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PROBLEMS OF WOMEN EDUCATION IN SIKKIM: SOME CASE STUDIES

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ABSTRACT :

Education of women is essential to improve the status of women. Women's social, economic and legal rights can be improved through education. Women should be more educated to overcome their ignorance and to participate in economic, political and social affairs. Despite constitutional guarantee women are not getting equal access in this regard. Sikkimese women are also facing some educational problems. This paper is a modest attempt to find out the different educational problems Sikkimese women are facing. A comparative study has been made between rural and urban areas. Seven cases each from four different study areas have been selected and various problems have been identified which are stated under different categories.

KEYWORDS : Education of women , status of women , economic, psychological .

INTRODUCTION

Education of women is essential to improve the status of women who constitute nearly half of the country's population. In our male dominated society education of women faces a number of barriers viz. social, cultural, economic, psychological etc. Therefore to improve the status of women within the family and society, expansion of girls education is necessary. Educationally Sikkimese women are still more backward than the men. 76.73 per cent of male literacy against 61.46 per cent female literacy has been noticed in the year 2001. But the positive feature has been noticed that the rate at which female literacy percentage is improving is higher than the rate of growth of male literacy. Again there is tremendous gap between rural-urban women literacy in Sikkim. Women literacy rate in urban areas is very high (80.19%) compared to the women literacy (59.05%) in rural areas [Census 2001]. Since the merger of Sikkim into India in 1975, the pace of development in the state has been considerably fast. Education is perhaps Sikkim's biggest success. In this context, it is important to study the status and problems of women education in Sikkim.

STATUS OF SIKKIMESE WOMEN

Women constitute nearly 47 per cent of the total population of Sikkim. Compared to other parts of the country, the social position of women in Sikkim is better. Fortunately till now the instances of female infanticide or dowry related deaths have not been reported. Women's participation in decision-making process is more than most of the other states in India. Even their number in government services is greater than that of Sikkimese men (Lama: 2001).

The position of women in Sikkimese society including their sociocultural, economic, authoritative, decision-making power etc. varies from one community to another. Patriarchal family system is present in Lepcha community. Father is the head of the family. Property is transmitted from father to son. If the couple has no son they can adopt a male child called as 'Kup-chops or kup-Lam.' 'Kamok-Myok' is that type of son-in-law who are brought into the father-in-law's house and he becomes the heir of his

father –in-laws property. Bhutia women also do not hold legal rights in family property. However, there are various unwritten norms to safeguard the women’s rights. Bhutia women enjoy equal status in the family (Foning: 1987). Despite the patriarchal family system, Bhutia-Lepcha women occupy higher position in their family. There is no feeling of sex superiority or inferiority among Bhutia and Lepcha people. The girl child is not a burden to the family (Bhattacharya: 2001).

Among the Nepalese too, patriarchal family system prevails. Women of ‘matwali’ group enjoy more freedom than the orthodox upper caste families. Father’s property is divided among all sons. Unmarried daughters also receive some shares of parental property. Among the Brahmins widower remarriage and junior sororate take place, but widow remarriage is not practiced. Among the Chettris and Newaris widow remarriage is permissible. A widow is regarded inauspicious. However, now women of all communities are found in various types of activities. They are no more confined to only household activities, but take part in decision making process and participate in economic activity too (Bareh:2001).

The Situation of Women’s Education in Sikkim:

Over the years with regard to educational scenario, the state has achieved enormous expansion. The literacy rate has increased from 17.74 per cent (1971) to 69.68 per cent by the year 2001 which is quite impressive. Achievement has been noticed in female literacy rate also. Number of female literates were 31959 in 1981 followed by 71714 in 1991 and 2001 there were 131502 female literates in the state which is very satisfactory. The following table shows the comparative figures of literacy in Sikkim from 1981 to 2001.

**TABLE NO.1
LITERACY IN SIKKIM: COMPARATIVE FIGURES**

1981			1991			2001		
Number of literates(%)			Number of literates (%)			Number of literates (%)		
Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
75779 (43.95)	31959 (22.20)	107738 (34.05)	117226 (56.94)	71714 (46.76)	188940 (56.94)	191326 (76.7)	131502 (61.46)	322828 (69.68)

Source: SIKKIM: A STATISTICAL PROFILE 2002, GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

The table also reveals the sex-wise disparity in literacy in Sikkim. Though the number of female literates has increased over the years but there is a huge gap between the number of male and female literates. The gender-wise disparity with regard to literacy rate was 15.27 per cent in the year 2001. There were 76.73 male literates against 61.46 per cent female literates. Over the years, disparity in female literacy rate between rural and urban areas of Sikkim has also been noticed. In 1981, female literacy rate in rural areas was 18.24 per cent against 45.42 per cent in urban areas followed by 35.40 per cent in rural areas against 63.40 per cent in urban areas in 1991 and 59.05 per cent in rural areas against 80.19 per cent in urban areas in 2001 (Sikkim: A Statistical Profile 2002).

Among the four districts of Sikkim, female literacy of West district is lagging behind and East district occupies the top position. From the master sheet of government schools it has been noticed that the overall enrolments of girls are more compare to the boys as on 31.3.2003 (Sikkim: A Statistical Profile 2004-05). While the Annual Report of S.S.A. 2004-05 reveals that the overall percentage of failure rates of girls students up to class IV is less compared to the boys but from class V to VIII the failure rate of girls are more.

TABLE NO. 2
CLASSWISE FAILURE RATES

CLASS	EAST			WEST			NORTH			SOUTH			TOTAL		
	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T
CLASS I	21.9	18.8	20.5	26	24.8	25.4	28.1	26.7	27.4	28.5	25.3	27	25.1	22.6	23.9
CLASS II	23.9	21.7	22.8	28.5	28.7	28.6	26.1	25.2	25.6	33.2	30.5	31.9	27.6	26	26.8
CLASS III	27.1	24.7	25.9	33	32.8	32.9	30	27	28.5	35.2	30.8	33	30.8	28.5	29.6
CLASS IV	23.2	22.2	22.7	31.1	28.6	29.9	28	25.8	26.9	30.7	30.4	30.5	27.4	26.1	26.7
CLASS V	26.7	27	26.8	30.9	32.2	31.6	22.1	22.3	22.2	30	30.9	30.5	28.2	28.9	28.5
CLASS VI	28.5	30.7	29.6	33.4	37.3	35.4	26.9	32.4	26.9	36.1	39.3	37.8	31.2	34.3	32.8
CLASS VII	25.8	25.7	25.8	26.1	32.2	29.2	25.8	23.1	24.4	26.3	31.3	29	26	28.3	27.2
CLASS VIII	27.3	33.7	30.7	37.7	49.2	43.8	29.9	27.5	28.7	34	40.3	37.3	31.2	38.2	35

*B-Boys, G-Girls, T-Total

Source: Annual Report of SSA 2004-05

The S.S.A report of 2004 – 05 also give details about the dropout rates in Sikkim. In the overall dropout rates up to secondary level, percentage of boys are higher than girls.

TABLE NO. 3
DISTRICTWISE DROPOUT RATES-2004

SL. NO.	STAGE	EAST			WEST			NORTH			SOUTH			TOTAL		
		B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T
1	Class I-V	13.40	13.13	13.27	17.24	16.71	16.98	14.44	17.88	16.06	17.00	15.57	16.31	15.37	15.06	15.22
2	Class VI-VIII	10.13	7.92	9.00	19.00	14.58	16.77	15.93	16.18	16.05	16.40	12.35	14.33	14.14	11.19	12.64
3	Class I-VIII	19.52	18.34	18.95	26.84	24.54	25.71	23.22	27.63	25.29	24.76	22.22	23.54	23.02	21.70	22.39
4	Class IX-X	9.22	9.14	9.18	20.62	16.69	18.83	12.42	11.90	12.16	9.16	8.17	8.68	12.00	10.66	11.35
5	Class I-X	23.28	22.29	22.79	32.92	28.83	30.92	27.67	32.25	29.82	27.32	24.52	25.98	27.13	25.39	26.29

*B-Boys, G-Girls, T-Total

Source: Annual Report of S.S.A. 2004-05.

The above table reveals that, at the elementary level, percentage of dropout boys is more (23.02%) than the girls (21.70%) and up to secondary level also, the percentage of dropout boys is more (27.13%) compared to the dropout girls (25.39%). The table also reveals that among the four districts, the dropout rate is more in the west district up to secondary level.

METHODOLOGY:

The main purpose of this study is to gain insight into the problem. Since it is a comparative work, places for fieldwork have been selected both from villages and towns to represent rural and urban scenario. Two villages i.e. Timburbong and Bariakhop and two notified town areas of West District i.e. Gyalshing and Nayabazar have been selected for case studies.

Qualitative data were analyzed through proper systematic description and analysis of the facts.

SELECTED CASE STUDIES

Some selected case studies have been done in support of the major constraints to women education in Sikkim. To get an overview of the problems, cases have been classified in 7 different categories – housewives, students of primary level, secondary level, senior secondary level, graduate or post graduate level, professional women and dropouts. From each study area these different categories of women were selected. In that way 28

case studies have been mentioned here.

TIMBURBONG VILLAGE:-

Case1 - a housewife. She is 50 years old. Her parental home is at Timburbong village. During her childhood she joined school but could not continue her study more than one year. Her father died when she was an infant. The economic condition of their house was not encouraged to study during those periods. She did not have proper uniform for school. Her family was so poor that they could not provide her proper uniform. While going to school, her friends used to create panic to her that she will be punished by her teachers as she could not come to school with proper uniform. The little girl was passionate to put plastic jewelry like bangles, ear rings etc. which was not allowed at her school. It was also a reason that she did not show any interest to continue her study. In addition with that, her elder brothers and sisters tempted her by saying that if she continues her study, she will miss the opportunity to get gold ornaments. Because the whole day her brothers & sisters engage themselves with household works, parents will prefer them to give gold ornaments. Poor girl found it very lucrative and completely lost her interest in studies. It supports that lack of guidance and the social situation did not encourage the girl. She joined her siblings in household works. At the age of 17 her marriage was fixed with a person having education under primary level. After marriage she involved herself in familial affairs. But now she regrets for being an ignorant person who could not guide her offspring. She tried to provide both of her sons and daughters equal access to education. She informed the researcher that if her daughters are interested to pursue higher studies, she and her husband will leave no stone unturned to support their wish.

Case2- a student of Class II. She is 9 years old. She belongs to scheduled caste family. Her father is a farmer. He studied up to primary level. Due to very poor economic condition her father could not continue his study and shared his hands with his parents in cultivation work. Her mother is an illiterate lady. The girl has three brothers and sisters. After completion of six years only her parents admitted her in a government primary school. Though her father is a poor farmer and her mother is an illiterate person, they always encourage their children to study well. But they could not teach or guide her concerning her studies. This girl is a laborious student. At home, her parents try to involve her very less in household activities. When she was asked about her ambition, she replied that she wants to be a doctor but she does not have an idea about how much she has to study and which subjects she has to choose to become a doctor. Her parent's illiteracy is the main problem regarding her studies as they could not provide private tuition to her. Therefore she has to completely depend on the school education. Her parents personally request her teachers to look after their daughter as they want to see their daughter well established in life.

Case 3 - a 16 years old girl studying in Class VIII. She hails from a poor family. Her father was an illiterate farmer. He died when this girl was in Class IV. Now at home she has a widow mother, 2 brothers and one sister. Her brother studies in Class VI and II respectively and sister is in Class I.

They have a small portion of cultivable land. Her mother Pratibha toil the land. During cultivation season they take the help of hired labourers. As Pratibha herself is an illiterate woman she never encourages her children to study. Because other children of the village go to school, Pratibha also sends her children to school. Moreover the children get mid-day meal, free accessories from school; therefore Pratibha does not oppose them. Being the elder daughter this girl has to perform lots of responsibility. In the morning when her mother goes to field she has to cook for all members of her family. Her other siblings that time go to jungle in search of fuel and fodder. All of them do not study in the morning. She cooks at evening also. Sometimes when her mother takes the responsibility of cooking, she has to go to jungle with her siblings. From her daily routine she hardly manages any time to study. Only few days before examination she prepares herself for that. She wants to complete her Class XII and dreams to get a job so that their standard of life would improve and her little brothers and sister would get all types of support from her to complete their education successfully.

Case 4- a student of Class XI. She is 18 years old. Her father studied up to Class X and looks after their own orange orchard. They have paddy field and they also produce ginger in their own land. Her mother is a housewife. She studied up to Class VI only. Case 4 completed her education up to secondary level from the nearby government secondary school and then joined a government Senior Secondary school which is 3-4 kilometers

far from her home and which is the nearest senior secondary school from their home. She goes to school by taxi. She has two elder sisters. One of them is married who has completed graduation and by profession is a teacher. The other sister stays with one of their relatives in a different place. Recently at home she is staying along with her parents and two younger brothers and one younger sister. Her mother has chronic disease and that is why this girl is given the charge of cooking. She gets up early in the morning and before cooking, studies for at least one hour. But in the evening her study time is not stable. After school and evening shift cooking she often loses her energy to open books. In their locality houses are existed in dispersed way. From their home to a distant place there is no other dwelling and therefore she does not face any disturbance from neighbours and friends. She wants to finish College level education and is interested to join police department. The uniform, the power of a police officer attracts her during her childhood. She gives importance to education mainly because it makes a person economically independent and helps to hold a powerful position in the society.

Case 5- a College student. She is 19 years old and studies in the first year in Government Law College. Their economic background is very poor. They have their homestead land only where they grow vegetables for their subsistence. Both her parents are illiterate. One of her brother is studying at a government senior secondary school in Class XI. Her elder sister is unmarried who studied up to Class X. Another sister studied up to Class VII and got married. Case 5 completed her secondary level education from a government secondary school which is situated at a walking distance. After that she joined a senior secondary school which is situated 4/5 kilometers from her home. Her parents could not afford the money for her communication and therefore she started staying with one of their relatives at that place. She used to perform all types of household works at her home and relative's place also. She used to get scholarship from the government during her school days as she belongs to a tribal community. With that meagre amount of money she used to manage her school expenses.

Her family does not have any relatives in the capital town and she was late to occupy any government hostel, so she is staying in a rented house situated far from her college. As she could not pay high rent, she anyhow managed a room which is lacking some facilities. Sometimes she has to go far places to manage drinking water whenever there is water crisis at that house. Before going to College, she cooks for herself. Her family is also taking lots of hardship to manage her educational expenses. Now also she is availing governmental grant. Her father works as a labour. He is borrowing loans from her relatives to support his daughter in completion of her college level education. The main obstacle which she is facing is their bad economic condition therefore she opines that importance of education in individual's life especially in women's life is to become economically self-sufficient.

Case 6- a Primary teacher of a government secondary school. She is 42. Her father is a farmer who studied up to Primary level and her mother is an illiterate house wife. She recalls her school days as full with household works. Her mother was sick and therefore she used to look after her younger brothers and sisters. Her school was situated 5/6 kilometers from her home and she used to reach there by foot. She could not attend school regularly because she had to do lots of household activities. She recalls that during her Class X final examination how much economic and situational problems she faced. But after all odds she overcome the situation and passed the examination. During her school days that much of educational degree was enough for anybody. No one encouraged her for further study. She got the job and after sometime got married to a person who is also in the same profession. In their happy married life, they have two daughters. Both she and her husband are very supportive regarding their daughters' education. She even thinks that daughters should be given more education than sons because education can make them stronger to fight against all odds. She also thinks that today's children are lucky enough that they get more facilities and guidance than the past days.

Case 7- A drop out. She is 24 years. She studied up to Class VIII. Her mother is an illiterate and father studied up to Class IV. Her father works in a government office as a fourth grade staff. During her school days she used to do lots of household works. She did not grow the habit of regular learning. Her parents also did not create pressure to her. She failed in her classes several times and accepted the fact that she is not good in studies. When she failed in Class VIII, she lost hope and left studies. Now she runs a small shop at her own locality. Though she used to study only sometimes before her examination but whenever she failed the examination she did not blame anybody but realized herself poor in studies. She is happy with her educational status because with that

much education she can calculate and smoothly run her shop.

BARIAKHOP VILLAGE:-

Case 8- aged 24 years. She is a housewife. Her educational qualification is up to Class XII. She stays with her parents. Her father is a peon in Govt. Senior Secondary School, Bariakhop and her mother is an illiterate housewife. She studied at Bariakhop Senior Secondary School from the beginning, which is situated only 4-5 minutes walking distance from their home. She has one sister who is undergoing M.A. course from Open University. While studying at Class XII she fell in love with a person of her same age. When they got married she was only 19 years. After marriage she involved herself with familial affairs and became less interested to pursue higher studies. Her husband and other family members encouraged her to continue study but all their attempts were in vain. Later on she joined in a local Saving Company as an agent. But unfortunately because of some internal problem the company locked out and she became jobless. Now she is the mother of a lovely two years old girl. She is satisfied with her role of a wife and a mother but in one corner of her heart she rears dissatisfaction when she meets her old friends who are established in their life. But now she is no more interested to continue further study. To her, women should complete study up to Class XII to run a family smoothly.

Case 9 - a 13 years old Class IV student. Her father is an electrician, who has learnt his work through his own effort without any formal training. He is an illiterate person. Her mother is also illiterate. She has one sister who studies in class IV in a government school. Her family owned a little portion of landed property. Her father does not have any regular employment. At home, cooking is the responsibility of little girl. Her mother does not help her in cooking. Her mother goes to field every day in the morning but does not return home timely. Therefore she and her sister have to look after household work, bring fodder and fuel etc. Once she fell down from a big tree while collecting fodder for cattles. Her right hand fractured and she could not attend school for several days. She does not have the habit of regular study. Only before examination she prepares herself. Both of her parents are addicted to alcohol. They are totally busy with their own world. Their illiteracy made them ignorant about the future of their own children. She does not have any ambition in life. No one in her family encourages her to study well.

Case 10 – 13 years, a student of Class VIII. Her father is a private contractor who mostly stays in Gangtok in search of getting work on contract basis. Her mother is the 3rd wife of her father. Her mother studied up to class VIII. When her father and his first wife found their temperament incompatible, their relation broke up and the wife returned to her parental home. His second wife got married with someone else leaving 4 children with him. From third wife, he has two children – a boy and a girl. The boy is staying with one of his step brothers, while this girl and her mother are staying with their maternal uncle's home. Now-a-days her father has given up all responsibility of his children and wife. Therefore the girl along with her mother and brother is facing lots of hardship for their livelihood. Her mother is dying to get any kind of job. Her father is a drunkard. Whenever he comes from Gangtok only creates trouble and nuisance at home. He physically abuses his wife and children. At maternal uncle's home the girl has to cook in the morning and evening. She hardly gets any time to study. The environment of her home is not suitable for studies. At evening, after meals when she gets little time no one is there to tell her to study. Therefore she enjoys watching television instead of studying. She hardly opens her books every day. She does not have any firm determination regarding her educational aspirations. Her immaturity does not allow her to think about her future prospects. Moreover her parent's relationship creates lot of hindrance to her educational accessibility.

Case 11- A student of Class XI, 18 years old. Both her father and mother are illiterate. They have landed property of less than 1 acre. She has two brothers studying in class II and VI respectively, one elder sister who got married and studied up to Class V, one younger sister studying in Class VI.

This girl joined Government Senior Secondary School, Bariakhop from Class I. She is a good student. But she hardly gets any time in the morning to study. Before coming to school she cooks for her family members, as her parents go to field to cultivate food grains. After she returns back from school she goes to jungle to collect fodder. But every day she tries to manage at least 1 or 1 ½ hours' time for study at the evening. Her parents are illiterate and therefore could not help her regarding studies. She sometimes helps her younger brother and sister

in studies whenever they face any problems. Before or during examination, she works hard at evening. She is a very punctual, hardworking, laborious student. At school, she gets inspired by her principal's advice in the morning assembly. She wants to complete graduation degree successfully and dreams to get a job so that she could look after her parents, properly. She is determined that she will remain unmarried and will be staying with her parents to take care of them. No one of her family is educated, therefore she wants to study higher so that she could help and guide her family members in every way. She wishes if she could get more time to study and if she could have educated family members, she could have achieved better result. In her version, education of women is very much necessary as only an educated mother could teach and guide her children. According to her, to run a family efficiently education of its female members is very important.

Case 12- has completed her graduation from Siliguri College of West Bengal. She is 23 years, belongs to a well-to-do family. Both of her parents are government servants. She studied up to Class VI in a private missionary school which was approximately 12 kilometers from her home. Therefore she used to stay at one of her relative's house. From Class VII she joined the nearby government school. When she passed class X, fortunately that school upgraded up to class XII. But she along with her friends faced the problem of shortage of teachers for a limited period of time. The infrastructure of that school was not good. Girls did not have separate toilet and common room. The school offered only one stream i.e. humanities. She had no choice but to opt for humanities. Her parents are very encouraging regarding her studies. She does not face any discrimination or loads of household works as she hails from an economically sound family. But being an adult now, when she thinks about her father's relation with other women and having an illegal daughter, sometimes make her sad and mentally disturbed though all of them try to maintain a good relationship with each other. The environment outside her home or the surrounding locality is not suitable for studies. Majority of the people of that locality are illiterate, young are addicted to alcohol, play gambling or pass their leisure time idly, girls get married before completion of secondary education. It is because of her parents support and guidance she has successfully completed her graduation degree as she thinks. Now one more challenge she is facing as she wants to continue higher study but the University is far from her home and as she has grown up her parents are afraid of sending their daughter to a far place. She is trying to convince her parents as she aspires to become a renowned sociologist and to reform her own society.

Case 13- aged 40 years, passed class X examination. She is working in a Government Senior Secondary school as a primary teacher. She is unmarried. She belongs to a well-to-do family. Her father is an influential man in this locality whose education is up to Class VII. Her grandfather was a mondal (almost like today's panchayat) of this locality. He could read and write but whether joined any educational institute or not, she is unaware about that.

Her father committed polygyny. Both of the wives are illiterate and at the beginning, they used to live together. Her mother could not bear a male child and that was the reason for her father's second alliance by the pressure of the family members and neighbors. Now the two wives are staying at separate houses with their own children and maintain good relationship with each other.

This lady was too small when her father got married for the second time. Now whenever she recalls those days she thinks that illiteracy, unemployment, social pressure or ignorance may be the reasons that her mother could not stop her husband from committing polygamy and accept his second marriage without any protest.

Being a member of a well-to-do family this lady did not face much difficulty to complete her studies. Moreover parents (even the step mother also) and teachers were very encouraging and showed favorable attitude towards her studies. In negligence in studies the seniors used to give strict punishments to their children.

According to her there was no gender discrimination regarding studies at their home. Along with her brothers and sisters she used to go to Soreng Secondary School which is 10 kilometers far from her home. But the distance was not a barrier to her for studies. She used to follow shortcut way and by chatting with other friends easily she crossed that much of distance by 45 minutes every day.

She was a mediocre student and inspite of taking regular private tuition, she failed in final examination

of Class X. As a private candidate she passed the examination and took teachers training from Government Teacher Training Institute. Just after completion of that training she got the job of a primary teacher in the same school where she studied. She is of the opinion that during her school days education up to Class X level meant a lot for anybody. People used to occupy a prestigious position in the society with that much of education. But now she regrets for not achieving more educational degree. She realizes that lack of guidance and no role model to follow are responsible for not achieving more educational degree.

Case 14- aged 25 years who is the elected Panchayat President of Bariakhop village, studied up to Class IX. She is unmarried. Both of her parents are illiterate and her brothers and sisters are also less educated. Her parents never encouraged their children to study. She could not continue her study because of the economic problem at home. Loads of household work became an inroad in her studies according to her. She wants to continue her study but again her mother's ill health could not allow her to fill up the form of Class X examination from open school. Being a drop out, she has no idea about the various schemes beneficial for the woman folk of her locality. She made the researcher surprised by saying that her political participation is not according to her wish but because of the pressure of the neighbours. She was unable to answer the questions related to her steps to be taken as a Panchayat President for the emancipation of the women of her own locality.

GEYZING TOWN:-

Case 15- aged 30 years, is a housewife. Her father is a tailor who studied up to class VIII. Her mother was illiterate who expired when she was only one year old. After her mother's death her father got married second time. She brought up at maternal uncle's home with grandparents. Their economic condition was very poor. Her grandfather was physically challenged and grandmother was illiterate. Her father did not take her responsibility. Her grandparents could not afford for her studies. She belongs to schedule caste community. Like now at that time also schedule caste students used to get government grants but no one was there for her to prepare the schedule caste certificate. Then her grandfather expired. Teachers and friends used to provide her support but it is her fate as she thinks that she could not continue her study. At 14 years she got married. Her husband is a small businessman. He studied up to Class VI. They have two sons and one daughter. All of them are studying in government school. She is dissatisfied with her educational qualification. When her children need parental guidance regarding their studies but they could not help, both she and her husband feel helpless. Therefore they have decided to give them all possible supports for further study. She feels that without education individual becomes a burden on other people. They are also very hopeful regarding the governmental support for higher study.

Case 16- aged 14 years, studies in Class IV. Her father is a businessman and her mother expired when she was in Class I. Her father got married again. She has 3 brothers and 2 sisters. One sister is married. Two brothers do not go to school. The girl, one of her sister and a brother go to school. She is suffering from malnutrition. She often feels sick at school. During summer season or sunny days she could not bear the scorching heat of the sun at the school assembly time. Her family could not afford for her treatment. They rely on the traditional technique for her treatment. Because of weakness she could not concentrate on her studies. Moreover she does not feel any interest to study. Her family members do not suggest her to study at home. She failed once or twice in some classes. Her step mother engages her in household works. The idea of need of education still has not developed in the mind of her, and therefore she could not speak about her aim.

Case 17- a student of Class VII. Although her parents are at Geyzing, but she stays separately with one of her unmarried aunt's house. She has 4 elder sisters and two brothers. Only one of the sister completed Class X level education. Among the brothers, one is mentally challenged. Her father is a drunkard person. Her mother is illiterate. They have little amount of cultivable land. They also have a milch cow which they have received from the state government. But her father is an irresponsible person who spends most of the time out of home. She is frustrated about the relationship between her parents and the carelessness of her father. Her mother has sent two of her daughters including her to their relative's home so that they could live a better life. Two of her sisters are recently got married. At aunty's home she has to perform lots of works starting from cooking, washing, cleaning etc. Although she lacks guidance from her family, she wants to continue her studies as much as her

family allows her. When she looks at her educated teachers she gets inspired to study. She thinks that because of education only her teachers lead a better lives.

Case 18- a student of Class XII. Her father is a teacher who himself is undergoing M.A. Course from distance education. Her mother studied up to Class XII. She has only one elder brother who is pursuing his medical course from Manipur. She studied up to Class X from Geyzing Girls' School after that she came to Soreng as her father got transferred here. She joined one of the government senior secondary school in science stream. Her inspiration is her father who always encourages her to study. She wants to become a doctor. But she is not satisfied with the educational environment of the school. She finds there is less opportunity for girls to get exposure in her school. But she is very determined and courageous to fulfill her target. To her, only through education women can equally withstand with men in the society.

Case 19- a student of B.A. 1st year of Loreto College, Darjeeling, West Bengal. She is 18 years. Her mother is a Clerk in a government Office. She was small when her father died and her mother got married second time. She has one step brother who is studying in Class X. She was good in studies and her parents, teachers used to encourage her for study. She studied in Pelling Senior Secondary School which is 9 kilometers from Geyzing. She used to reach school sometimes by foot from a short cut way or sometimes by vehicle. Belong to a middle class family she did not have heavy pressure of household works. But during school days when her mother got married second time, she was upset. Though her step father looks after her and treats her like her own daughter, she still have some insecurity feelings which at this adolescent period creates disturbance on her studies. But she is determined to achieve highest academic degree. She believes that before getting married girls should complete their education and make their own identity. According to her it is the time for girls to show their competence and talents in each and every field.

Case 20- 48 years old, is a headmistress in a government secondary school. Her mother is a teacher and father is an ex-army man. Born and brought up in a well-to-do family she did not have the burden of household works. But she recalls her school days when the parents were not so conscious regarding their ward's studies. Though her father had done M.Com. she did not get too much encouragement from him also. Before the result of her B.Sc. (Honors) came out she got the job of a laboratory assistance. But unfortunately she failed in B.Sc. examination and joined B.A.Course. After completion of the course she got the job of a graduate teacher in a government school. At the age of 26, she got married and gave birth to three children. She feels that her daughters are lucky enough that they are getting all types of parental supports and encouragement which she did not receive during her school/college days. She completed B.Ed. and M.Ed. Courses later on to get promotion and perfection in her professional life. According to her women education is indispensable to make the family and society better. Education may help to eradicate gender discrimination from the society. She encourages her all three children – two daughters and one son, equally for their studies. She wants to give equal access to education to her children.

Case 21 - 24 years girl is a Class VI drop out. Her father is an employee of power department whose educational qualification is up to Class VIII. Her mother does not have any formal education degree. She is unmarried. All her three siblings are students of schools and colleges. But only she did not continue her study. She says that her memory power is very weak and it acted as a barrier for her study. She was a blunt student and could not follow her teachers. Her parents also did not inspire her to study. Gradually she finds it a very difficult task to read and write. She failed several times and then left studies. But even she feels that to become successful in life, education plays a vital role.

NAYABAZARTOWN:-

Case 22- A 34 years house wife. She studied up to Class VIII. Her husband is a driver. His educational qualification is also up to Class VIII. Both of her parents were illiterate. She got married at a very early age. Before reaching 18 years, she entered into marital life and left studies. Moreover she was not interested in studies and her husband did not insist her to study as he does not want his wife employed in any institution. But now when she turned round and look her schoolmates, she regrets about her own decision. She says that at a very young age she did not realize the importance of education. She thinks that education not only helps to provide jobs but

it is also essential as it helps particularly women to fight against any kind of exploitation. It helps to increase individual's status. She has one daughter and a son. Now when she has realized the importance of education, she wants to provide equal education facilities to all her children, irrespective of their sexes.

Case 23- studies in Class III. She is 13 years old. Her parents work as non-agricultural labour (coolie). Both of them have educational qualification under primary level. She belongs to a very poor family. She has three brothers. Two of them go to school. At this very young age she has to perform loads of household works. She hardly gets any time to study. When she was asked about her interest in studies, her reply was negative. She does not find any interest to study but she likes to go to school as she gets time to play with her friends and also enjoy mid-day meal. At home she is given the responsibility to cook. She failed several times and her parents never encourage her to study. Both of them consume local made liquor almost every day after the whole days' work and do not return home at a fixed time. She could not reply distinctly about her ambition in life. She lacks the guidance and proper parental care at this very young age.

Case 24 - A student of Class VIII. She is 14. Her father studied up to Class V, is a fourth grade government employee. Her mother studied up to Class XII. She studied up to VII in a government school. When she was in Class IV her parents were divorced. Both she and her brother started staying with their grandparents and an unmarried aunty. She performs household works only when she has holidays. Her aunty encourages her to study well.

Two years back when her divorce mother (now married again) realized her responsibilities towards her children, became interested to take educational responsibilities of her and approached her grandparents regarding this. It is because of her wish that now this girl has joined a private school for better education. But poor girl could not cope with the new educational environment as she is not a bright student. She failed in all subjects. Now she is repeating the same class and happy with the new school as she gets special attention there. The divorce of her parents makes her to feel insecure every time. Her grandparents are always worried about her future. She wants to be a teacher. When she was asked to show reasons for it, she said that teacher always gets the chance to read and expand their own knowledge and she wants to enjoy that facility.

Case 25- studying in Class XII. She is 18. Her father studied up to Class V. He is an unemployed person. Her mother studied up to Class VIII. Her family did not possess any cultivable land. Her mother tries to manage work on contract basis occasionally. They have one old wooden house which they have given to one family on rent. She has one sister who is studying in Class V. She completed up to Class X from a government school, Jorethang, South Sikkim which is situated at a nearest distance from her home. Now she is staying at a rental house at Soreng, West Sikkim, as she has joined one government senior secondary school, which is 10-11 kilometers from her home. Her earlier school does not provide science stream and therefore she compelled to join here. When she was at home she used to cook because her mother has to visit different places in search of getting contractual work. Now she is free from doing any types of household work at her rented house but for her family it becomes an extra burden to send her monthly expenses. She dreams to become a doctor but afraid if her parents could afford it or not. From home she gets encouragement for study but expresses her dissatisfaction regarding the partial treatment she gets along with her female friends from some teachers of her school. She feels that teachers always encourage the boys, not the girls. She supports women education up to master level in today's competitive world.

Case 26- a student of B.Com. 1st year in Sikkim Government College, Tadong. Her father is a government employee who works in power department. He studied up to Class VIII. Her mother is a housewife who has studied up to Class III. After completion of primary education from Nayabazar Junior High School the girl joined Jorethang Senior Secondary School. She completed secondary level education from there. She wanted to pursue her study with commerce background, the stream which is not available at that school. Therefore she shifted to Soreng. She passed the examination successfully and joined the college. She is staying in girls' hostel now.

She has three brothers. Two among them have completed graduation. One is in business and the other one is interested to pursue higher studies. The third brother only studied up to Class VII who is a driver. Being the only girl child at home she always gets attention of others. At home she did not face any type of pressure of household works as this department is looking after by her mother and sister-in-law. She gets supports and

encouragement for study from her family members especially from her educated brothers. Her aim in life is to become a Chartered Accountant. She opines that women can enjoy a secured life only if she is educated.

Case 27- a 35 years old business woman. She studied up to Class VII. Both her parents were illiterate. During her school days she used to walk 8 kilometers to reach her school. Her father was a rich farmer. They had maid servants at home to perform household works. But at her very young age her father expired. Her illiterate mother and little educated elder brothers and sisters did not understand the importance of education and never tried to create pressure on her to study. She got married when she was only 15 years old. Her husband is in hotel business. They have only one son who is a student of engineering course.

At this mature age she realized the importance of education in individual's life. She believes that education of women is essential even more than the male needs because it provides all types of opportunities to raise their status and to stop exploitation against them.

Case 28-18 years old is a drop out. She did not complete Class VIII. Her father was a farmer who expired when she was small. Her mother studied up to Class VIII and runs a small hotel. She has one brother who studies in Class IV. Her old and sick grandfather also stays with them. When her mother goes to hotel which is at a little distance from their home, She looks after all household activities and takes care of her grandfather. She was weak in studies and did not have the habit of learning throughout the year. No one at home inspires her to study. She failed many times and when she failed in the Class VIII board examination, lost total interest to repeat the same class and decided to give up. Till now she does not have any regrets in her mind regarding her incomplete study.

MAJOR PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED

After discussing the state of women's education in Sikkim, particularly in West District of Sikkim and after the empirical study conducted in rural and urban areas to know the educational status and problems of the women, the researcher has come into the conclusion that though women literacy rate in Sikkim is quite impressive, still there is vast gap between male and female literacy rate. Despite the Sikkimese women enjoy a higher position within their society compared to most of the other State in India; their educational position is not satisfying or equal to men. Then there is rural- urban disparity in female literacy. Therefore the researcher honestly tries to find out what are the problems acting as a barrier to women education in Sikkim. The various reasons identified by the researcher as the major constraints to women education are stated below:

(1) Historical constraints :-

The educational backwardness of the Sikkimese people is a historical development. Due to various political turmoil in this region expansion of education did not take place in this tiny State. Before the British rule, people were far from the modern education system. Introduction of modern education in Sikkim is the impact of missionary activities in Sikkim. Prior to that education in this region was monastic in nature and there was no evidence of formal education system for Sikkimese women.

(2) Infrastructural Problem:-

The village settlements in Sikkim is very scattered by nature. Town areas of this hilly regions are also devoid of some basic facilities which is available in other parts of India. For instance, good communication facilities.

The available educational facilities in the villages and towns in Sikkim particularly women educational facilities are not well developed. Separate educational institution for girls with hostel facilities, library facilities, and separate toilet for girls are rare. Surprisingly there is no girls degree college. As a matter of fact girls are facing serious problems with regard to their educational upliftment and in pursuing higher studies.

(4) Economic Constraints:-

(a) Poor economic condition of mainly the village people is one of the vital reasons for educational backwardness of the women in Sikkim. Due to their poor economic condition they fail to maintain their budget for education of

their child specially girl child. They are poverty-ridden because of their low income and high expenditure to maintain the standard of life. Girls are also expected to perform loads of household work like- to fetch water, bring fodder and firewood from far places and therefore they could not continue their studies.

(b) When the parents work in field, it is traditionally accepted role of a village girl to look after their small siblings which disturbs their studies.

(5) Socio-cultural constraints:-

(a) Education of parents is very essential to educate or guide the children. But unfortunately a vast number of the parents in Sikkim are illiterate or very less educated. Majority of the students in villages are first generation learners. Hence they are not getting proper guidance from their parents. Moreover the parents are not conscious about the studies of their children particularly of their daughters. Stagnation in class is an acute problem in village areas devoid of facilities of coaching centers where illiterate parents could not guide their children. Large size of family also lacks favorable environment for education at home.

(b) Girls of Sikkimese society enjoy excess freedom or liberty compared to their counterparts of different other places of India and they sometimes misuse their freedom, ignore their studies and do not show any interest to continue their studies. This is one of the major constraints to women education in Sikkim.

(c) Marriage before the completion of their school education is also a common practice among the girls of Sikkim. It is mainly because of the acceptance and popularity of one of the form of tribal marriage i.e. marriage by elopement which is locally termed as 'choribiha' among all the communities of Sikkim. Moreover lack of consciousness of the parents regarding the legal norms of the marriageable age of the girls also encourages this practice. As a result, girls withdraw their enrolment from school in the mid-way.

(d) From traditional period Indian daughters are treated as 'Parayadhan' that means after marriage they will be included to their in-laws house. Therefore to invest money for their studies means complete wastage of money. Some of the Sikkimese parents till now rear that belief and even some rear the age old traditional belief that if the daughters are given more education it may destroy their moral character and that is why they do not encourage their daughters' education.

(e) The general feeling and belief among some less educated parents that there is lack of job opportunity or gainful employment for their sons and daughters even after higher studies. This feeling is also a retarding factor which does not encourage rural girls to continue higher studies.

(f) There is lack of motivation from the community itself. Influential people hardly take any initiative to encourage younger generations particularly girls to study more.

(g) Alcoholism is associated with hill-culture. Among the 'Matwali' group of people, use of alcohol in everyday life and during festive occasion is very common. Other ethnic communities have also adopted this culture as a result of their peaceful co-existence for decades. Many people have misused this practice-mainly the rural illiterate people often cross the limit of consuming alcohol. After heavy consumption of alcohol they forget their own responsibilities at home, they forget to take care of their own children and to guide them. Not only the fathers are addicted to it but in some rural houses even the mothers are addicted to alcohol. This bad habit of the parents has a very negative impact on the studies of the children of this State especially on the rural children and girls.

(h) Polygamy or freedom on sexual life or post marital relation of parents is also a constraint to the children of Sikkimese society especially to the girls. Parents often get involved in post marital affairs with other partners and forget their responsibilities towards their children. Children feel insecure because of this kind of attitude of their parents. Enjoyment of parents makes inroads on the studies of their children mainly on the girls who are by nature more emotional than boys.

(i) Some teachers who hold the traditional belief that men hold superior position in society, encourage the male students to participate in all types of educational activities. They prefer the boys only and the girl students lack confidence, develop inferiority complex. This type of attitude of teachers acts as a barrier to girls' education.

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This paper is an extract from the Ph.D. thesis of the writer which was completed in the year 2009 from North Bengal University. Hence the data used are prior to that period.



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