



STATUS OF WOMEN
AMONG
THE LEPCHAS

D. C. Roy

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Preface

Participation of women is sine qua non of any development. Without adequate concern of women the developmental efforts, so far taken by the government, will be derailed. Integrating women in the main developmental process is of vital importance for the overall development of the country. It has been realized and accepted, both theoretically and legally, that equal standing of women with their male counterpart is the only key of success of human development.

Women play a very important and significant role in the tribal society. The actual status of women in the society depends upon the type of the society. In a matriarchal society, the status of women is comparatively higher than that of in a patriarchal society. Again, women under all matriarchal society do not enjoy same social status. Even they enjoy higher social status; they may not enjoy similar type of political or economic status.

The position of women in any tribal society can be viewed mainly from three angles—social, political and economic. All the three aspects are so closely and mutually correlated that only an integrated approach can reveal the actual position of women in their respective societies.

The social status can be identified from the role of women in the family and in the society, rights and duties to other members of the family and society, customs in selecting mates

etc. Political status in the traditional tribal society depends upon the possibility of performing the role of a chief who happened to possess both physical strength and the power of army. The chief remained the head of the judiciary system which is guided by tribal rules and customs. All fellow tribes are to be royal to and carry out the decision of the chief. But in the present day, political involvement of women is represented by their participation and engagement in different types of peoples' representatives like Panchayat, MLA, MP etc. The economic status of the women connects them with their participation and involvement in productive and distributive activities. Primitive tribes subsist on hunting and food gathering is a story of the past. In modern days most tribal economy is agriculture based. Tribal agriculture may better be identified as tribal peasantry. The economic status of women now depends upon their involvement and active participation in different types of agricultural activities including their role in decision making process.

As per West Bengal Human Development Report 2004, Darjeeling ranks 4th position among the 17 districts of the state. This encouraging HDI is also matched with increasing sex ratio in favour of women per thousand men. As against 914 in 1991 it increased to 943 in 2001. In 2001, the proportion of female per thousand male in the district remains higher than that of in West Bengal (934) and all India (933). The HDI comprises of three indices — health index, income index and education index. The corresponding ranks for the district in health, income and education indices are 4th, 2nd and 5th respectively. The overall status of women in the district is appreciable. In GDI estimation, the position of Darjeeling is 2nd in the state of West Bengal. As per the individual indices of GDI, the district ranks 1st, 5th and 6th in respect of income index, health index and education index respectively. So women are placed highly in the district of Darjeeling. The high ranking of the district in the state has no doubt been

contributed by the women through their participation and contribution in all the three indices. Economy of Darjeeling is basically based on agriculture and plantation. The area east of Teesta is agriculture based while western bank of Teesta is based on tea and cinchona plantation. In 1991 the proportion of agricultural worker to total worker is 36.50 while it is about 21.01 percent for plantation worker. But both agriculture and plantation are labor intensive and absorb huge number of female labour. The participation of female in agriculture is as high as 69.69 per cent while it is 51.21 per cent for plantation and other allied activities.

The percentage of ST population to the total population of the country has slightly been increased from 8.08 to 8.20 over the decade 1991 and 2001. But their respective percentage for the state of West Bengal has decreased from 5.59 to 5.50 over the same period. This is more so for the district of Darjeeling where the percentage figures has decreased from 13.78 to 12.69 over the last decade. In this category Darjeeling ranks fourth (12.69 per cent) after Dakshin Dinajpur (16.12 per cent), Purulia (18.27 per cent) and Jalpaiguri (18.89 per cent). But in respect to the absolute number of ST population (204167 person in 2001), the position of Darjeeling is 8th among all the districts of the state. The percentage of ST to the total population of Darjeeling has decreased from 14.75 to 13.78 and further to 12.69 for the census periods 1981, 1991 and 2001. This constant decrease in percentage figure of ST to the total population of the district is a matter of great concern.

Economically 39.41 per cent ST population of Darjeeling is engaged in the category of main worker in 1991. Among the main workers, 31.52 percent are cultivators, 19.41 percent agricultural labour and 20.73 per cent are engaged in livestock, forestry and plantation activities. The percentage of ST engaged in other categories of industrial workers is very negligible.

Among the main workers 62.34 per cent are male and 37.66 per cent are female. The ratio of male to female among the cultivators is 67.96:32.04. The proportion of female as agricultural labor is 38.45. But female plays an important role in the category of livestock, forestry, fishing and plantation where their percentage to total persons engaged in this category is 48.73. It is to note that 55.88 per cent of ST female remained in non-worker category. Thus it can be inferred that the ST society in Darjeeling is economically dominated by the males.

Lepchas are the aboriginals of the hilly region of the district of Darjeeling and the state of Sikkim. In 2001 the total Lepcha population in West Bengal is 32377 while their number is 31210 in the district of Darjeeling where they comprise 96.40 per cent of their total population of the state. They constitute 15.29 per cent of the total ST population and 1.94 per cent of total population of the district in 2001. In Darjeeling their main concentration is in the sub-division of Kalimpong.

Lepchas are not new to the academicians and the researchers and a few research works have been carried out on them. But most of the works are either travelogues or based on socio-ethnographic in character. No work has so far been carried out on the status of women in the Lepcha society. Lepchas are matrilineal and women are placed highly in the society in respect of bride price, inheriting mother's *moo*, right to worship etc. But the variables and factors which act and react in different stages of social development have never been attracted by the scholars and researchers. Absolutely no work has ever been tried regarding the political and economic status of women in the Lepcha society.

Women are the better half of any society and no development of the society can be achieved without developing the women. Most of the tribal society are either matriarchal or matrilineal and at present are facing some sort of crisis.

The position of women is in transition. The traditional women dominated society finds a jolt when it reacts with the male dominated outside world. Land ownership is in the names of male members although India has accepted legal equality of property between man and woman through equal right of inheritance. Properties are distributed among sons and not equally to the daughters. In the light of these apparent contradictions, the present study aims to examine the pattern of harmony or tension, if any, in the Lepcha tribal society.

Two Constitutional Amendments have been done for giving more political power to the women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments reserve 1/3rd seat for the women in Panchayet and Municipality elections respectively. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) ensures equal right of women in social, political and economic life of the nation. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has undertaken a number of schemes for the development of the tribes in respect of their income generation and infrastructure development, educational development and literacy, employment-oriented scheme, ensuring fair price and food security, support of entrepreneurship etc. But except construction of hostel for the girls (since 1962-63), educational complex in low literacy pockets (since 1993-94) etc. no special drives have been taken for the development of tribal women. It is reported that absolutely no projects have ever been carried out by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs for the development of the Lepcha women of the region.

Economic development, political empowerment and social status are inseparable to each other. To integrate women in general and the tribal women in particular in the mainstream of national development, overall development of the women in the fields of economic, political and social sectors is not only necessary but indispensable. A multi-faceted approach integrating different departments can examine the actual status of women in the society.

Acknowledgements

This is the second attempt in a row of my systematic research work on the Lepchas but it is unique in the sense that no work on the status of women among the Lepchas has been carried out so far. The last two decades are important from the angle of women studies in India and a good number of literatures are now available on different aspects of Indian women. Tribal study in India has a long history and it actually started during the British rule by the Europeans. But no systematic study about the status of women in the Indian tribal society in general and among the Lepchas in particular has ever been attempted. The present work could not have been undertaken and got the present shape without all sorts of assistance and sponsorship by the University Grants Commission. The recognition and acceptance of proposal to carry out a study on women among the Lepchas by the Commission is the main factor which encouraged and initiates the present work.

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For the last two and a half decades I have been posted at Kalimpong, the stronghold of the Lepchas and came in close touch with the Lepchas. I, as invitee and non-invitee, attended and observed different functions, festivals and celebrations organized by the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association, Keyong Sezong, village level units and individuals. I am thankful to all the portfolio holders of the ILTA but I like to especially mention Ren L.S.Tamsang, President ILTA; Ren P.T. Lepcha, Secretary, ILTA; Ren N.T. Lepcha, Joint Secretary, ILTA and Lapon S.T. Lepcha, Cultural secretary, ILTA; Ren Dorjee T Lepcha, President, Lepcha Youth Organization. Special thanks are due to Ren. L.S.Tamsang and Ren P.T.Simik for the troubles they took in correcting the spelling of the Lepcha words particularly the Moo names.

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Dr D. C. Roy

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Introduction

“One of the difficult fields of ‘food battle’ is that of intra-family divisions. While economic models are often constructed on the assumption that the distribution of commodities among different members of the family is done on the basis of equalizing wellbeing or need-fulfillment, there is considerable evidence intra-family divisions often involve very unequal treatments.” (Dreze, J & A. K. Sen ,1989: pp. 50 - 51). Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen entered in the kitchen to see the prevalence of inequality in division of food among the male and female members in most developing countries.

Family is the unit which receives maximum service from the women who in their capacity of a daughter, wife, and mother contribute their best for the family. In under-developed countries, women satisfy themselves by extending their service for the family and serving the family members. They remained confined themselves within the four walls of the family and spend most of their time in carrying out the household activities. Kitchen is the temple, place of worship for other members of the family, where they spend most part of their life in preparing food for the family members but they themselves suffer from malnutrition, anaemic, low life expectancy etc. The irony of the fact that they prepare the

food without even knowing its taste: they supply nutritional food for other members keeping themselves in the stage of severe malnutrition stage: they give birth the future generation but themselves remain uneducated, ill health and ignorant. They enjoy by sacrificing and not by receiving or consuming.

Society may be considered as an extended family. By society here we mean the unilateral type of social formation comprising of only one community. In a mono community society, the social status of women is the reflection of their status in the family. The community status may be compiled together to get the national status of women. In the chain relation between family and the country, there exists a number of steps each of which has been influenced and affected by a number of factors.

In order to evaluate the status of women in any society particularly in the tribal society, one has to consider their status from different angles – social, economic and political. All the three aspects are so closely and mutually correlated that only an integrated approach can reveal the actual position of women in the society. This is more important in case of tribal society where the activities of any individual are so integrated and interrelated that no compartmentalization and separation is possible. The concept of division of labour is a modern phenomenon and is applicable in case of capitalized social structure. It has very negligible relevance to a tribal society. A comprehensive approach covering different aspects and areas of engagement is suitable for the study of status of women in the society.

As family is the basic unit of any society, the social status of women can only be known from the role of women in the family and the rights and duties women enjoy and perform at different stages of day to day family life. The rights and duties of women during the pre and post marital stage are

sharply different. Her position and relation with other members of the family as daughter, sister, wife and mother reveals the status of women in the family. The role and involvement in the main social organizations like marriage, religion, education etc determine the comparative weight of women vis-à-vis men in the family. The social functions, culture, customs, taboos etc are some of the markers of social status of women.

Economic status may be considered as one of the important aspect to determine the overall status of women in the society. A higher economic status automatically places the women in higher social position. Economic status connects them with their participation and involvement in productive and distributive activities. Primitive tribe, subsist on food gathering and hunting, is the story of the past. In modern days most tribal society are based on agriculture which may better be identified as tribal peasantry. The economic status of women in the society can better be judged from their involvement and participation in different types of agricultural operations including their role in decision-making processes.

Political status in the traditional tribal society depends upon the possibility of performing the role of a chief who happened to possess both physical strength and the power of army. The chief remained the head of the judiciary system which is guided by tribal rules and customs. All fellow tribes are to be royal to and carry out the decision of the chief. Now, political involvement of women is judged by their participation and engagement in different types of peoples' representatives like Panchayat, MLA, MP etc. Participation and engagement in different political organizations with decision making power has been discussed in terms of political empowerment. But the nature and system of public institutions in any tribal society are different from those of the civil society. For tribal society political status rather than political empowerment may be more useful.

Status: A Theoretical Orientation

There is no unanimity among the social scientists and researchers about the definition of the term 'status'. By crossing the boundary of sociology and anthropology the term has got an inter-disciplinary relevance in its present use for the gender study. Different authors like Henry Maine, Robert E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess, Ralph Linton, Robert K. Merton, Whyte, Max Weber and others have defined the term differently.

The term status is used in relative term and may be used to mean how much importance a society confers as women's versus men. It may also be used to mean how much power and authority women have relative to men in the society. It may again be used to examine how much power and right women or men enjoy in the society. To examine economic status one should know how many right men or women possess on property, asset, income earning activity etc. The political status can be viewed from the angle of right to vote, elect or take part in political activities and policy making body. In fact, the term status is an issue based term and need to be compared and interpreted as per the issue or base of the concept used.

In his illuminating cross cultural study, M. Whyte (1978) could not arrive at any definite conclusion about the status of women. He rated 52 different items used in defining the relative status of the sexes. He found very few items are related and concluded that the term can not be used as a single concept. He preferred to talk about relative status of women in different sphere of life.

However, the sociologists and the social anthropologists use the term in different senses.

Status was initially used to mean 'ascribed' status while later the concept started using in wider sense of 'achieved'

status. Ralph Linton distinguished between ascribed and achieved status. Ascribed status refers to the inherited one while those status resulting from personal attainment of goal set forth by the culture, is treated as achieved one.

In all societies certain items/things are selected as reference points for the ascription of status such as age, sex, occupation, family relationship etc.

Ralph Linton (1936) opines that the term status is used with a double significance. "A status, in the abstract, is a position in a particular pattern. It is thus quite correct to speak of each individual as having many statuses, since each individual participates in the expression of a number of patterns. However, unless the term is qualified, the status of any individual means the sum total of all the statuses which he occupies. It represents his position with relation to the total society." (1936: p. 113).

By status Floian Znaniecki identified social status which depends on the role of an individual in the society. He said "A person who is needed by a social circle and whose self possesses the qualities required for the role for which he is needed has a definite social status". (1940: p. 14). A person occupying a certain status is granted certain rights by his social circle. The rights granted to an individual in a particular social circle, are indicative of his specific social status.

E.C. Huglus (1944) mentioned about the dilemmas, contradictions and confusions in regards to personal attributes and status. There are some individual positions which remain fixed for long. But social change, technical change, appearance of new individual creates new change in the status of an individual. This makes contradictions, confusions and dilemmas of status of an individual in the society.

R.H. Lowie (1948) mentioned four aspects of examining status of tribal women. They are: i) actual treatment attained,

ii) legal status, iii) opportunities for social participation, and iv) character.

The two concepts status and role are inseparable but they are two separate concepts. Status is a collection of rights and duties and can be expressed through a medium of an individual. Role represents the dynamic aspects of status. The individual occupy the status socially assigned to him. He does so with relation to other statuses. Further the individual is said to perform the role when the rights and duties associated with status are put into effect. In practice there are no roles without statuses or statuses without roles.

According to Robert K. Merton social statuses and social roles comprise major building blocks of a social structure. He wrote "each social status involves not a single associated role, but an array of roles. This basic feature of social structure can be registered by the distinctive but not formidable term, role-set. By role-set I mean that complement of role relationships in which persons are involved by virtue of accompanying a particular social status." (1976: p. 294). It is thus clear that the concept status can neither be used in any specific meaning nor can be used uniformly for all societies. It is society or community specific. The status of women in any society depends on the rights and duties as conferred to the women by the respective socio-cultural pattern and organization.

Status of Women in Indian Society

Women were placed at a very high position in the Indian Hindu mythology. The three important Hindu Goddesses – *Parvati*, Goddess of power; *Lakshmi*, Goddess of wealth; *Saraswati*, Goddess of learning – are all female. Manu, the great Hindu sage, author of *Manusmriti* wrote: "Where a woman is honoured, God feels delighted."

Indian mythology sets the women on a pedestal but the history speaks about their oppression, inequality, unjust and

other derogatory practices against women. Raja Rammohun Roy (1772 – 1833), father of modern India and champion of women's rights and a feminist had to fight hard in stopping Satidaha and introducing remarriage of widows. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar was the champion in female education and legalized widow remarriage. Keshab Chandra Sen, a leader of Brahma Samaj, gave a modern touch among women through schools, prayer meetings etc. Swami Vivekananda tried to inculcate power among the women. Swami Dayananda Saraswati, founder of Arya Samaj encouraged women education and condemned those customs which degraded women. Lokmanya Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi took up the cause of women in the promotion of female education, remarriage of widows etc. There are many male social reformers and activists who fought for women's right and justice in the male-dominated Indian society.

After Independence, India showed a remarkable change in respect of women's status in our society. UN General Assembly passed a number of resolutions advocating equal rights and dignity of women. The Indian Constitution was framed and amended with an objective of ensuring equal status of women in the country. Some changes in the women's status can be marked in the fields of economic, social and political arenas after Independence. But sixty years of independence is found to be insufficient in improving the position of women as per their expectation and balancing them at par with the men members of the society. In spite of Constitutional guarantee, the Indian women are the victims of inequality in economic, social and political fields. Enactment of laws by the Parliament and Legislature are and amendment of the Constitution shows the presence of inequality in the country even in the twenty first century.

Status of Women in Tribal Society

Women are indispensable part of every social setup — be

it primitive or tribal or modern. Women's status and role in any tribal society is different than among the non-tribals. During food gathering and hunting stage, a group or band of people used to move together from one place to another in search of food. Women not merely accompanied the group but took active part in hunting and collecting fruits, roots, and animals in the forest. With the change in social structure, the status and role of women has changed but even then their status in the tribal society remains significant and different than that of other civil society. It may be noted that the type of matriarchal and matrilineal society can be found only among the tribals.

Modern civil societies are largely patriarchal where economic and social resources are mainly controlled and possessed by the males. Sociologically matriarchal civil society is almost nil. But tribals are generally either matriarchal or matrilineal. Women in such cases usually play a vital role in economic, social and political organizations. Beside owning and inheriting movable and immovable properties, women's involvement in primary occupation is no less important than the males.

Higher economic status placed the women at a higher social status in the tribal milieu. Bride price, staying of groom in the bride's house is some of the customs which place the women in a socially advantageous position. In many religious beliefs women are regarded next to God and are worshipped.

Their economic and social status keeps the tribal women politically better than others. A tribal woman not only take part in family decision-making but has been found to take key role in social and communal activities. History witnesses a number of tribal movements where the role of women has been well recognized.

The wave of modernization and the intended change in all-round social and economic sphere has changed the role of

women among the tribes. The slogan of the day, 'to bring the tribes in national main stream' is more materialistic and in the changed complex system, women started losing their earlier position to their male counterpart.

Writings pertaining to historical, economic, social and political perspective of tribal women are very scanty. A composite write-up covering socioeconomic and political aspects of any tribe has never been attempted. To work among the tribes is more challenging and difficult which might have diverted the social scientists to avoid tribal women study.

Malinowski assessed the status of women in tribal society "after taking into consideration the mutual duties between the sexes and the safeguards provided for the protection of each sex against the high handedness of the other. (Malinowski.1920: p. 20). Here status is used as synonym for role. "Madan and Majumdar (1956) have explained that status of women in all types of societies, particularly in patriarchal, is determined by various types of taboos that are attended to women generally. In another occasion Madan and Majumdar argued that it would be a scientific error to approach the women of a society with a rigid bias to the view that they have either a low or a high status. And those dichotomies are generally misleading. There can be so many intermediate statuses and there can be polarity, though it may not be very striking. The tribes, differing in life and culture patterns, accord status to the women as per their respective purview. Use of a single concept may not make the position clear" (K. Mann:1987: pp. 16-17).

The status of women is community specific and depends on the specific socio-economic and political environment of the community. Women's status can only be known and discussed within the environment in which they grow, interact, work, serve and live as a daughter, wife, mother, grandmother and so on. All societies are influenced and

affected by the external factors. The culture, custom, habit, style of livelihood of the dominating neighbouring community slowly but steadily enter in other community and thereby give a mixed shape of the two. The influence of the modern electronic and other media like TV, cinema, magazine, newspaper etc. can no way be ignored in influencing and shaping the position of an individual in the society.

Before the advent of the British in the region, Lepchas were totally unknown to the out side world. They lived in the forest which provided them with food and shelter. They also practiced shifting cultivation during Tibetan rule. In course of time they had to settle down to terraced based settled cultivation due to forest reservation policy of the British. They were absorbed in different works for extending both physical and mental services. At present the Lepchas are mostly agriculturists producing food crops for subsistence and some cash crops to meet other requirements. Women were a part and parcel of Lepcha economy. During the food gathering and hunting stage the whole group including the women not only moved together but also took part in day to day activities along with men. Even at the present settled cultivation, the role and involvement of the women in different agricultural operation is very important and indispensable.

Lepcha religion got influenced by the British and the Tibetans. Lepchas were originally nature worshippers but were first converted into Buddhism by the Tibetans and later into Christianity by the British. Mun, the Lepcha female priest lost her prestigious position and role in the changed socio-cultural situation. All natural items were the objects of worship but the changed religious situation took them away from their deep association and feelings with the nature. The changed religion, custom, taboos etc are some of the factors which are responsible for changing the position and status of women in the Lepcha society.

Objectives

The threefold objectives of the present study are:

- (a) to identify the social status of women in the Lepcha society. The basic purpose of the study here is to identify the areas and factors that make the prestigious position of the girl child in the society. A comparison between the traditional and present ethnic values, customs, and rules will help us to know the dynamism of social status of the women in Lepcha society.
- (b) to identify the political status of the women in the society. Participation of women in decision-making bodies during the traditional system and modern democratic setup identifies the political status of women in the Lepcha society. The traditional customs, judiciary system along with participatory role as voter and contesting candidate in different tiers of election will identify the dynamism of political status of women in the Lepcha society.
- (c) to know the economic status of women in Lepcha society. Involvement and role of women in productive and distributive activities during the traditional and modern society symbolize the type of economic dynamism among the Lepchas.

Hypotheses

The proposed project has been planned to carry out with two sets of hypotheses – working hypothesis and scientific hypothesis. The working hypotheses or preliminary hypotheses are made when sufficient information is not available to establish any hypothesis and it is a step towards formulating the final research hypothesis. Our working hypothesis is that the Lepcha society has undergone some sociopolitical and economic change over the decades. With this

working hypothesis, we seek to test three scientific hypotheses from the surveyed data.

Firstly, we hypothesized that in the social front Lepcha women have lost some of their days old prestigious position in the society to their male counterpart.

Secondly, we hypothesized that in the political front Lepcha women have gained their position in decision making bodies through their active participation in all types of democratic government formation.

Thirdly, we hypothesized that in economic front Lepcha women continued to play their key role in both production and distribution of agricultural produce.

Incidentally in the course of our study we will automatically test some hypotheses like the maintenance of matriarchal society, the role of priestess, role and number of women political leader, existence of bride price/ dowry, inequality of wage distribution, nature and type of work for the females, taboo in women's participation in work etc.

Methodology

Both primary and secondary data have been used for examining the dynamics of the status of women in the Lepcha society.

Secondary data have been collected from government, non-government sources and from the existing literature on the Lepchas. Various government publications, reports, census documents are the main source of data. The existing literature, although very meagre in number, written by the foreign and domestic writers, academicians, travelers, and administrators are used and referred as and when necessary. Some local government officials like Sub Divisional Officer, Block Development Officer, and SC, ST Development Officer have been consulted. The dignitaries and other members of

the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association are found to be of great help in carrying out the study. But the basic primary data have been collected personally through field survey. We take the help of investigators and interpreters from among the Lepchas who acted as bridge between the common Lepchas and the researcher. These investigators were engaged not only in collecting quantitative and qualitative data but they helped in conducting different tour programs.

In Darjeeling district of West Bengal, Lepchas mainly live in Kalimpong sub-division. A list of Lepcha dominated villages was prepared with the help of block level data. Only those villages which are absolutely dominated by the Lepchas are selected. Before finally selecting villages, a primary survey was conducted to gather some first hand information about the village. The officials of the Association were consulted and a sort of permission was obtained to avoid any later confusion and contradiction. Most of the Lepcha dominated villages are located at far-flung hilly areas without any proper communication facilities. So it is decided that four such villages would be sufficient for collecting data for the present study. Proximity to the town, religion, education, type of crops produced etc. have been used as the basic criterion for selection of the villages. In the hilly region villages are sparsely populated so complete enumeration rather than sample survey has been considered as the better method of collecting data. During our conduct of household survey we have used the observation technique for recording some of the events, practices, material conditions etc. We knew that participant observation method is the best for this type of study but for obvious reason we preferred and used close observation method.

Both qualitative and quantitative data have been collected for the study. A questionnaire has been prepared and used for quantitative data while qualitative data have been gathered through close observation and involvement. The

investigators, employed from within the Lepchas of the concerned villages helped in collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. We, as invitee or non invitee, participated in all types of social religious, ethnic, political, economic functions as and when possible and practicable.

Tools Used

Primary data have been collected from two different sources: village level and institutional level.

Village level primary data have again been collected from two different sources: a) from selected Lepcha dignitaries, elderly persons of the concerned village, members of the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association etc. and b) household data from the selected villages. Some cross check of the data/information has been made from different households of the respective village. Revisit of the village has been carried out to solve the confusions and to make scrutiny of the inconsistency in data.

Institutional data have been collected from among the Lepcha girl students studying in the two colleges of Kalimpong. A schedule has been used for the purpose of gathering quantitative data. Students were taken into confidence and a close relation was established with them for the purpose of examining and assessing their mentality about the status of women in their society.

Women participation in political affairs particularly in contesting, winning and taking part casting votes in Panchayet, legislative and parliamentary elections or any other local governmental organization have been planned to collect from Sub Divisional and Block Development Offices.

Photographic information regarding women participation in social, political and economic activities has been collected as and when available. Different cultural, social, ethnic, religious, economic and political functions and programs are

attended and documentations have been done and moments are clicked and recorded through photographs.

Beside the adult women labor, proper care has been taken for collecting data on child labor. Some information are considered to be very relevant e.g. women education, women literacy rate, women health care, women mortality rate, women participation in political activities, women participation in decision making, women participation in the types of social activities etc.

Qualitative data have been collected through participation and observation. All ethnic, social, political and economic activities, both as invitee or non invitee, were attended and observed closely.

Period of Study

One full calendar year, from March 2006 to April 2007, has been spent in collecting primary data from the villages. All major sociocultural and religious events within the study period have been covered. Two main social events – one marriage and one funeral ceremony have been attended as close observer. Some cultural events like Birth anniversary of King Gaeboo Aackuk, Muk-Zik-Ding Rum Faat, Naam Boon, etc. have been observed very minutely. Revolt of the Lepchas against construction of Hydro electricity power project at Dzongu and the connected relay hunger strike at Kalimpong has been noticed from very close. The year does take into consideration a complete agricultural calendar year and the agricultural operations for the entire major crop within the year have been examined. A complete crop circle has been investigated and the pattern of women participation has been marked for the present study.