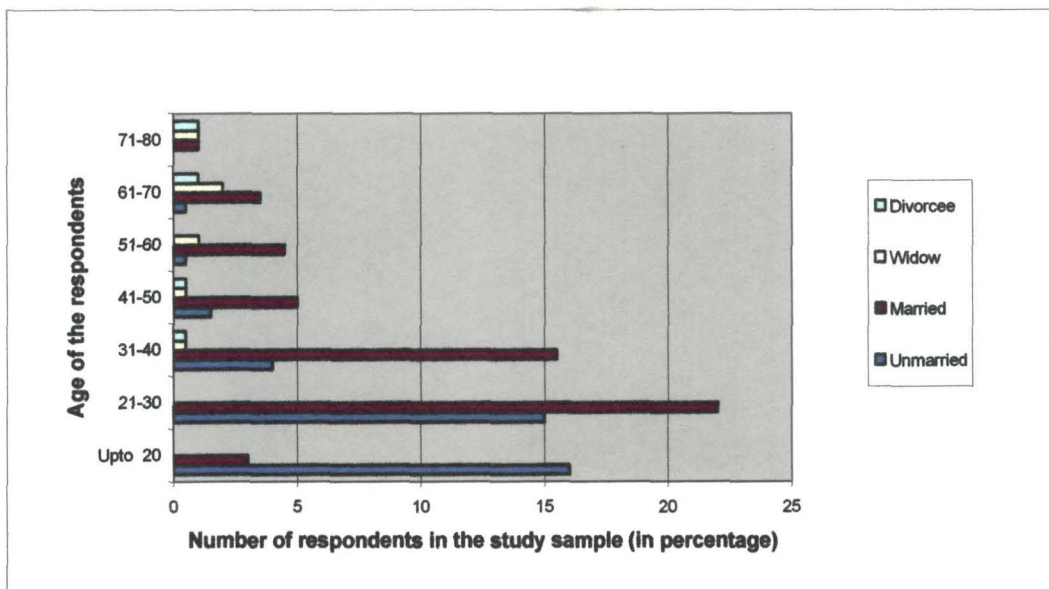


Fig. 2 (a) Education of Bhutia Women- Agewise distribution North District

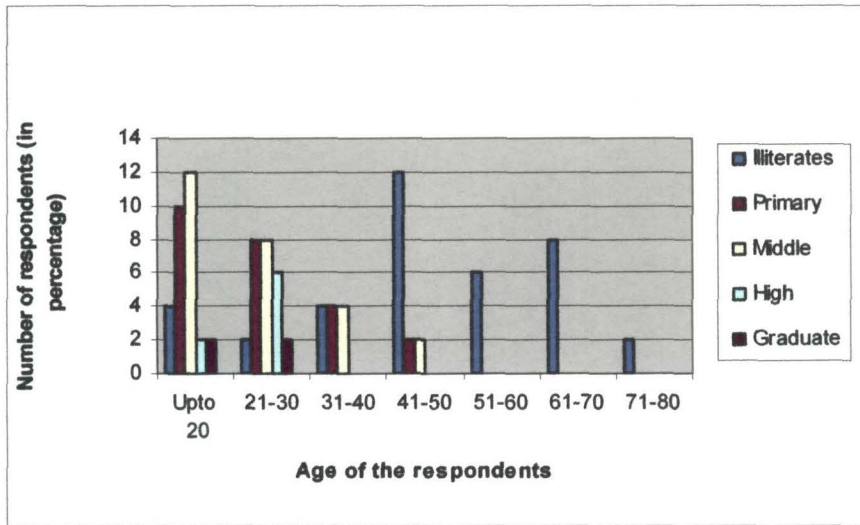
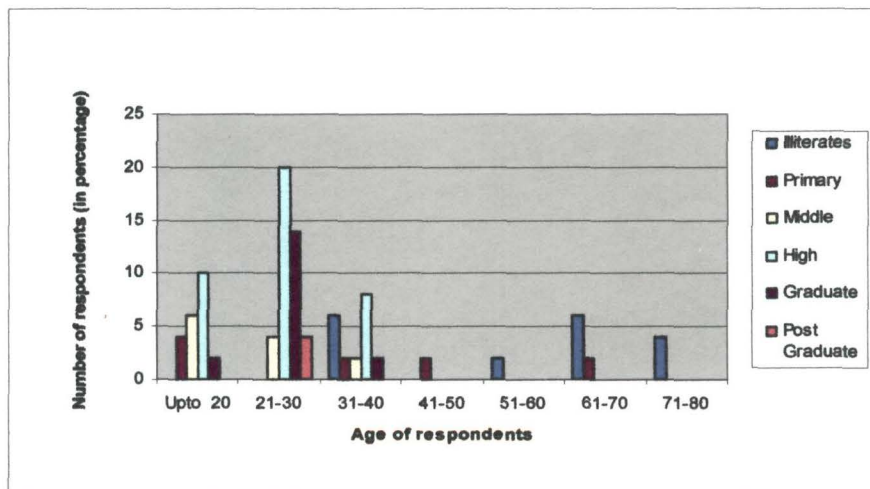
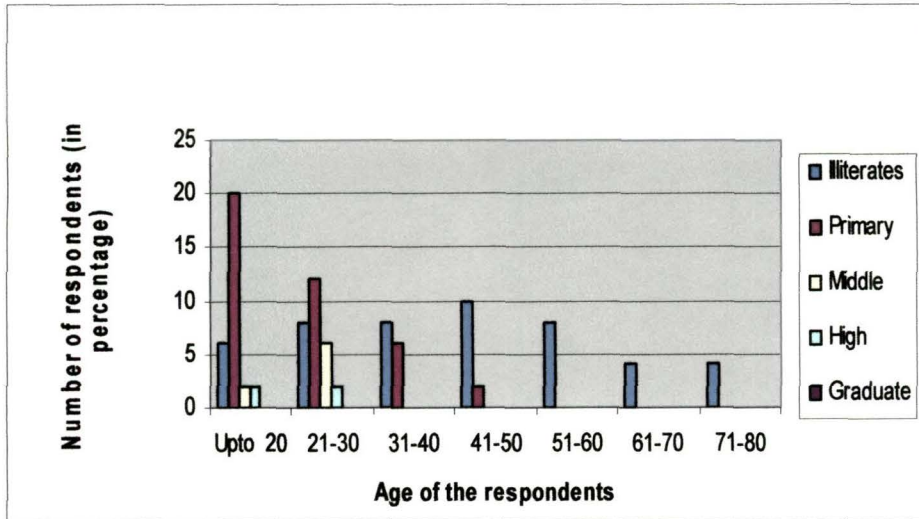


Fig. 2 (b) Education of Bhutia Women- Agewise distribution East District



**Fig.2 (c) Education of Bhutia Women- Agewise distribution
South District**



**Fig. 2 (d) Education of Bhutia Women- Agewise distribution
West District**

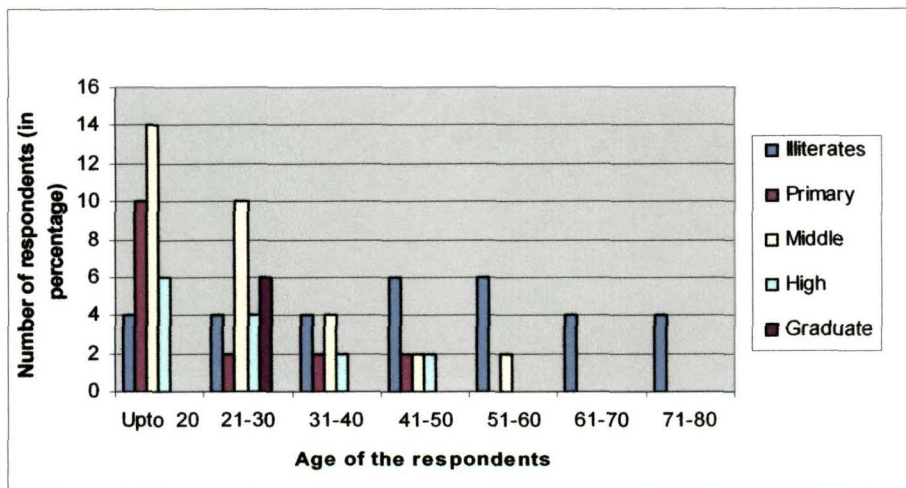
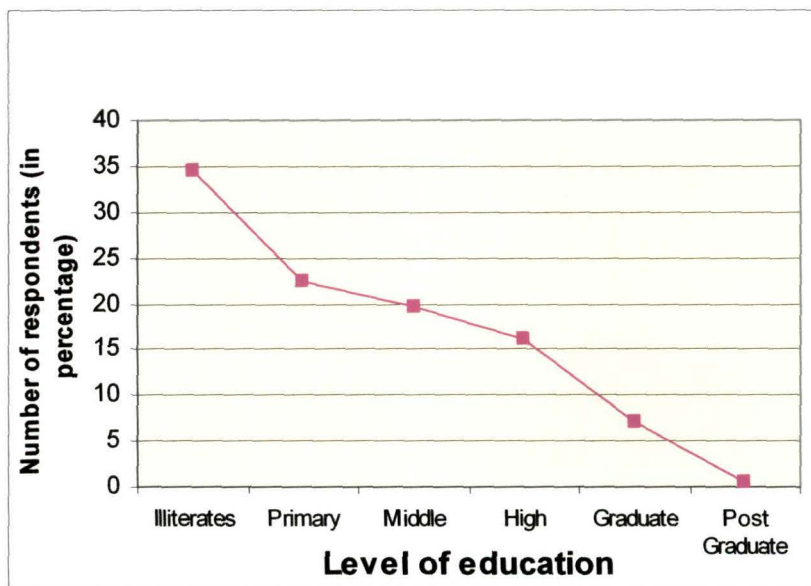


Fig. 3 Level of education among the respondents in the four districts in the study sample



higher age category were married, but one thing which was observed was that Bhutia women married late.

The educational development in Sikkim has received priority in recent years. Among all the four districts of Sikkim, East has the highest number of graduates i.e 13percent (Fig. 2b) while West district has 10percent graduates (Fig. 2d). However, North district (Fig. 2a) has only 2percent of graduates. Reason to this type of difference may be attributed to the fact that the Bhutia families in East and West district are more affluent and are able to send their children outside for further studies. South district (Fig. 2c) has the lowest level of education this may be probably due to the fact that the parents themselves are not educated and somehow preferred the children to join the family occupation (i.e agriculture). In the study sample, the post graduates are only found in the East district. According to the data (presented in form of Fig. 3) in the present study, 34.5percent percent of women interviewed are illiterate, whereas 65.45percent are literate with varying levels of formal education. Among the educated 22.5percent have primary school education, 19.5percent have middle school education, and 16percent have only passed high school. The graduates are 7percent and only .5percent are postgraduates that too are only confined to Gangtok.

It can be therefore inferred from the data, that women mostly go up to primary and middle school with greater incidence of drop out at higher level of education.

The level of education is also indicative of the kind of occupation the respondents have in the sample of the study. Sikkim is an agricultural society but there is a significant shift towards other occupations as well. Women who are relatively less educated are confined to household chores and also empirically found to be engaged in agriculture (Fig. 4a). The women engaged in government jobs are 15percent. The lesser

Fig. 4 (a) Distribution of Bhutia women by occupation

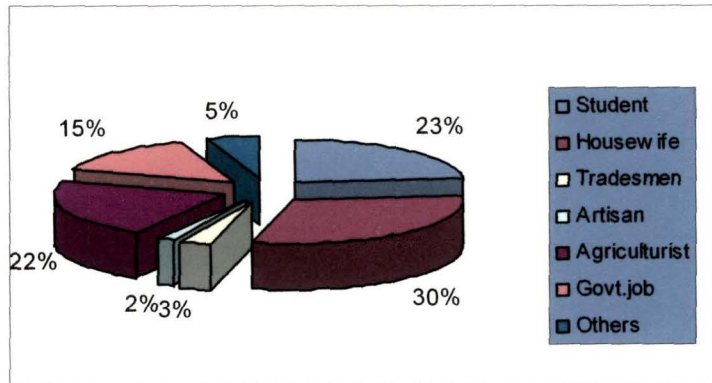
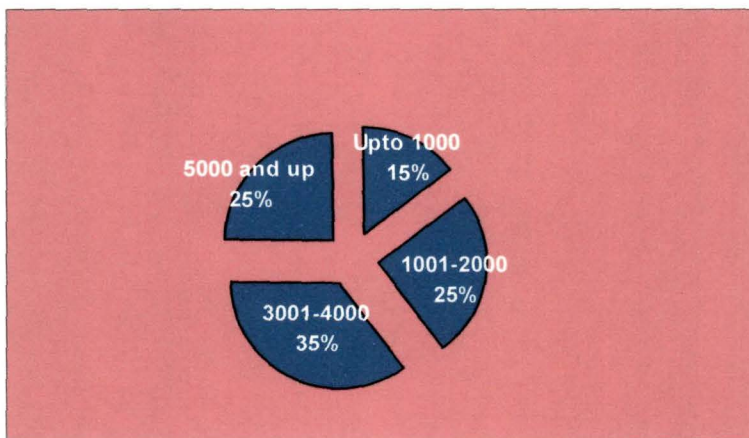


Fig 4(b) Total monthly income of the respondents (in all the four district) in the year 2004-2005



representation of women in occupation outside home and their maximum concentration in agriculture is conditioned by their low level of education. Women who hold graduation degree or above are generally employed. It is observed that in Gangtok Bhutia women are employed in various fields due to various occupations, which are available to them.

The respondents were generally self- employed. Women in the self-employed sector are those who worked in their own agricultural field and carried out their household chores. The remaining are employed in public sector or state government organization.

It is a common observation that when questioned about their income the respondents are not comfortable in disclosing it. The income that is stated is accepted at its face value and recorded. The family income-wise classification of the respondents reveals that 15percent of the families have an income of Rs1000/month. 25percent have upto Rs. 3000, 35percent of them have upto Rs. 4000 and 25percent have above Rs. 5000 (Fig. 4b). A comparison of their living conditions with their income during the field visit reveals that they hadve not quoted the exact figure.

Besides the analysis of social and economic attributes, an analysis of the living conditions of the respondents is also taken into account and an attempt is made on this basis to describe the general standard of living of the respondents.

Most of the Bhutia houses are two storey rectangular structures. The ground floor is partially enclosed and serves as an enclosure for animals. The houses are made of bamboo splits plastered with mud. The roof is thatched with reed, straw and bamboo. Most of the houses have two, to three rooms. However, there is a separate room for the altar in every traditional house. However these days it is a common sight to see R.C.C. buildings especially in and around Gangtok. The traditional houses have also undergone

Plate: 2 A An old traditional Bhutia house.

Plate: 2 B A modern Bhutia house retaining some of its old tradition features.



Plate 2A



Plate 2B

considerable changes regarding building material. However, the basic framework of the house remained the same (Plate 2A and 2B).

An Attempt is also made to have an idea of the amenities available to them within the house. These include water supply, electricity etc. Amenities refer to the basic facilities, which are available to the people in the house itself or at their doorsteps. Analysis of these conditions also helps to verify how far the state machinery has been effective in providing these to the people.

Questions were asked in context of water connection inside the house. Most of the respondents except those residing in Gangtok did not have a proper water connection inside the house. There was a tap outside, which was shared by two or more households. Some houses had their personal taps but water supply was not continuous. They also depended upon natural springs (*jhoras*) for water. The data with regard to electricity also reveals that they have power supply in their houses. Besides the electricity supply, it was further explored whether the respondents had flush system in the toilet or not. In this context, in East 80percent of them revealed that they had this facility built up with septic tanks among which most of them are from Gangtok. The overall description of facilities within the houses reveal that the area in the study sample of East district is relatively developed. In other districts, the toilets are constructed in a corner outside the house. Those houses having a flush system are only 50 percent in West, 20 percent in South and 20percent in North.

The household assets, which are available to people and in particular to the women are also indicative of the level of development. The first query was about the availability of cooking gas in each family. In this context, 100percent of the respondents revealed that they had this facility. In Sikkim, this facility is provided to the villagers by

Table: 1

Facilities in the household (in percentage)

Type of facilities	East	West	North	South
Tap water	100	100	100	100
Pressure cooker	100	75	100	75
kerosene stove	100	100	100	100
TV/Radio	100	85	95	85
Telephone	95	90	90	75
Scooter/cycle/Motor	65	45	50	35
Car	75	45	50	25

Source: Field survey

the government free of cost. Therefore, all of them are having LPG gas connection. Although it was also noticed that many of them were saving on the refilling of the gas and used an alternate source as well. Alternate form of energy source like wood, coal and Kerosene were used because they were available at cheaper prices to them. The houses which had cooking gas also preferred the use of wood and coal in the winter season as it served the purpose of heating. However, this practice is not followed in Gangtok. Here sophisticated heaters are used. Although the kitchens do not have any modern, cooking appliances but a pressure cooker was found in almost all the houses (Table 1).

The source of entertainment and information used by women include radios/tape recorders and TV sets. In East 100percent and in North 95 percent of them have radio/tape recorders (Table1). A few houses even have compact disc players. This indicates that although the respondents reside in remote areas yet they have access to various entertainments.

Sikkim, because of its hilly terrain makes transportation difficult. Transportation is by public buses or taxis. Very few people own cars although some houses did boast of a motorcycle. Those people who own cars use them as private taxies. The percent of respondent's \ households having scooters in East district is 65 percent followed by 50 percent in North, 45 percent in West and 35 in South. In East district 75 percent of the respondents have cars (Table1).

3a. Summary:

To sum up the foregoing descriptive analysis and discussion of the social and economic profile it can be stated that majority of women are Buddhists by faith, although some conversions to Christianity is also noticed. Bhutia because of their tribal social structure do not have any caste categorization, although clan exogamy is followed.

The education profile of the respondents reveal that very few women possess graduation and post graduation degrees. The number of illiterates is relatively in the higher age group. The parents did send their children to school, but they leave school due to several reasons other than economic reasons. With whatever level of education they have they try to take up a job in whatever field it is available. However, the higher positions in the government organizations are only available to the well qualified women. Most of other uneducated women are engaged in household chores and agricultural activities or self employment. Most of the women who are earning have the right to even spend it. However, most of them do not give a clear picture of their income in the interview during the field enquiries.

The general standard of living of the respondents is of the middle class level. Although some of the respondents are of the lower class level. The area of the houses is not very large but it is in accordance with the size of the family. Respondents have resorted to certain modern facilities like cooking gas but the use of traditional energy source is still seen. The overall observations of the study area based on field visits and data indicate that change is taking place in the social setup and women are responding to this change.