

## Chapter I

### A Socio-Economic Profile of the Study Area

The general level of health in any society is largely determined by the socio-economic status, the cultural condition and the level of education of the population, apart from the health infrastructure available. It is a generally accepted fact that poor and illiterate sections of the society have a higher rate of illness. Social stratification is often directly related to illness as illustrated by the reality that money can buy health services and environmental improvement, and education can improve health behaviour and help prevent illness. There are differences in health behaviour in terms of wealth, education and social status. In order to establish the linkage between socioeconomic factors and health, one has to have an understanding of the socioeconomic condition of the people studied. The objective conditions people live in and the legacy of tradition would shape the collectively shared health perceptions and health culture of the people.

The disparities in life expectancies and life styles of various groups need to be analyzed by a social survey in order to pinpoint the health requirements of the disadvantaged sections of society. In this regard, the current lifestyle of the local population has been analysed taking into account assorted variables such as property holdings, size of family, nutritional intake, sanitation habits and exposure to the outside world. In addition, the indirect role of higher incomes such as housing structures and affordability of certain household amenities in promoting better health is also examined.

There are, however, some phenomena such as cultural practices and perceptions, which cannot be fully interpreted with the help of hard data alone. Therefore, an attempt has been made to explain or supplement hard data with field observation gathered from informal interviews with the people of Banigama.

Most of data collected has been presented in tabular form with specification of the caste/ethnicity of the respondent. This has been done in order to calculate the socio-economic profile of each demographic group as accurately as possible.

### The Demographic Profile

The total number of households in Banigama was 1680, with a total population of 8,442 at the time of my fieldwork in 2001. Of the total population, 50.31 per cent were male and 49.69 per cent were female (Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1: Households and Population by Caste/Ethnicity in Banigama VDC**

SN	Caste/Ethnicity	Number of Household & Percentage	Population Male	Population Female	Total
1	Brahmin/Chhetri	256 (15.24)	745(48.38)	795(51.62)	1,540 (100.00)
2	Tharu	1,062 (63.21)	2,541(50.18)	2,523(49.82)	5,064 (100.00)
3	Untouchable	117 (6.96)	368 (55.76)	292 (44.24)	660 (100.00)
4	Terai Dwellers	215 (12.80)	527 (51.12)	504 (48.88)	1,031 (100.00)
5	Others	30 (1.79)	66 (44.90)	81 (55.10)	147 (100.00)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,680 (100.00)</b>	<b>4,247 (50.31)</b>	<b>4,195 (49.69)</b>	<b>8,442 (100.00)</b>

Source: VDC Office, 2001

The caste/ethnic distribution of the population shows that the Tharus were in majority in Banigama, with the highest population. Its 1062 households constitute 63.21% of the total households in Banigama with a population 5064. The Brahmin/Chhetri groups together rank second both in terms of number of households and population size. The third and fourth ranked are the Terai dwellers and untouchables, respectively whereas, the Tibeto-Burman are ranked the lowest with few households (Table 1.1). The Newar and Tamang feature in the sample and have been kept under others for analysis purpose (Table 1.2).

As stated in the methodology, 10 per cent of the households from each of the above mentioned caste/ethnic stratum was drawn as the sample. Thus, I have covered a total of 178 households representing 1003 individuals in my sample (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2 presents the distribution of households and population by caste/ethnicity, undertaken in this study.

**Table 1.2: Distribution of Households and Population by Caste/Ethnicity**

S.N.	Caste/Ethnic Group	No. of Households	%	Total Population	%
1.	Brahmin/Chhetri	27	15.17	188	18.74
2.	Tharu	114	64.04	599	59.72
3.	Untouchable	13	7.30	84	8.38
4.	Terai Dwellers	22	12.36	121	12.06
5.	Others	2	1.12	11	1.10
	<b>Total</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>1003</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Field work, 2001

### Age and Gender

Data in 1.3 reveal that a large section (25.84%) of respondents were in the 31-35 year age group. Only 2.25% of the respondents were above 60 years. These respondents gave their long-standing perceptions on health and illness. Gender-wise, 41.18% of female respondents were in the 20-25 year age group. Interestingly, only 10% of the 178 HHs interviewed were the headed by women. In addition, women have also been categorized as Married and Women of Reproductive Age (MWRA) in order to solicit women's problems and perspectives on health and illness, which is dealt with in chapter V.

**Table 1.3: Distribution of Household heads by Age Group and sex**

Age Group	Sex					
	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
20 to 25 years	23	14.29	7	41.18	30	16.85
26 to 30 years	25	15.53	5	29.41	30	16.85
31 to 35 years	44	27.33	2	11.76	46	25.84
36 to 40 years	24	14.91	1	5.88	25	14.04
41 to 45 years	21	13.04	2	11.76	23	12.92
46 to 50 years	11	6.83	-	-	11	6.18
51 to 55 years	6	3.73	-	-	6	3.37
56 to 60 years	3	1.86	-	-	3	1.69
Above 60 years	4	2.48	-	-	4	2.25
<b>Total</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The table above gives a clear picture of male domination as out of the 178 interviewees, only 17 females were the heads of the households and had some control over resources. Historically, Nepali society is male dominated, and Banigama VDC is a point to illustrate this. However, if females are given opportunities and allowed access to education, they can resist male domination to an extent and participate equally in various fields of social life.

The data in Table 1.4 gives the gender breakdown of respondents by their caste/ethnicity.

*Respondents?*

**Table 1.4: Distribution of HHS according to sex and Caste/Ethnicity**

Caste/Ethnic Group	Sex				Total	
	Male	Male	Female	Female	Number	%
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Brahmin/Chhetri	25	92.59	2	7.41	27	100.00
Tharu	102	89.47	12	10.53	114	100.00
Untouchables	11	84.62	2	15.38	13	100.00
Terai Dwellers	21	95.45	1	4.55	22	100.00
Others	2	100.00	-	-	2	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>90.45</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>9.55</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

### Education

The literacy levels of the sample household heads are presented below in Table 1.5.

**Table 1.5: Literacy Level of the Household Heads**

Education Level	Caste/Ethnicity											
	Brahmin/Chhetri		Tharu		Untouchable		Terai Dwellers		Others		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Illiterate	-	-	5	4.39	-	-	5	22.73	-	-	10	5.62
Literate Only	10	37.04	46	40.35	8	61.54	6	27.27	1	50.00	71	39.89
Primary Level	1	3.70	3	2.63	2	15.38	3	13.64	-	-	9	5.06
Secondary Level	11	40.74	40	35.09	3	23.08	2	9.09	1	50.00	57	<u>32.02</u>
Intermediate Level	4	14.81	15	13.16	-	-	4	18.18	-	-	23	12.92
Graduation Level	1	3.70	5	4.39	-	-	2	9.09	-	-	8	4.49
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

*94.34  
or  
54.45  
excl. illiterate  
87.2*

The literacy rate among the household heads in Banigama is 39.89%, which is far below the national rate of 53.7%. In Banigama, 32.02% of the respondents have completed their secondary level of education and a mere 4.49% of the respondents have completed graduation. Out of 13 untouchable HHS, 8 respondents were literate, 2 had completed primary school and 3 secondary school. One each household from Tibeto-Burman group were found literate and having secondary level of education. Because of the small number of women, specific categorization of women's literacy levels could not be presented. However, field visits and interviews suggest that the literacy rate of women in Banigama falls far below the national average of 42.5%.

## Organisational Affiliation

In Banigama some people are affiliated with organisations such as Village Development Committee and volunteer in sub-health posts. Those affiliated with VDCs were local politicians including ward level politicians and ward members.

**Table 1.6: Distribution of HHs in terms of organisational affiliation and sex**

Affiliation	Sex					
	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Affiliated	48	29.81	4	23.53	52	29.21
Not Affiliated	113	70.19	13	76.47	126	70.79
<b>Total</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Data reveals that 29.81 % of the males and 23.53 % of females studied were affiliated with some kind of organisation. In context of Nepal's male dominated society female involvement in organisations is an encouraging sign from the perspective of gender empowerment.

Five ward members are chosen to represent the inhabitants of each ward. Of the 5 members, one seat is allocated exclusively for women. Field visits also revealed that out of the 48 males, 3 were VDC executives. Female affiliation in organisations is seen in equal numbers as ward representatives and community health volunteers.

Field observation indicates that those affiliated to organisations are relatively more knowledgeable in terms of their exposure to health and illness. Informal interviews verified that they were more familiar with the need and importance of personal hygiene, toilet, safe drinking water and environmental sanitation for individual and community well being.

It was also revealed that they were more familiar and exposed to with the services provided by the sub-health post in Banigama village. Since two women were female community health volunteers, it is natural for them that they were knowledgeable about preventive and primary health care. From such findings, it is rational to infer that organisational affiliation enhanced awareness of health in general and promoted healthy living.

**Table 1.7: Affiliation of HHs to organisations**

Affiliation	Caste/Ethnicity											
	Brahmin/ Chhetri		Tharu		Untouchable		Terai Dwellers		Others		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Affiliated	7	25.93	39	34.21	1	7.69	5	22.73	-	-	52	29.21
Not Affiliated	20	74.07	75	65.79	12	92.31	17	77.27	2	100.00	126	70.79
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Giving an account of organizational affiliation, Table 1.7 shows that 25.93%, 34.21%, 7.69% and 22.73% of Brahmin/Chhetri, Tharu, Untouchable and Terai dwellers respectively are affiliated to various organisations in Banigama. There was only one untouchable ward member. According to the table, Tharu, Brahmin/Chhetri, and Terai dwellers are seen to be affiliated with organisations in sequential order in Banigama. None of the Tibeto-Burman has been found affiliated to any organization.

### Occupation

An occupation is the day to day work done by people in order to earn their livelihood as a means of maintaining their family.

Table 1.8 illustrates that in terms of occupation 45.51% of the household heads are exclusively farmers. With the inclusion of a side job with agriculture this number becomes 61.81%. 77.53% of households in Banigama VDC own some agricultural land, although the size of holding varies (see Table 1.9). This percentage is low compared to the national figure. Over 80% of the total labour force continues to be employed by this sector. There has been a growth of the non-agricultural sector during this decade, bringing down the agricultural share in the GDP from about 50% at the beginning of the decade to around 40% now. The low percentage of farmers (61.81%) in the study as against the expected 80% might be because of two reasons. One reason could be that the sample represents students, service holders, housewives and others. Although the respondents are categorized as “farmers” in the national census, they are not peasants in true sense. Secondly, Banigama, being a semi-urban VDC, is near Biratnagar, the second largest city in Nepal and the district head quarters of Morang, and offers various opportunities for off-farm employment. So, it can be assumed that 60% of the labour force depends on agriculture alone with no other means of livelihood.

Table 1.8: Distribution of Household Heads according to occupation

Occupation	Caste/Ethnic Group											
	Brahmin/ Chhetri		Tharu		Untouchable		Terai Dwellers		Others		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Agriculture	15	55.56	59	51.75	4	30.77	3	13.64		-	81	45.51
Study	1	3.70	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.56
Trade or Industry	1	3.70	4	3.51		-	3	13.64	1	50.00	9	5.06
Sewing	-	-	2	1.75	1	7.69	1	4.55	-	-	4	2.25
Agri.+Service	-	-	12	10.53	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	6.74
Wage Labourer	1	3.70	2	1.75	2	15.38	8	36.36	1	50.00	14	7.87
Agri.+Labour	-	-	3	2.63	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	1.69
Service	4	14.81	16	14.04		-	4	18.18	-	-	24	13.48
Agri.+Trade	3	11.11	8	7.02	1	7.69	2	9.09	-	-	14	7.87
Housewife	2	7.41	6	5.26	1	7.69	1	4.55	-	-	10	5.62
Cycle Mechanic	-	-	2	1.75	-	-		-	-	-	2	1.12
Occupational	-	-	-	-	4	30.77		-	-	-	4	2.25
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Terai dwellers (18.18%) are involved in relatively larger number in “service” (externally employed by others) compared to Brahmin/Chhetris (14.81%) and Tharus (14.04%). However, only one Untouchable is seen to be in such service, indicating the menial status of this caste in Banigama VDC with nominal opportunities in the service industry. Of the two Tibeto-Burman, one each has been found as wage labourer and having his small village grocery. Field observations reveal that those who were employed in various organisations were overwhelmingly involved in jobs other than government/semi-governmental and non-governmental organisations. The majority were working in shops and also in seasonal off-farm activities.

**Table 1.9: Land Holding Pattern among the Caste/Ethnic groups**

Land holding	Caste/Ethnicity											
	Brahmin/ Chhetri		Tharu		Untouchable		Terai Dwellers		Others		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Landless	2	7.41	15	13.16	8	61.54	14	63.64	1	50.00	40	22.47
Below 0.50 ha	7	25.93	25	21.93	3	23.08	1	4.55	1	50.00	37	20.79
0.50 to 1.0 ha	6	22.22	28	24.56	-	-	2	9.09	-	-	36	20.22
1.0 to 3.0 ha	9	33.33	32	28.07	2	15.38	5	22.73	-	-	48	26.97
3.0 to 5.0 ha	3	11.11	9	7.89	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	6.74
Above 5.0 ha	-	-	5	4.39	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	2.81
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The data in Table 1.9 show that 77.53% of households in Banigama own agricultural land - although the sizes of the holdings vary: 22.47% are landless, 20.79% and 20.22% have agricultural land below 0.50 ha and between 0.50 and 1.0 ha respectively. Only 2.81% of households have more than 5.0 ha. agricultural land, 6.74% have agricultural land between 3.0 and 5.0 ha. Caste/ethnicity wise, the land holding status shows Brahman/Chhetri households are ahead of other ethnic groups. 11.11% of the Brahman/Chhetris hold in between 3.0-5.0 ha of agricultural land while Tharus hold 7.89%. Of this, 4.39% of Tharus also have more than 5.0 ha of agricultural land. 61.54% and 63.64% of Untouchables and Terai dwellers respectively were found to be landless. Similarly, the Tibeto-Burman were equally landless and holding only less than 0.50 ha of agricultural land.

**Table 1.10: Distribution of Households by Tenural Status**

Tenural Status	Caste/Ethnicity											
	Brahmin/ Chhetri		Tharu		Untouchable		Terai Dwellers		Others		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Owner	22	81.48	84	73.68	5	38.46	6	27.27	1	50.00	118	66.29
Owner + Tenant	-	-	8	7.02	-	-	1	4.55	-	-	9	5.06
Tenant	-	-	2	1.75	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1.12
Share cropper	3	11.11	5	4.39	-	-	1	4.55	-	-	9	5.06
Landless	2	7.41	15	13.16	8	61.54	14	63.64	1	50.00	40	22.47
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The distribution of households by tenural status according to caste/ethnicity is presented in Table 1.10. Data reveal that a large majority of Brahmin/Chhetris (81.48%) and Tharus (73.68%) households are owner farmers. In contrast, almost 61.54% and 63.64% Untouchable and Terai dwellers respectively are landless labourers. There are 3, 5 and 1 households from Brahmin/Chhetri, Tharu and Terai Dwellers respectively that **have joint**

**custody of the farming produce.** Only 2 households from the Tharu ethnic group possess official certificates stating their tenancy from the land reform office. One Tibeto-Burman, irrespective of his marginal land, was an owner cultivator. By and large in Nepal there are innumerable farmers who unofficially till others' land on the basis of crop sharing. As such, land distribution in Banigama is uneven. The majority of the population in this village is landless and dependent on the upper castes households which control the majority of holdings.

Nepal is an agricultural country with about 81% of farming population. As cultivable land is limited and scattered, the farmers have to toil for sheer subsistence and are not able make a surplus. Farmers still use primitive methods of farming and livestock-raising and do not have adequate education and skills for other jobs, resulting in low productivity and income.

### House Types

People's housing also has implications on health and illness. The following paragraph presents the types of housing in Banigama.

**Table 1.11: House Types**

Caste/ethnic group	Pacca		Kachha		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Brahmin/Chhetri	-	-	27	100.00	27	100.00
Tharu	6	5.26	108	94.74	114	100.00
Untouchable	-	-	13	100.00	13	100.00
Terai Dwellers	-	-	22	100.00	22	100.00
Others	-	-	2	100.00	2	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3.37</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>96.63</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

According to household caste/ethnicity, only 5.26% of Tharus have brick and cement (Pacca) houses; the rest have Kachha houses made of mud and thatched straw. In other words, 96.63% of houses in the study area are Kachha.

In rural Nepal, house structures serve as indicators of the economic standing of households. Owners of Pacca houses are viewed as being financially capable, while those of Kachha houses are usually taken as poor. Because of this, it is not uncommon to have people who evaluate each other on the basis of houses and treat people on the basis of the kind of house they live in. It is also possible that individual self-esteem in society is based in part on their dwelling.

There is a close relationship between housing structure and health. Pacca houses are generally neat and tidy and without excess mud and dust but Kachha houses flake off, producing dust. In addition, they are cleaned with cow dung and as a result increase chances of harbouring various communicable diseases. In comparison to Pacca houses, Kachha houses are not made scientifically and do not have adequate ventilation for fresh air. Because of this, smoke from cooking fires muffles the whole house, directly affecting family members and causing various respiratory diseases like bronchitis, TB etc.

**Table 1.12: Distribution of households in agrarian categories**

Land holding	Pacca		Kachha		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Landless	-	-	40	100.00	40	100.00
Below 0.50 ha	2	5.41	35	94.59	37	100.00
0.50 to 1.0 ha	-	-	36	100.00	36	100.00
1.0 to 3.0 ha	3	6.25	45	93.75	48	100.00
3.0 to 5.0 ha	1	8.33	11	91.67	12	100.00
Above 5.0 ha	-	-	5	100.00	5	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3.37</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>96.63</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

From Table 1.12 above, it is evident that the six Tharu households have Pucca houses, and that 3 households own 1.0-3.0 ha. of agricultural land. The remaining 2 and 1 household own less than 0.50 ha and 3.0-5.0 ha of agricultural land respectively. From such findings it is safe to argue that the 2 households owning less than 0.5 ha of land but with Pucca housing are dependent on other sources of income like service and business.

### Household Ownership

In Nepal, household possessions serve as symbols of economic well being. People associate certain "luxury" household items, such as televisions and motorcycle, as status symbols and a gauge of financial well being. The distribution of such possessions in Banigama is presented below:

Table 1.15: Family types

Caste/ethnic group	Nuclear		Extended		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Brahmin/Chhetri	14	51.85	(13)	48.15	27	100.00
Tharu	82	71.93	32	28.07	114	100.00
Untouchable	7	53.85	6	46.15	13	100.00
Terai Dwellers	15	68.18	7	31.82	22	100.00
Others	1	50.00	1	50.00	2	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>66.85</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>33.15</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The household family structure is presented in Table 1.15 according to caste/ethnicity, and displays the characteristics of a Nepali semi-urban area like Banigama in Morang District. In totality 66.85% of the local households are nuclear families, and the remaining 33.15% are part of an extended family structure.

### Drinking Water and Sanitation

Drinking water and sanitation, notably lavatory facilities, have a direct impact on health and illness. The local sources of drinking water and sanitation provision (toilet facility) in Banigama are presented below.

Table 1.16: Sources of Drinking Water

Caste/ethnicity	Pipeline		Tubewell		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Brahmin/Chhetri	-	-	27	100.00	27	100.00
Tharu	3	2.63	111	97.37	114	100.00
Untouchable	1	7.69	12	92.31	13	100.00
Terai Dwellers	-	-	22	100.00	22	100.00
Others	-	-	2	100.00	2	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2.25</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>97.75</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The source of drinking water of Banigama inhabitants is presented in Table 1.16. Except for 2.25% of households with pipeline water connections, the majority (97.75%) of households in Banigama depend on water from tube wells. The table reveals that 1 Untouchable household has access to pipeline drinking water. Field observation verified that that particular household is near the main water supply pipeline. In Terai, tube well is by and large constructed with polythene pipes and are not more than 20 ft deep. Because of this, water quality can not be assured just by the seemingly clean appearance of the water. Apart from the usual gastrointestinal problems, the arsenic level in the drinking water is becoming a problem these days.

**Table 1.17: Sources of water for general use**

Caste/ ethnicity	Pipeline		Tube well		River		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Brahmin/Chhetri	-		27	100.00	-	-	27	100.00
Tharu	3	2.63	107	93.86	4	3.51	114	100.00
Untouchable	1	7.69	12	92.31	-	-	13	100.00
Terai Dwellers	-	-	22	100.00	-	-	22	100.00
Others	-	-	2	100.00	-	-	2	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2.25</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>95.51</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2.25</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

In Banigama VDC, 4 Tharu households still use river water for bathing and cleaning; this is unhealthy. The reasons for this may be cultural prejudices and views that river water is purer.

**Table 1.18: Time to reach source of Drinking Water in minutes**

Caste/ethnicity	<15 Min.		15-30 min.		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Brahmin/Chhetri	27	100.00			27	100.00
Tharu	113	99.12	1	0.88	114	100.00
Untouchable	13	100.00	-	-	13	100.00
Terai Dwellers	22	100.00	-	-	22	100.00
Others	2	100.00	-	-	2	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>99.44</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.56</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The distance to the source of drinking water in terms of walking distance is presented in Table 1.18. Data reveals that except for one Tharu household all houses have access to water within a 15 minute walking distance.

**Table 1.19: Perception of Water Quality**

Caste/ ethnicity	Good		Turbid		Bad smell		Bad		Sandy		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Brahmin/ Chhetri	16	59.26	1	3.70	2	7.41	7	25.9 3	1	3.70	27	100.00
Tharu	105	92.11	4	3.51	1	0.88	2	1.75	2	1.75	114	100.00
Untouchable	10	76.92	2	15.38	1	7.69	-	-	-	-	13	100.00
Terai Dwellers	17	77.27	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	22.7 3	22	100.00
Others	2	100.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>84.27</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3.93</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2.25</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5.06</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4.49</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The user household evaluation of their water quality based on appearance is presented in Table 1.19. An overwhelming majority (84.27%) of households felt that the quality of the water they drink is "good". 7 Brahmin/Chhetri and 2 Tharu households thought that the water

quality was bad. The 5 Terai dweller households stated that they get sandy water. In total, 3.39%, 2.25%, 5.06% and 4.49% of households in Banigama VDC termed the water as turbid, putrid, rancid and sandy water respectively. Such findings indicate an urgent need to improve the quality of drinking water in Banigama VDC.

**Table 1.20: Houses with and without Toilet Facility**

Caste/ethnicity	Yes		No		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Brahmin/Chhetri	22	81.48	5	18.52	27	100.00
Tharu	16	14.04	98	85.96	114	100.00
Untouchable	3	23.08	10	76.92	13	100.00
Terai Dwellers	5	22.73	17	77.27	22	100.00
Others	1	50.00	1	50.00	2	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>26.40</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>73.60</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 1.20 presents household toilet facility with respect to caste/ethnicity. Data suggest that an overwhelmingly 73.60% of houses do not have toilet facility. Only 26.40% of houses in the study area have properly constructed toilets. It is thus understandable that there is high probability of oral faecal diseases in Banigama. More Brahman/Chhetri houses have toilets compared to other groups. This may be because of their level of education, awareness and realization of the importance of toilets for a healthy life. The following table illustrates the various reasons cited for not having proper sanitation facilities

**Table 1.21: Reasons for not having Toilet Facility**

Reasons	Caste/Ethnicity											
	Brahmin/Chhetri		Tharu		Untouchable		Terai Dwellers		Others		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
No Need	-	-	9	9.18	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	6.87
Lack of Knowledge			5	5.10	1	10.00	4	23.53	1	100.00	11	8.40
Lack of Money	5	100.0	78	79.59	6	60.00	12	70.59	-	-	101	77.10
Other Places to defecate	-	-	-	-	1	10.00	-	-	-	-	1	0.76
Negligence	-	-	3	3.06	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	2.29
Others	-	-	3	3.06	2	20.00	1	5.88	-	-	6	4.58
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>100.00</b>

See Table 1.22 & 1.27  
1131  
70 have samples

According to Table 1.21, 77.10% of respondents said lack of money as the reason for not having a toilet. Across ethnic lines, 4 ethnic groups echoed lack of financial resources as

the reason for not being able to construct proper lavatories. However, in case of one Tibeto-Burman house it was lack of knowledge. From the table, it is also clear that 5 Tharu and one Untouchable household did not have toilets because of a lack of awareness of the importance of toilets.

Although lack of money has been cited as the reason for not having toilets, this statement can hardly be accepted as it is clear that lack of education as well as lack of consciousness among Banigama dwellers also has a key role in increasing awareness of such issues. The Terai dwellers (who do not have toilets) give much more priority for everyday subsistence and do not correlate toilets with basic needs.

Terai dwellers in particular must be made aware of factors influencing their health as there is a high probability of them being victimized by assorted communicable diseases as a result of their current disregard for hygiene.

**Table 1.22: Toilet Facilities in agrarian categories**

Land holdings	Yes		No		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Landless	3	7.50	37	92.50	40	100.00
Below 0.50 ha	9	24.32	28	75.68	37	100.00
0.50 to 1.0 ha	10	27.78	26	72.22	36	100.00
1.0 to 3.0 ha	17	35.42	31	64.58	48	100.00
3.0 to 5.0 ha	6	50.00	6	50.00	12	100.00
Above 5.0 ha	2	40.00	3	60.00	5	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>26.40</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>73.60</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 1.22 gives the distribution of households belonging to various land-holding categories by toilet accessibility/facility. Data reveal that an overwhelming majority of 92.50% of the landless households do not have toilets. This is not surprising as they barely have adequate space in their homestead even for their thatched hut. Likewise, of the 131 households that do not have toilets, 28 (75.68%) have below 0.50 ha. of agricultural land. What is surprising is that even those (60%) who possess over 5.0 ha of land do not have toilets. From such findings, it is safe to argue that the economic factor isn't the only reason for not having toilet, but is also due to lack of consciousness in the socio-cultural milieu. It seems that the continuing tradition controls the mind-set of the people and influences their health behaviour.

Table 1.23: Place used as alternative to toilets

Caste/ethnicity	Toilet		Bush/Farm land/river Open Space		Others *		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Brahmin/Chhetri	22	81.48	5	18.52	-	-	27	100.00
Tharu	15	13.16	92	80.70	7	6.14	114	100.00
Untouchable	3	23.08	10	76.92	-	-	13	100.00
Terai Dwellers	5	22.73	16	72.73	1	4.55	22	100.00
Others	1	50.00	1	50.00	-	-	2	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>25.84</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>69.66</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4.49</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

\*Bank of road, irrigation canal

Table 1.23 presents the commonly used defecating place of households without toilets. A total of 69.66% of households in Banigama use bush/farm land/river bank /open space to relieve themselves. Likewise, 4.49% admitted to using the banks of roads and irrigation canals. Without a doubt, Banigama inhabitants need to improve sanitation habits by simply constructing toilets and improving the sanitation of their surroundings.

### Cooking Stove

Cooking stoves also have a direct bearing on health and illness. The level of impact is determined by the type and quality of specific stoves.

Table 1.24: Type of Stove used

Caste/ethnicity	Traditional		Improved		Gas		Kero		Bio-gas		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Brahmin/Chhetri	17	62.96			2	7.41			8	29.63	27	100.00
Tharu	107	93.86	2	1.75			2	1.75	3	2.63	114	100.00
Untouchable	11	84.62	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	15.38	13	100.00
Terai Dwellers	21	95.45	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4.55	22	100.00
Others	1	50.00	-	-	-	-	1	50.0	-	-	2	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>88.20</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.12</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1.69</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7.87</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The data in Table 1.24 reveal that 88.20% of Banigama households depend on traditional cooking stoves which utilize firewood/cow dung. Such stoves produce excessive smoke, thereby becoming a health hazard and particularly causing respiratory problems and perhaps tuberculosis. However, one Tharu household has installed an improved smokeless stove and another uses kerosene stove. Two Brahmin/Chhetri households use LPG gas stoves for cooking while eight have biogas facilities. Eight Brahmin/Chhetri households (29.63%)

have installed bio-gas. This may be because of better economic status and ability to own the livestock necessary for biogas production or due to exposure to relevant organisations/agencies because of their education. However, the same table indicates that two Untouchable households (15.38%) also have installed bio-gas plants. Again, this could be because of affiliations with promoting organisation. Only one Terai dweller household has installed a biogas plant. Normally bio-gas is generated from cow dung alone. People of the study area could attach plants to toilets, thereby establishing better hygiene habits. Unfortunately, as in other parts of Nepal, cultural taboos labelling human excreta as dirt prohibit its use in bio-gas plants.

### Food Intake

The staple diet has a direct impact in health behaviour. The food we eat keeps us physically and mentally fit.

**Table 1.25: Distribution of Households by Meals a Day**

Caste/ ethnicity	Tea		Breakfast		Lunch		Tiffin		Dinner	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Brahmin/ Chhetri	25	92.59	26	96.30	27	100.00	15	55.56	27	100.00
Tharu	14	12.28	110	96.49	114	100.00	68	59.65	114	100.00
Untouchable	9	69.23	12	92.31	13	100.00	5	38.46	13	100.00
Terai Dwellers	4	18.18	21	95.45	22	100.00	7	31.82	22	100.00
Others	2	100.00	2	100.00	2	100.00	2	100.00	2	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>30.34</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>96.07</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>54.49</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 1.25 presents the food intake of households in Banigama VDC. Data reveals that morning tea and afternoon snacks are prepared in only 30.34% and 54.49% of households. However, the morning breakfast is cooked in almost all the households (96.07%). Almost all Brahmin/Chhetri households prepare tea in the morning for family members. Field visit supports that tea is by and large drunk by evening household members of all castes/ethnic groups in village market tea stalls. The morning breakfast is most common in (96.49%) Tharu households.

Nutritious food is one of the necessary elements of healthy life and plays a vital role for the physical, mental and intellectual growth of individuals. Generally speaking, the people of the study area appeared malnourished due to lack of a nutritious and balanced diet.

Malnutrition makes the physical and mental capacity weak. As a result, people become weak, lack energy, and are unable to work and suffer from many diseases. This affects people's quality of life.

**Table 1.26: Household Staple Diet**

Caste/ ethnicity	Spicy		Normal		Less spicy		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Brahmin/ Chhetri	4	14.81	19	70.37	4	14.81	27	100.00
Tharu	22	19.30	76	66.67	16	14.04	114	100.00
Untouchable	-	-	11	84.62	2	15.38	13	100.00
Terai Dwellers	-	-	16	72.73	3	13.64	22	100.00
Others			2	100.00	-	-	2	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>16.29</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>69.66</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>14.04</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 1.26 presents the quality of staple diet in Banigama. Normal food, i.e. food with minimal spices and grease is prepared in 69.66% of the households. 16.29% however eat overly spicy food which may be considered unhealthy. Across ethnic lines, largely the Tharu (19.30%) and the Brahmin/Chhetri (14.81%) households eat overly spicy food as compared to other ethnic groups. This could be because of dietary habits and also because they can afford spices.

As is the custom, women first serve male household members, then the children and are the last to eat. Because of this, women, in most instances do not get adequate food. This is one of the reasons they are more susceptible to poor health. Another obvious reason for poor health is that they have to bear and rear many children but do not get the required calories during pregnancy. Thirdly, women are silent sufferers in health matters because of culturally ingrained suppression of health and socio-cultural issues, especially gynaecological/reproductive health. The fundamental reasons for this phenomenon are seen to be women's low literacy rates, poor economic conditions- the ownership of property by male counterparts at the household level and the prevalence of patriarchal attitudes in both the households and society.

Field observation also brought into the light that the food eaten in Banigama was not timely and that woman fasted frequently. When people keep their stomach empty for lengthy periods, they suffer from acidity.

## Poverty and Incomes

In general, people automatically equate unemployment with poverty. However, in spite of their income and savings, many hard working people in Banigama can also be considered poor. Sociologists define poverty by distinguishing between absolute and relative poverty. Absolute poverty often has life threatening consequences. Relative poverty exists when people may be able to afford basic necessities but still are unable to maintain an average standard of living. But because of the eclectic nature of the sources of income in Banigama, it is difficult and confusing to categorise households that are below the national poverty line. Households in Banigama have various sources of income other than cash income by which they are surviving, for instance, agricultural and livestock produce for survival and, in a few instances, patron client relationships come in their support. Besides, Banigama being the adjoining VDC of the district HQs Biratnagar, some households have opportunities for intermittent off-farm employment.

Poverty and income are important variables with respect to health and illness, as is illustrated by the information below. The annual gross income of households from all their sources in Banigama VDC is presented in Table 1.27. Data reveals that more than half of the households (53.37%) in Banigama VDC have annual incomes between NRs.5000-10 000 whereas only 7.30% of the households have annual incomes exceeding 25 000 per annum. Among the caste/ethnic groups more Brahmin/Chhetri (11.11%) households compared to other ethnic groups are in the highest income group (with an income exceeding NRs 25 000 per annum). They are followed by the Tharus who have 7.89% of their households in this income group. While none of the Untouchable households belongs to this high-income group, one Terai dweller household did. The Tibeto-Burman household is in the lowest income group.

**Table 1.27: Annual Income of Households**

Caste/ ethnicity	5-10 Thousand		10-15 Thousand		15-20 Thousand		20-25 Thousand		> 25 Thousand		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Brahmin/ Chhetri	14	51.85	5	18.52	2	7.41	3	11.11	3	11.11	27	100.00
Tharu	64	56.14	14	12.28	18	15.79	9	7.89	9	7.89	114	100.00
Untouchable	5	38.46	4	30.77	2	15.38	2	15.38	-	-	13	100.00
Terai Dwellers	11	50.00	4	18.18	3	13.64	3	13.64	1	4.55	22	100.00
Others	1	50.00	1	50.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>53.37</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>15.73</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>14.04</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>9.55</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7.30</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 1.28: Number of Earning Members in Households**

Caste/ ethnicity	2 or less		3 & 4		5 & above		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Brahmin/Chhetri	22	81.48	5	18.52			27	100.00
Tharu	93	81.58	18	15.79	3	2.63	114	100.00
Untouchable	9	69.23	3	23.08	1	7.69	13	100.00
Terai Dwellers	19	86.36	3	13.64	-	-	22	100.00
Others	2	100.00	-	-	-	-	2	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>81.46</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>16.29</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2.25</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 1.28 gives an account of the number of earning members in each household by caste and ethnicity. It shows that an overwhelming number (81.46%) of households in Banigama have two or less earning members in the family. This means there are many mouths to feed with the earnings of just a few. Only 2.25% of households have more than 5 earning members, and by and large they are from the Tharu ethnic group. However, one Untouchable household also has more than 5 earning members. Field observation supports that even though households have few earning members they do not get work throughout the year but are engaged for only 3-4 months in the agriculture sector. The absence of off-farm employment opportunities leads some to work as wage labourers in the village and in the district headquarters as and when available.

**Table 1.29: Households Savings**

Caste/ethnicity	Yes		No		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Brahmin/Chhetri	6	22.22	21	77.78	27	100.00
Tharu	54	47.37	60	52.63	114	100.00
Untouchable	1	7.69	12	92.31	13	100.00
Terai Dwellers	7	31.82	15	68.18	22	100.00
Others	2	100.00	-	-	2	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>39.33</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>60.67</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The majority of Banigama dwellers are at the subsistence (60.67%) level. Data reveals that only 39.33% could make savings from their income. Saving capacity wise, the Tharus in Banigama (47.37%) are in a better position compared to other ethnic groups. This is because of the household members working by themselves not hiring labour in agricultural work. 1 Untouchable households and Tibeto-Burman were also able to make some savings (Table 1.29). Table 1.30 below illustrates that the saving capacity of the HH correlates with the size of land holding. Clearly, those with larger plots of land have better likelihoods of savings part of their incomes.

**Table 1.30: Households Savings and Land Holdings**

Land holdings	Yes		No		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Landless	7	17.50	33	82.50	40	100.00
Below 0.50 ha	14	37.84	23	62.16	37	100.00
0.50 to 1.0 ha	14	38.89	22	61.11	36	100.00
1.0 to 3.0 ha	24	50.00	24	50.00	48	100.00
3.0 to 5.0 ha	8	66.67	4	33.33	12	100.00
Above 5.0 ha	3	60.00	2	40.00	5	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>39.33</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>60.67</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Among the caste/ethnic groups the Brahmin/Chhetris are able to save more money. Since they are educated, they have better exposure and chances to utilize their skills. They not only depend on agriculture but also earn from other modes such as business and external employment. Uneducated people, in contrast, have low percent of saving. There is no doubt that earning and saving capacities depend largely on education, size of land holding and exposure levels.

**Table 1.31: Household Savings**

Caste/ ethnicity	5-10 Thousand		10-15 Thousand		15-20 Thousand		20-25 Thousand		> 25 Thousand		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Brahmin/ Chhetri	4	66.67	2	33.33	-	-	-	-	2	33.33	6	100.00
Tharu	27	50.00	9	16.67	7	16.66	8	14.81	3	5.56	54	100.00
Untouchable	1	100.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	100.00
Terai Dwellers	5	71.43	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	100.00
Others	1	50.00	1	50.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>54.29</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>17.14</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10.00</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11.43</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7.14</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The source of income of the household is indicative of the family's economic condition. The economic condition of the family will be strong if more productive members are employed. The sources of income of the family can be increased if passive housewives are involved in income generating activities. However, such trends and opportunities are largely absent in Banigama. Rural women are generally restricted to household chores and jobs that involve menial labour and are not encouraged to be the major breadwinners.

**Table 1.32: Household Savings according to Land ownership status**

Land holdings	5 to 10 thousand		10-15 thousand		15-20 thousand		20-25 thousand		> 25 thousand		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Landless	5	71.43	-	-	1	14.29	-	-	1	14.29	7	100.00
Below 0.50 ha	6	42.86	3	21.43	1	7.14	3	21.43	1	7.14	14	100.00
0.50 to 1.0 ha	9	64.29	3	21.43	1	7.14	1	7.14			14	100.00
1.0 to 3.0 ha	12	50.00	4	16.67	3	12.50	3	12.5	2	8.33	24	100.00
3.0 to 5.0 ha	4	50.00	1	12.50	1	12.50	1	12.50	1	12.50	8	100.00
Above 5.0 ha	2	66.67	1	33.33	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>54.29</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>17.14</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10.00</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11.43</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7.14</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 1.32 presents the degree of household savings according to land status of the household. The majority (54.29%) of those households which are able to save from their annual income are from the NRs 5000-10000 saving group. The landless could save only in between NRs 5000-10000 annually. The second majority (66.67%) are from those who hold more than 5.0 ha of agricultural land. With respect to the landless, they work in off-farm activities when they get the opportunity. The table also indicates that large savings and the number of people in households are negatively correlated. Among the households which save more than NRs 25000 annually 2, 1, 1, households hold 1-3 ha, 3-5 ha, 0.50 ha of land and one household is in the landless category. The one landless household that could save above than NRs 25 000 is a village businessman.

An approximate inference of households below the poverty line in Banigama is like this: the average size of household in Banigama is 5.63. The percentage of dependent population (up to 10 years; and above than 60 yrs) in the households is 27.12%. When this number 272 is deducted from the total population (1003-272) the number of economically active populace in the household is seen to be 731. Then, computing the national percentage of people below the poverty line, it can be estimated that 307 people are below the poverty line in Banigama. In this regard, it can be inferred that 42.05% of the Banigama population live below the poverty line.

### Causes of Poverty

The causes of poverty can be analyzed at various levels, from the approximate to the in-depth analysis. The determinants at these two levels overlap. At the deeper and long term level, the highly unequal structure of ownerships of land resources, low agricultural productivity, highly limited access to agricultural markets due to lack of infrastructure and information,

peripheralization in relation to the global, Indian and local urban economies and associated rapid de-industrialization and lack of skills at the household and community levels, high incidence of rural indebtedness at the exorbitant rates of interest and high level of unemployment are all the leading causes of large scale poverty.

The major proximate determinants of poverty are: the low literacy levels, relatively even lower among women, lack of adequate food and nutrition and ill health, lack of off-farm employment opportunities, oppressive and exploitative- patrilineal and patrilocal regimes, discriminatory wages for women, caste discrimination, and so on.

Field observations indicate that small land holdings, unemployment, illiteracy, large family size, lengthy illness, alcoholism, lack of awareness, lack of skills, physical disability, lack of inheritable of property, ethnic and social discriminations are the major factors that cause poverty. The deprivation of the poor in the study area is the result of their poor access to all resources, especially land, on the one hand, and low productivity on the other. Low productivity of poor people's land arises partly from the fact that they own relatively low quality land mostly '*Bari*' (rain fed) land, but partly also from the inadequate use of productive inputs. The problem of inadequate inputs in turn owes itself to the failure to address two fundamental problems, those of infrastructure and institutions. The field observations suggest that the 'Dalits' (Untouchables) and 'ethnic minority' are more illiterate than other groups. The word 'Dalit' is a political term coined for occupational castes by the politicians recently. Other indicators are that they tend to have significantly lower access to health, education and safe drinking water. In the study area social exclusion is primarily based on the basis of caste/ethnicity and gender. Likewise exclusion-led discrimination against women occurs on numerous fronts, including ownership of assets, health and educational opportunities, mobility, and physical survival. Because of socio-cultural restrictions, women have lower status than their male counterparts.

In a stratified society, caste-based social exclusion manifests itself as disparities in both the incidence of poverty and in human development indicators. Disparities in human development indicators between lower- and upper-caste groups are widespread.

The 'Dalit' population in Nepal constitutes 12% (CBS, 2001) of the total population. They are considered lower caste and discriminated against because they are branded as Untouchables. 'Dalit' women, because of their low status within their own community, are at an even greater disadvantage.

## Summary

There is a big disparity in Banigama in terms of socio-economic status; it can be assumed therefore that people of different strata are at variance in terms of perceptions and behaviour towards health and illness. The following section summarises the socio-economic profile of the study area and its likely influence on health and illness.

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood for Banigama inhabitants. A large part of the agricultural land is occupied by the higher caste Brahmin/Chhetris, followed by the Tharus who are primarily the owner cultivators irrespective of the size of the unevenly distributed land holdings, although there are also crop sharing households. A large number of Terai dwellers and Untouchable households are landless. The majority of Banigama inhabitants have a hand to mouth existence. Needless to say, households with enough land have sufficient food. Brahmin/Chhetri and Tharus are better placed income wise, and therefore have better chances of making relatively large savings. Terai dwellers come in the third position in terms of their income and saving after Tharus. The "Others" Tibeto-Burman group were also able to make savings. Unfortunately, only one untouchable household has been found to be able to save from their annual income. Their income as such is low compared to other castes/ethnic groups. Almost all houses except for a few Tharu ones in Banigama are Kaccha. Kaccha houses pose health problems as they lack proper ventilation and the smoke from kitchen fires muffle the whole house.

Literacy rates were also found to be disparate in Banigama. While none of the Brahmin/Chhetris were found to be illiterate, a few Tharu and Terai dwellers were. Academic attainment was also higher among Brahmin/Chhetri followed by Tharu and Terai dwellers. In terms of literacy, Tibeto-Burmans were also found to be equally literate and having school level of education.

Affiliation with external organisations was also gauged as it has the potential to broaden individual perception of many matters including health. Tharus appear to be more closely affiliated to organisations than the Brahmin/Chhetris. Terai dwellers occupied the third position. None of the Tibeto-Burman households had any affiliation to any kind of organisation. One Untouchable household was also affiliated to an organisation.

The possession of household amenities such as electronic media (televisions and radios) and means of transportation (bicycles and motorbikes) can also serve as indicators of the overall exposure and mobility of households. Ownership of such amenities and awareness

of health issues are positively correlated. In this matter, the Brahmin /Chhetri, Tharu and Terai dwellers occupying first, second and third ranks respectively.

Almost all the households had access to tube well for drinking water. Field observation and informal interviews bring to light that on average 20 ft deep tube wells do not have adequate depth for safe drinking water. As a result, the water quality in Banigama cannot be assured by appearance alone. Toilet facilities are still a new concept in Banigama. Only negligible number of households has adequately constructed lavatories, the majority (80%) of which belong to Brahmin/Chhetri households. All other caste ethnic groups lack household toilet facilities, which may be creating health problems for household members.

While analysing the socio-economic status of people studied in Banigama in terms of class structure, Brahmin / Chhetris and Tharus can be grouped together as upper classes in the local context, although they might not fit the term rich. Terai dwellers and Tibeto-Burmans can be grouped as middle class, and the Untouchables rank as the lower class.

Social conditions play a vital role in any society in influencing health and illness of the people. The social conditions outlined in this chapter would in most probability influence health and illness patterns in Banigama. The communities with all their tradition, economic conditions and perceptions live in a health culture which finds its reflections in the health practices in everyday life. There is also a divide in terms of the economic status of local people. Those who are wealthy and educated are assumed to have the means and knowledge to be healthy. It is likely that the high income group can afford better health services. Educated people manage to buy health services even with limited incomes. They may seek the services of the government health infrastructure without any hesitation. Education is an important factor which influences health behaviour and provides ample exposure to the people on many matters. It can be assumed that educated people are often conscious about health and are more likely to seek modern health services without much delay. Education increases employment opportunities and also helps people discard cultural prejudices and superstitious.

It is true that all people are affected by cultural prejudices to some extent. However, those who are educated and in a better economic condition may have a more rational perception of health and illness and are not compelled to rely only on home remedies, faith healers and quacks. They may seek the services of health centres at the onset of their illness. Brahmin / Chhetris followed by Tharus are in a better position with regard to health awareness compared to Terai dwellers, Tibeto-Burman and Untouchables.