

EMPOWERMENT OF TRIBAL WOMEN OF ASSAM

**PUBLISHED BY :
DIRECTORATE OF ASSAM INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH FOR
TRIBALS & SCHEDULED CASTES, JAWAHAR NAGAR-22**

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Preface

The development of women in general and tribal women in particular to empower them has been the centre stage of various developments planning both at the central as well as state levels in India. It is opined that in general the political and economic conditions of tribal women is more depressed and neglected than that of non-tribal counterparts. The state has taken up a number of policies to promote, preserve and strengthen the economic and political empowerment of tribal women. Economic empowerment of tribal women is an essential issue of tribal development. This seminar was organized to understand the problems and other issues faced by tribal women and find means for their empowerment.

With this end in view, a two day seminar on 'Empowerment of Tribal Women of Assam' was organized by the Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Jawaharnagar, Guwahati-22 and held in its premises on 6th and 7th November, 2007.

Distinguished scholars, representatives from different non government organisations, government departments working in the field of women's empowerment, particularly on issues related to tribal women participated in the seminar.

The seminar had six academic sessions and altogether 18 numbers of paper were presented in the academic sessions. The deliberation brought into light many important facets of the issue of empowerment among tribal women of Assam.

A recommendation committee headed at the final session of the seminar was formed which discussed all the suggestions and recommendations put forward during the course of the seminar. The suggestions and recommendations were sent to all concerned for necessary actions at their end.

The present volume, a product of the two day seminar includes the papers presented, proceedings of the academic, inaugural and valedictory sessions and also the recommendations.

I am grateful to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, New Delhi and WPT & BC Deptt. Government of Assam for entrusting this Directorate for organizing such seminars on issues related to the tribes of Assam. I offer my thanks to Ms. S. Das, I.A.S., former Director during whose tenure the seminar was held. I acknowledge with thanks and gratitude the help, co-operation and sincere services rendered by Mr. G. C. Kakati, Joint Director, Ms. N.A.H. Anam, Curator, Ms. Mitra Das, and Ms. Farzana Begum, Research Officers, Mr. B. Barman and Mr. A Bora, Assistant Research Officers, Mr. H. Morang and Mr. D Laskar, Senior Investigators and making the seminar a grand success. Last but not the least, I offer my gratitude to all the staff of the institute without whose help and cooperation it would not have been possible to hold the seminar.



(George Basumatari)

Director

Assam Institute of Research for Tribals
and Scheduled Castes, Jawaharnagar,
Guwahati-22

Summary Proceedings of the Seminar on Empowerment of Tribal Women of Assam

A two day seminar on 'Empowerment of Tribal Women of Assam' was organized by the Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Jawaharnagar, Guwahati-22 and held in its premises on 6th and 7th November, 2007

The main Objectives of the seminar was—

1. To understand the different problems faced by tribal women, particularly of Assam.
2. To find out the various dimensions of empowerment of tribal women.
3. To discuss the role of the state, civil society and NGOs in bringing about empowerment of tribal women.
4. To discuss the role of SHGs in bringing about economic empowerment of tribal women.

Keeping in view these objectives, scholars, NGOs, representatives from different government departments working in the field of women's empowerment, particularly on issues related to tribal women were invited to participate in the seminar.

Inauguration

The seminar was inaugurated on 6th November, 2007 at 10.00 a.m. by Dr. G. C. Sharma Thakur who was also the Chairperson of the inaugural session. He expressed his happiness for organizing a seminar of such kind and spoke about the importance of the issue of tribal women empowerment.

Dr. Kunja Medhi, retd. Prof. of Political Science, and former Director, WSRC, Gauhati University gave her key note address. In her address, she emphasized on the importance of the issue of

Women's Empowerment in general and tribal women in particular. While discussing the issue in the Indian context, she tried to present some data on women and violence in Assam and other states of North East India. She also pointed the problems faced by the tribal people of this region. She reiterated that to attain gender equality money needs to be spent more on women and children, and the creation of a conducive atmosphere for girls education is of utmost importance.

In her speech as Chief Guest, Suniti Sonowal, eminent Lawyer and social activist spoke at length about the position of tribal women of this region and tribal women of other regions of India. As she herself belongs from a tribal community, she was able to give a personal perspective of a tribal women vis a vis women empowerment.

Earlier Sri. G. C. Kakati, Joint Director introduced the distinguished guests. The officers of the institute felicitated the distinguished guests with gamocha and bouquets while Ms. Sumitra Das, I.A.S., former Director of the Institute welcomed all the guests and participants to the seminar.

Ms. Nazmeen A.H. Anam, Curator of the institute gave the vote of thanks. About 150 persons from different institutions and other walks of life participated in the inaugural session of the seminar.

Academic Session-I

The seminar had six academic sessions and altogether 18 numbers of paper were presented.

The first academic session started from 11.45 am, 6th December 2007 and continued till 12.45 pm. The session was chaired by Dr. G.C.Sharma Thakur. Ms. N. Anam, Curator, AIRTSC acted as the rapporteur. The first paper was presented by Ms.Ranima Saikia. The title of the paper was. "**Role of Karbi women in income generating activities (A sociological study with special reference to Karbi Anglong District, Assam)**".

The objective of the paper was to study the socio-economic profile of the respondents and to study the involvement of the respondents in farms and allied income generating activities. As commented by the Chairperson, the study was of women's role improving the Karbi society. The study reveals the degree of involvement of Karbi women in different sectors like sowing, selection of seeds and post harvest activities. The second paper was presented by Ms. Binita Das. The paper was titled as "**A Glimpse on the status of Plains Tribal women of Assam in the Perspective of Women empowerment**". The paper tried to focus on the problems and prospects of the plain tribal womenfolk of Assam in respect of women empowerment. The third and last paper of this session was presented by Lakhinanda Bordoloi. The title of the paper was. '**Empowerment of Tribal women for environmental protection**'. There was much discussion among the participants of this paper. There was a general consensus that tribal people do not create environmental hazards, rather they tend to preserve forest by all means.

Academic Session-II

The second academic session started after lunch break at 1.45 p.m and continued till 3.15 pm. Dr. B. K. Medhi, Prof. Deptt. of Anthropology was the Chairperson of the session and Dr. Girindra Nath Das, DRO, Diphu, acted as the Rapporteur-Three papers were presented during this session. The first paper was titled, "**Janajatiya Mahilar Savalikaran.**" and presented by Dr. Lily Rajbanshi. Dr. Rajbanshi laid emphasis primarily on proper education, eradication of poverty, removal of corruption, health awareness, etc. so that women empowerment could be achieved successfully. In her paper she also mentioned that the social system of the tribal women has been nicely portrayed by various literatures like Rajani Kanta Bordoloi, Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Bishnu Prasad Rabha and Lummer Dai, etc. The second paper was presented by Fr. Tom Mangattghazhe. His paper titled "**Empowerment of Women for Peace Building in Assam**" attempted to highlight the activities of some women peace makers of the world including

those of India as well as Assam. According to him, increased representation of women in decision making levels in various institutions is highly essential. Moreover, he advocates the promotion of ethnic solidarity of women and strengthening women's capacity for leadership and peace. The third and last paper of the session was presented by Dr. Tiluttoma Baruah. The title of her paper was **"The women in 'Tai-Phake' Society."** In her paper she mentioned that although the Tai-Phakes are patrilineal, the status of women is not inferior to that of men in the society. Of course, there are socio-religious restriction prevalent among them.

Academic Session III

The third and the last academic session of the day started at 3-30 after a short tea break and continued till 4.30 pm. Dr. B. K. Medhi continued as the Chairperson. Ms. Daisy Baishya acted as the Rapporteur. The first paper of the session was by Rajesh Bhowmik and was titled as **"The special features of Tribal Textile in Assam : A case study of women Artisan"**. In this paper the author emphasizes the close relationship of women and textile. Tribal Women are expert weavers. They engage themselves from the process of collecting seeds to production of raw cotton and dyeing of warp to weaving. They operate the loom and create beautiful designs which reflects their artistic sense. He argues that tribal women should get training, attend workshops, seminar and get exposure so that the rich tradition of weaving do not die. The second paper on **"Empowerment of Tribal Women with special reference to Plains Tribal Women"** was presented by Dr. G. C. Sharma Thakur. He writes that the concept of empowerment of tribal women has over the years evoked more contradiction than consensus. Empowerment and status are to be regarded as two sides of the same coin. In his paper he emphasizes that empowerment has to be considered in three dimensional angles like condition of a person or object in the eyes of law which may be customary also, position or rank in relation to others in the family, group or society, and relative rank in hierarchy of status. All the papers were discussed at length and views were presented.

Academic Session IV

The Second day of the Seminar started at 10.00 am. with the fourth Academic Session and continued till 1.30 am. The session was chaired by Dr. Tiluttoma Baruah and Mr. D. Laskar acted as the Rapporteur. There were three papers in this session. The first paper titled **"Some Observation on the Rangdani Rabha Women in the Rural Contexts of Assam"** was presented by Ms. Anulekha Das Barman. It was a joint paper by Dr. Birinchi K. Medhi and Ms. Anulekha Das Barman. This paper attempted to examine the present position of the Rangdani Rabha women in three villages of Goalpara district of Assam. The norms and patterns in the society provides facilities as well as lay obstacles for a Rangdani woman. Although both the sexes are treated equally, a Rangdani woman do not inherit property, she also has to labour both at home and outside in the crop fields. She is economically dependent on the male folk, of the family and is found to be absent from all decision making in the family and society. The second paper was presented by Ms. Chitra Sharma and titled as **"Role of Vocational Training for Economic Empowerment of Karbi Women"** In this paper she emphasizes the importance of education and vocational training for empowerment of Karbi women of Assam. She mentions the names of some institutions in Karbi Anglong which are making important contribution for economic empowerment of the womenfolk. She also mentions the name of some Karbi women who have been able to make differences in the lives of the Karbi people. The third paper was presented by Shri Dadul Borah and titled as **"The Social status of women in Dimasa Society in North Cachar Hills District of Assam."** (An observation in the context of Empowerment of Tribal Women). All the papers were well received and a lot of discussion took place during the session.

Academic Session V

The fifth Academic Session started from 11.45 am and continued till 1.15. The session was chaired by Fr. Tom

Mangattgthazhe and H. Morang acted as the Rapporteur. Four papers were presented during this session. The first paper was on the **"Role of the Karbi women in their Socio-Economic Life : A study in Diksak Village, Khetri, Kamrup"** and presented by D. M. Misra. The study is based on primary data on the socio-economic life of the Karbi people of Dimoria block. In this study the author found out that women in that society are economically engaged in the production of rice beer, rearing of fowls and pig, weaving, fishing and collection of firewood. The second paper was presented by Arifur Zaman. The paper was jointly authored by Prof. Birinchi K. Medhi, Arifur Zaman and Bishmita Medhi and titled as **"Women in the Garo Society of Assam."** This paper gives a picture of the status of Garo women in the rural context of Assam. The author writes that although the Garos are a matrilineal tribe the position of women is not found to be superior than women of other tribes. A Garo woman can never be selected as a village head, and is not allowed to attend the meetings of the village council, she is the head of the family in figure only. The decision maker in the house is the husband. Their literacy rate is low. They are not allowed to be priests in the church. Their socio-economic position is also not favourable. The third paper titled **"Role of NGOs for development of Tribal Women in Assam"** was presented by J. K. Sharma. This paper focuses on the efficiency and effectiveness of the voluntary agencies in Assam. It also reveals the involvement of various types of voluntary action towards empowerment of women, issues of livelihood, health, legal aid, credit facilities, vocational trainings etc. The fourth and last paper of the session was presented by Daisy Baishya and titled as **"Status of women in terms of sex and marital affairs among the Monpa Tribe of Tawang District, Arunachal Pradesh."** In this paper the author made an attempt to study the status of Monpa women in terms of prestige and honour attained through birth, inheritance or acquisition of property, decision about marriage, management of domestic affairs, etc. She writes about the institution of marriage in their society, the absence of child marriage, prevalence of bride price attitude towards chastity, adultery and divorce, etc.

Academic Session VI

The sixth Academic Session was the last academic session of the seminar. It started at 2.15 pm. and continued till 3.15 pm. It was chaired by Fr. Tom Mangattgthazhe. Mr. B. I. Laskar acted as the Rapporteur of the session. There were three papers in this session. The first paper was presented by Leena. B. Hazari and titled as **"Watershed Management Programme : An instrument for Socio-Economic Development of Tribal Women"**. This paper attempted to give a descriptive analysis of WSMP in the context of Assam, it writes about the tools to tackle environmental degradation, objectives of WSMP, WSMP in the context of women's empowerment and future strategies for empowerment of tribal women. The third and fourth papers were presented by the author Chandra Mohan Kalita. The papers are titled as **"Tribal Women and Rural Technology"** and **"Empowering the tribal women in Assam"**. Both these paper dealt with women empowerment in general terms.

Valedictory session

The final session started at 3.15 pm. In this session the rapporteurs read out their reports of the academic sessions. A recommendation committee headed by Dr. G. C. Sharma Thakur was formed which discussed all the suggestions and recommendations put forward during the course of the seminar. After the recommendations were read out, certificates for presentation of papers and participations in the seminar were presented to the participants. The seminar ended at 5.15 pm.

Findings and Recommendation

1. Organizations and conduct of special awareness programs on different issues concerning the lives of tribal women-environmental issues, legal literacy, health and reproductive rights, economic education, adult literacy and non-formal education for girls, etc.

2. Provide better health care and health measures-which will lead to improvement of women's physical health and status.
3. Make awareness about the value of education-which will lead to improvement of literacy rates among women, as also retention of girl children in schools.
4. Tribal women's role in decision making in the political area should also be strengthened.
5. Research on tribal women issues should be based on empirical data-which will lead to a proper perspective of women's issues and arrive at some practical solutions.

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Empowerment Of Tribal Women With Special Reference To Plains Tribal Women

Dr. G. C. Sharma Thakur*

Theoretically speaking the concept of empowerment of tribal women has evolved more contradiction than consensus. The social Anthropologists, Sociologists, Women Activists have maintained diverse views in respect of women empowerment, particularly empowerment of tribal women. Empowerment includes all culturally prescribed rights and duties in specific socio-political situations right from families to the highest administrative seats. Empowerment and status are two sides of the same coin. For instance when we talk about empowering the tribal women, we have to take into account various cultural ingredients involving status such as right to possess land, right to transfer, use of products of land, trees, bamboos, areca nuts, livestock, inheritance rights of property, rights of weaving articles, utensils, heirlooms, ornaments, domestic animals, weapons etc. plus cordial family inter personal relation between husband and wife, daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, daughter-in-law and husband's sister or brother etc. Besides there are social status which are ascribed and certain rights which are achieved.

Empowerment has to be considered in three dimensional angles such as :

1. Condition of a person or object in the eyes of law which may be customary also.
2. Position or rank in relation to others in the family, group or society.
3. Relative rank in hierarchy of status.

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Most of the tribal people do not have written law and customary law and the prevailing do's and don'ts of society act as the guardian of social order. Certain verbal rules are in currency determining status of the members of a family or society and the people ungrudgingly abide by the rules and decisions of the elders or village assemblies. The Pandulipis of the Boro Kacharis, the Thamachat of the Buddhist ethnic groups of upper Assam are two examples of written law based on customs and traditions. In all the tradition bound societies the status is generally determined from the position or rank in relation to commoners. Thus the Gaonburas (village headman), priests, medicine-men are offices of status. The womenfolk in these societies do not grumble for not getting such portfolios. Again the jural status may appear low in such societies but in the day to day life womenfolk stand equal to men. In some other matters women may suffer disadvantages. While in other matters women are treated equal. Thus it is next to impossible to measure the strength and ability of women vis-a-vis status in relation to men in most ethnic societies in absolute terms. Dr. D.N. Majumder, the renowned Anthropologist opines that it would be scientific error to say the status of women, high or low as the dichotomies are highly misleading. The womenfolk themselves do not think that they are less powerful in their societies.¹

Empowering tribal women has certain limitations in view of the strong psychological bearing based on the traditional modes and moral between the sexes. Molinowski observes "One can assess and analyse status of women in a tribal society after taking into consideration the mutual duties between the sexes and safeguards provided for the protection of each against the high handedness of the other".² Besides the inter family cohesiveness and togetherness in tribal villages is cemented so intimately that individual families problems are generally considered as problems of the village or the community at large. My experience in this regard in the Tai Phake village of Naharkatia - Joypur amply demonstrates this special characteristic features. Among the Tai Phake women, it is customary to weave clothes

by each woman and a marriageable girl has to earn this skill compulsorily. If any marriageable girl is unable to weave her clothes due to poverty or some other reasons, the co villager womenfolk come to the rescue by providing clothes etc. Egalitarianism is so deep in the tribal societies that new concepts like empowerment of women, 'extreme form of consumerism' are not very easily relished by the people.

One may jump into conclusion that women power is largely visible in matrilineal and matrilocal societies like that of the Khasis. But actually this is not so. Women's status in traditional tribal societies has to be viewed from -

- (1) Division of labour between the sexes,
- (2) Choice of selection of marriage partner,
- (3) Inheritance, (4) Succession, (5) Household management,
- (6) Role playing in socio-religious occasions.

The division of labour in the tribal societies are well maintained that there is no grumbling from the men or women. The womenfolk perform the major role right from the morning till going to bed.

Although marriage by negotiation is preferred by all the societies yet the elders do not have any reservation for run away marriages which is the general trend in almost all the tribal societies. In respect of inheritance and succession, the patrilineal societies have not allowed the womenfolk to inherit but that does not indicate that womenfolk are treated badly. In the changing societies however, there is need for providing equal treatment to the women in respect of inheritance and succession although the womenfolk themselves are not very vocal in this regard. As regards role playing in socio religious occasions tribal women of Assam have not made any head way as the chief or village headman is invariably aged old man and the priest is always a male. It would, however, be not advisable to make a drastic change in this traditional mode as lack of the roles on the part of women has not affected social and cultural life of the people.

Some scholars opine that bride price, polygyny, polyandry are symptoms of lesser social position of tribal women, but these traits of culture may appear to be so from the non tribals' view point. In fact this tribal people with their time honoured traditions and customs do not feel that the prevailing traits of culture are derogatory or infringement of women's status. Polygyny is fast disappearing due to spread of education. Similarly the bride price is not demanded by the educated parents of the tribe. Bride price is not treated as buying a girl. It is something like compensation to the parents of the girls as after marriage the family loses a helping hand in the daily chores. The Taraon Mishmis of Arunachal Pradesh however, had a tendency to treat the bride price as equivalent to buying a bird which they call 'Miya Bviya'.

Empowerment of tribal women is also noticed in when women are allowed to seek divorce in case of adultery. The village councils approve such divorce cases. The Kabuis and Tangkhul Nagas have equal rights to divorce. Among many tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam women can seek divorce on grounds of infidelity, impotency, cruelty, quarrelsome nature of the husbands. The Garo, Singpho and Tangsa women claim compensation when divorced. Return of bride price in cases of divorce is common among all the Assam tribes.

Traditional customary empowerment of tribal women is traced among the Dimasa Kacharis of N.C. Hills of Assam where a unique system of female clan called Julu is prevalent. There are 42 such clans which are exogamous. The women of such clans enjoy certain rights and privileges. There are male properties, female properties and common properties among the Dimasas. The daughters among the Deoris and Mishings have absolute right over mother's property after the death of mother. Among the Khasis, the youngest daughter Ka-Khadduh becomes the custodian of family property. Here there is limitation i.e she can only manage the property as custodian but she cannot dispose the property by way of sell or mortgage without the consent of the brothers and uncles. Among the Garos, the mother is the

sole owner of the family property and on her death the ancestral property devolves on a chosen female member who is known as Nokna. Among the Karbis of Karbi Anglong district a widow can inherit her husband's property but if she remarries a person from a clan different from the clan of her late husband she cannot inherit the late husband's property.

Perhaps education is one such area where empowerment of women needs urgent attention. Female literacy of all the ethnic groups is conspicuously below the male percent of literacy. Except the Mizo tribes, all the tribes of Assam have very less female percent of literacy. Percent of tribal literacy as per 1971 Census shows that even the most politically conscious tribe Boro Kachari had only 11.06 percent of female literacy against 29.73 male literacy. Only Hmars and Any Mizo tribes had somewhat reasonable female percent of literacy being 31.66% and 51.92% respectively. The position is shown below in a tabular form.

TABLE - I
Percent of Literacy of the Scheduled Tribes of Assam
(Census 1971)

Sl No.	Name of Tribe	Total p. c. of literacy	Male literacy	Female literacy
1	2	3	4	5
1	Barmans of Cachar	30'45	39'97	22'56
2	Boro Boro Kachari	20'51	29'73	11'06
3	Chakma	23'48	38'94	6'38
4	Deori	27'72	39'58	15'10
5	Dimasa Kachari	18'84	27'36	11'62
6	Garo	22'89	31'36	11'62
7	Hajong	10'88	14'98	5'03
8	Hmar	44'40	56'90	31'66
9	Hojai	27'72	36'56	19'09
10	Kachari Sonowal	27'33	35'36	18'77

11	Khasi & Jyaintia	18'27	20'65	15'42
12	Any Kuki tribe	28'51	36'54	19'43
13	Lakher	1'00	1'00	-
14	Lalung	21'43	31;47	11'14
15	Man Tai speaking	7'98	13'70	2'11
16	Mech	30'56	39'66	21'64
17	Mikir	13'18	21'09	4'95
18	Miri	18'20	28'54	7'54
19	Any Mizo tribes	57;95	63'44	51'92
20	Any Naga tribes	15'51	22'55	8'33
21	Rabha	22'24	31'23	12'66
22	Pawi	16'67	25'00	-
23	Synteng	4'91	5'35	4'58

It is seen that percent of female literacy in respect of Pawi which is nil, Synteng 4.58, Mikir 4.95, Hajong 5.03, Man Tai speaking 2.11, Miri 7.54 and Any Naga tribes 8.33 are so meager that special empowerment drive only could elevate these communities at least to the parity level of the male percentage of literacy, let alone state percent of female literacy. Even after three decades, the tribal female percentage of literacy is much behind as the 2001 Census shows that against 72.3 percent of male literacy, the percent of female literacy is 52.4 although the percentages appear to be nearer all Assam figure i.e. 71.3 percent for male and 54.6 percent for female, the tribes imbalance could be visible as the percent of literacy of Hmars, Any Mizo tribes inflate the overall percent of literacy. The female percentages of literacy of Karbi (34.31%), Book Kachari (43%), Mishing (39.43%), Hajong (29.91%), Khasi (26.49%), Any Naga tribes (38.32%) are deplorably low. The following table shows (Table-II) the position of literacy of the scheduled tribes of Assam as per 2001 Census.

TABLE - II
Showing Total Population of Assam along with
Percentage of Literacy

Census 2001

Sl No	Name of tribes	Population			PC to total STs	PC of Literacy		
		Total	Male	Female		Total	Male	Female
1	Karbi	3,53,513	1,80,136	1,73,377	10.68	42.95	51.25	34.31
2	Dimasa	11,09,979	56,876	54,100	03.35	49.14	57.28	40.58
3	Garos	21,112	10,739	10,373	0.62	40.06	44.44	35.52
4	Hajong	256	139	117	0.01	44.53	56.03	29.91
5	Chakma	2,478	1,329	1,149	0.07	15.13	24.07	4.49
6	Hmar	14,460	7,429	7,031	0.44	27.03	76.17	67.65
7	Khasi	12,722	6,354	6,368	0.38	27.55	28.61	26.49
8	Any Kuki tribe	28,273	14,666	13,607	0.85	65.24	70.43	59.65
9	Any Mizo (Lushai) tribes	2,957	1,504	1,453	0.08	62.80	67.55	57.88
10	Any Naga tribes	21,706	11,077	10,629	0.66	47.09	55.51	38.32
11	Lakher	11	5	6	0.01	81.8	80.00	83.33
12	Synteng	336	164	172	0.01	58.33	65.85	51.16
13	Man Tai speaking	739	375	364	0.02	67.50	72.27	62.63
14	Bodo Kachari	13,52,771	6,82,710	6,70,061	70.88	51.48	59.81	43.00
15	Miri (Mishing)	5,87,310	2,99,790	2,87,520	17.76	49.12	58.42	39.43
16	Rabha	2,77,517	1,40,614	1,36,903	08.39	56.37	64.33	48.20
17	Kachari etc (Sonowal)	2,35,881	1,19,470	1,16,411	07.13	70.52	76.22	64.66

18	Lalung (Tiwa)	1,70,622	85,964	84,658	05.16	51.53	57.77	43.17
19	Deori	41,161	20,809	20,352	01.24	65.46	72.72	58.33
20	Mech	8,997	4,597	4,400	0.28	70.97	76.09	65.64
21	Hojai	1,882	932	950	0.06	63.07	70.49	55.74
22	Barmans of Cachar	15,877	8,024	7,853	0.48	56.15	61.32	50.87
23	Generic tribes	47,013	24,414	22,599	01.43	50.54	58.27	42.20
	Total Assam	33,08,570	16,78,117	16,30,453	-	62.5	72.3	52.4

In a recent study, conducted by Project Director, DPEP II in five districts of Assam namely Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Goalpara, Barpeta and Sonitpur covering ten tribal villages, revealed that incentives of various kinds offered by the authorities encouraged 22.4 percent girls to attend school, 18.3 percent girls joined school to spend some free time with fellow girl students. 11.4 percent girls joined school due to midday meal. The percentages of girls who do not go to school regularly stand at 50.00. The reasons for not going to school were topographical, insecure school environment, unsuitable school timing, large numbers of holidays, helping parents at home, bad road condition, worn out kaccha schoolhouse, absence of partition in classes, flood water during summer, lack of separate toilets for girls and last but not least lack of basic needs of girl students and lack of educational environment at home. 66% girl students reported that they do not go to school because they do not have school uniform, inability of parents to provide books etc, engagement of the girls in taking care of the minors while parents are in the fields. 10.8% girls surprisingly reported that books supplied by Government were insufficient, 45.2% of the girls were not reading at home because they had no kerosene at home even for lighting the house. 13.6% leave school without completing the primary level.

The above pen picture amply demonstrates a gloomy picture of female education in rural and tribal areas and empowerment of women should start from the grass root. Unless the base is strengthened, the super structure will definitely be shaky. Our social situation is such that womenfolk have been confined in exclusive spheres like child rearing, cleaning, cooking, laundering, weaving, fuel gathering, fetching water, preparation of daily food for the family, socializing children and teaching do's and don'ts etc. They are performing these duties traditionally ascribed to them without grumbling. Men and women in egalitarian tribal societies have their distinctive role models and empowerment, therefore, has to done in the light of prevailing women status which is not always derogatory rather, a traditionally handed over role.

Women empowerment of tribal people has certain limitations. Jawaharlal Nehru's five principles of tribal development (Panchoshil) contained. "We should not over administer these areas or overwhelm them with multiplicity of schemes." Customary laws should not be overstepped. Similarly, age and traditions of division of labour between the sexes should be considered while empowering women. Even after the lapse of more than half a century, the Hindu succession and Inheritance Act, is not adopted in time spirit in our society as traditions die hard. Empowering tribal women should be undertaken in conformity with the prevailing social system based on customs, traditions, religious beliefs and practices so that womenfolk could march with time without jeopardizing the traditional values, modes and morals.

Women empowerment, therefore, is a value loaded term, which ensures, according to Robert Lowie, "actual treatment obtained, legal status, opportunities for social participation and character."³

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Women In The Garo Society Of Assam

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A brief outline of the paper

(I)

Women form around 50 percent of the total population of the world. Not only to speak from the angle of the numerical strength, from other angles also women possess vital position in the society. They are the mothers, give birth to offsprings for the continuation of the society. They are the mentors, managers, and dependable teachers through whom the socialization process is continued. Through this process culture of a society is nurtured and developed. Yet most of the women, even from the developed countries, think themselves as a neglected and exploited section of the society.

Different authors from various disciplines have studied women status, broadly, their problems and prospects in different contexts. Various approaches to study role and status, problem and prospects, overall woman emancipation, etc., were developed in different historical periods under certain circumstances. As a consequence of such processes feminism as an ideology has been developed. According to Jary and Jary (2000:211) (a) Feminism is a holistic theory concerned with the nature of

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woman's subordination to men and their global oppression. (b) It is a socio-political theory and practice aims to free all women from male supremacy and exploitation. (c) This social movement encompassing strategic confrontation with the sex-class system. (d) It is an ideology stands in dialectical opposition to all misogynous ideologies and practices.

It is a well known fact that on the basis of the union of man and woman a family is constituted and a society is the agglomeration of families. Why and how most of the societies treat woman as the second class citizen and child producing machine should be evaluated and through addition and omission of the different traits in different culture, woman should be given their proper position. Positions of a woman vary from society to society, culture to culture, and region to region. The broad aim of this paper is to present the position of the Garo woman in rural contexts of Assam. Data for the paper has been collected from 4 homogeneous Garo villages viz., Bakrapur, Daglapara, Kachumari, and Khalkapara situated at a distance of around 8 k.m. from Dudhnoi town of Goalpara district, Assam. The required data has been collected during the first half of the year 2007 adopting census, open-end interview, case study and descriptive methods.

(II)

Generally it is believed that the tribal woman enjoy higher status than that of the non-tribal woman. In the book *The Naked Naga* the great anthropologist Furer Haimendorf (1993:96) opines '.....many woman in more civilized part of India may well envy the women of Naga Hills, their high status and their free and happy life'. Does the Garo woman also enjoys high status and lead a free and happy life?

It should be noted here that the Garo is a matrilineal tribe and in that society descent, inheritance, succession, authority and residence after marriage are traced through female line. The principal abode of the Garos is the Garo Hills of Meghalaya, though for different reasons they are distributed over various

plain areas of Assam and Bangladesh.

According to Majumder (1980:74) 'The core of the (Garo) household is always a female. Among the Garo there cannot be a household with male alone'. The Garos of Assam practiced wet cultivation as their mainstay, where the woman shouldered the burden of agriculture more or less equally with the male. Besides the agricultural activities they have to cook, clean the house, wash utensils and cloth, weave, look after the children and the domesticated animal, fetch water and firewood, make country liquor, and so on. If we closely examine the daily routine of Garo women we will see that they have to do more work than the men. The marriage of a Garo girl is not fixed without her consent. After marriage, her husband has to come to live in her family of orientation. The *mahari* or lineage is a very important organization among the Garos. The *mahari* members are traced through female line. It is the main duty of the *mahari* to keep peace and amity among the members of the organization. After the death of a wife the husband cannot marry again without the consent of his wife's *mahari*. The children of a couple are included in the mother's *mahari* and they have to accept the surname of their mother. Divorce is rare among them; however a wife may be divorced through the permission of her *mahari* for her laziness, barrenness, adultery or cruelty. A Garo mother is the owner of the household property. Without a daughter a Garo family is not complete. A daughterless Garo couple generally adopt a girl from the wife's *mahari*. Among the daughters, a daughter is selected to inherit her mother's property who is known as *nokna*. The husband of *nokna* is known as *nokrom*. Afterwards if the father and mother do not like her activities, they can change their choice by curtailing her power and selecting another daughter as inheritress.

(III)

A Garo woman is never selected as a village head. They are generally not allowed to attend the meeting of the village council. Literally though a woman is the head of the family, in practice her husband controls and supervise his wife's property.

A Garo woman addresses her husband as *nok-gipa*, *nok* means house and *gipa* means owner, i.e., owner of the house. An active and energetic husband is always honoured by the wife.

In all the studied villages the literacy rate, particularly the rate of woman is very low. The Garos of the said village have adopted Christianity abandoning their pristine animistic religion. In the church also a woman is not allowed to be a priest. In those villages the Garos are surrounded by the Assamese caste villagers. Sometimes a non-Garo marries a Garo girl, then she has to leave her natal home and has to live in her husband's home. Eighteen per cent of the Garo husband could not adjust in the wife's house and fled away. Though his wife is allowed to remarry, yet sometimes it is a problem to get a second husband. The situation becomes worst as in these Garo societies many traits of Assamese culture have been percolated and good number of Garo boys do not like to marry a Garo girl and live in the father-in laws family. Moreover they do not like to marry a divorced or abandoned woman. It has been already stated that the Garos of the said villages have adopted new religion and wet cultivation, abandoning archaic religion and shifting cultivation. They have settled in the plain areas instead of their age-old hilly abode. To cope with the new situation they are still to acquire education and their required qualities. In comparison to male folk the female folk are still backward in education and enveloped by the age old superstitions. We can not simply say that the tribal women enjoy high esteem and lead a happy life by studying the women of the said villages. They are also subordinate to males and in many cases exploited by the male members of their society and also by the outsiders.

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Empowerment of Tribal Women for Environmental Protection

Lakhinanda Bordoloi*

Environmental problems have attracted the attention of a wide cross-section of people all over the world during the last two decades. People are increasingly becoming conscious of a variety of problems like global warming, ozone layer depletion, acid rain, famines, droughts, floods, scarcity of fuel, firewood and fodder; pollution of air, water, sound and problems from hazardous chemicals and radiation which have adverse affects on environment. No nation in the world has been spared nor has any citizen been untouched.

The recent increase in industrialization and urbanization during the last century has brought extensive environment pollution problems to the nation. For the people of our region (North East India) environmental problems pose a great challenge which is unprecedented in its scope and complexity. Now, environment is certainly an important concern for people of the region.

The seven North Eastern states together occupy an area of around 255.084 sq. k.m. and comprise about 7.8 of India's land area. About 65 percent of this land area in North East is under forests. At the same time the forests in this region have also been under tremendous pressure from human practices like shifting cultivation, timber logging, agricultural expansion etc. According to the assessment made by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests, all the North Eastern states have lost their forest cover to varying extents.

The two hill districts of Assam; viz, Karbi Anglong and North Cachar contain 39-40 percent of the total forests of the state. However, the forests in the hill areas are facing the

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onslaught of deforestation. Furthermore, only about 25 percent of the forest area in the hills are in the form of forest reserves under the direct government control. The rest are unscheduled forest under the control of Autonomous Councils and less likely monitored and protected. In fact, 75 percent of the forests in the two hill districts exist as unclassified or unscheduled of which 25 percent is proposed to be given reserve forest status by the Autonomous Councils, still leaving about 50 percent as unscheduled.

The problems like desertification due to encroachment and settlement are more in this areas and it is seen that the process is going on, in other areas also.

So, there is the rapid lost of forest areas not only in the hills, but the phenomenon is common in almost all the districts of Assam.

In the North East region tribal population is dominating and maintaining close relation with the forests and have shown signs of importance of their role for the protection and sustainable growth.

Forest-Tribal Relation : The life style of tribal people is different from other people who live in urban, semi-urban and village atmosphere. The tribal culture and civilization is different from other civilizations. Tribals are very fond of nature and have been living in forest and neighbouring areas. Since time immemorial forests and forest based resources have provided them motherhood affection. This 'forest communities' or tribals have been enjoying direct and indirect benefits from the forests in forms of getting fuel, fodder, minor forest produces, shelter, food etc. and enjoying cool and peaceful atmosphere and natural beauty.

History shows the evidence that tribal life was governed by the forests. Forest have ensured their daily needs and protected their economy along with values like traditional beliefs, practices, customs, folk songs, folk tales, folk dances, folklore medicines, their dialects etc. So, it is said that forests and tribals both have inseparable relationship. But, over the years, tribals

are not holding any grip over the forest and forest based resources because of various reasons, like forest based resources have been deteriorated in their areas, forest policy which does not allow them to enter in the forest areas, impact of government policy to bring them up to mainstreams through reservation in the field of education, employment, politics etc. Now, their dependency over forest and forest based resources has declined to a large extent.

Sometimes, it is seen in the North Eastern region that the undertaken development projects have been creating lot of problems for them who are mostly poor. 'Victims of development' are common among the tribals in the region and in their turn when these unfortunate people use natural resources they are accused of causing damage to the environment by 'illegal' uses of forests and other natural resources. These have changed the way of life of tribals in terms of economy, culture and employment.

The forest communities or tribals have not only contributed a lot in restructuring the countries politics and administration, they are playing role in other spheres of nation building. Therefore, it is felt that this forest communities can play vital role in environmental sustenance. Not only the tribal men but the women have an active role to play. In the context of environment where human activity must maintain a perfect balance with all environmental condition, the tribal women must be encouraged, empowered and given the scope to prove their worth in maintaining a proper ecological balance. As they are not only mother, a partner of the family, but a member of the society and therefore, they should come forward as decision maker. Their participation will certainly help in the sustainable growth of the environment. It is because their thinking and perception is different in environmental issues from those of other women.

Women Awareness for Environmental Protection : Global awareness of women after the Earth Summit is considered significant event regarding environmental protection. The Earth Summit was held at Rio-de-Janeiro (Brazil) in June 1992, where

world leaders, officials and journalists met to discuss our common problem of survival on the planet. In the Rio declaration (Agenda 21) among various proclamations it was said that "Women have a vital role in environment management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development and ensure a better future for all"

Subsequently, the fourth women conference on women was held at Beijing and the NGO's forum at Huairo. Both these meets reaffirmed a global concern for women, their problems and value of their participation. In India the All India Womens' Conference laid down efforts on sustainable development in search of peace and equality which has gathered momentum world over.

The second world summit on sustainable development was held at Johannesberg in 2002 which emphasize among others the role of women in this regard.

It is because of women's awareness now that the governments are changing their attitude and enhancing the status of women. Legislative measures have also been taken to bring them forward. However, the recognition of role of tribal women for environmental conservation due to their close relation with the nature and bringing advancement in social and economic field is not realized universally. The entrenched social patterns, evil elements, poor condition, lack of consciousness etc. continue to inhibit tribal women from access to education, status, opportunity and other means for realising their full potentiality.

Concept and Dimensions of Tribal Women Empowerment for Environmental Protection :

The concept of empowerment incorporates a thought of empowering weaker sections of the society in the form of individual or group who have been facing the challenges of 'social, economic, political and other forms of deprivation. Women empowerment is an active process enabling them to realize their full identity and power. Empowerment generates power among poor and backward sections of the society and tribal women.

The process of empowerment now covers different

dimensions such as Economic, Social, Educational, Political, Physical, Psychological etc. in its purview to uplift their lives. All the dimensions have equal importance for the poor tribal women from the view of environmental protection.

1) The achievement of sustained and equitable development remains a great challenge for tribal women. Economic empowerment covers equal benefit of economic growth, credit, social cohesion, participation and interaction. The environmental economics builds its theoretical base mainly on the concept of welfare economics. It is a part of economics which deals with inter relationship between the environment and development. The environment economic empowerment will limit the environment constraints for development of tribal women. Adequate knowledge of environment economy helps the development and sustainable growth of the environment.

2) Social empowerment emphasizes institutional mechanism to promote cordial relationship among and enforce to provide recognition capability to members in the society. This dimension may bring tribal women closer to other members from cultural, religious, psychological and social point of view which helps them to promote suitable social environment.

Apart from this, tribal women have suffered a lot of problems due to deforestation in their social order. Problems like collection of forest produces, herbs, medicines, firewoods etc. to run their day to day life; the employment of tribal women in mining sector, engagement in building construction as labour, association with social evils like bottle-legging, gambling, beggary, prostitution etc. due to urbanization, industrialization, over crowding and population growth are quite common now. Social empowerment will certainly reduce all the social problems related to the environment.

3) Education is a basic tool for empowering tribal women and other marginalised group for improving literacy, gender sensitivity, equal opportunities, awareness generation, leadership, team work approach etc. In deed, education can play a leading role developing a multidisciplinary and ethical oriented form in

order to devise solution to the problems related to environment.

Environment education means education on environment which is relatively interdisciplinary study. In order to maintain sustainable environment tribal women must know the interaction between mankind and environment with reference to problems causing from emergency of human species in terms of the technological development of late 20th century. Education empowerment aiming at and informing them about various problems and causes will certainly provide solution to the problem.

4) Political empowerment includes thoughts of political processes in terms of power decentralization, sharing ideas, decision making etc. It creates political awareness about day to day activities of state, encourages the tribal women contest the election, criticize government etc. It promotes them along with the concept of equality, liberty and justice in all walks of life. By this way tribal women can take part in decision making and legislation for environmental protection.

5) Physical empowerment promotes good health and capability for higher productivity. Physical empowerment makes other dimensions strong. The growth, survival and health of mankind are directly linked with environment. The components of environment not only affect but also determine physical status.

6) Psychological empowerment creates moral support for the capabilities of deprived sections such as tribal women. This process helps to improve the knowledge, self confidence, self-reliance and mobilization towards the goal. This type of empowerment may make tribal women free from fear, which otherwise become obstacle in the participation for environmental protection.

Apart from these dimensions, empowerment of tribal women is necessary for sustainable growth of their respective community also. Problems related to other field exists still in tribal Society. Empowerment in all dimensions will certainly help, minimize all sorts of problems.

Obstacles : There are certain obstacles in the role tribal women can play for environmental protection. Gender inequality, injustice,

discrimination are major reasons why now the tribal women are unable to show their skill and ability. In contemporary society tribal women are economically insecure female illiteracy, poverty, violence & others are common as mentioned above.

Remedies : Some remedial measures to remove obstacles in the way of tribal womens' participation in environmental protection are :

- 1) There must be spread of education among them, increase literacy rate.
- 2) Eradicate Poverty.
- 3) They must be made conscious.
- 4) They must be given liberty to freely participate in organizational work.
- 5) Government and other organization must help them in providing support services.
- 6) Creation of an enabling policy, institutional and legal environment.
- 7) Improvement of health care, family planning and social condition.
- 8) Integrating tribal women with other walks of life and having tribal women representatives at national, state and local-self government.
- 9) Integrating tribal women into the wider range of modern technological skills and activities.
- 10) Improving general outlook towards them etc.

Role of Tribal Women in Specific Cases for Environmental Protection :

In a majority of cases of environmental protection tribal women can play their orle. However, only some specific case areas, where maximum scope for their orle are necessitated are focused here.

Population Growth and Tribal Women : As population grows there are signs of environmental stress. The need for

control of population at global level has been felt and following the two world conferences at Cairo and Beijing, it has now been realised that tribal womens' development in all respects will be most effective in reducing fertility and population. They must be educated, economically independent, employed and in sound health to be able to limit the size of the family. They must participate in the family planning measures, increase the marriageable age, form volunteer corporations, participate in panchayats for successful population control.

Forest Management and Tribal Women : Forest conservation is of great environmental importance. Forest maintains environmental balance. So, it is our duty to conserve forest. In the forest management tribal women can play significant role. They can actively participate in afforestation, social forestry, joint forest management, Mohila Nursery, Kitchen Gardening, Medicinal plant projects etc. In the state like Himachal Pradesh women showed their capability in this regard. They are actively participating in plantation and afforestation programs. Abandoning traditional shifting or jhumming cultivation, hunting and gathering practices, tribal womens' participation in agro forestry, intercropping, crop rotation and other processes of forest conservation are need of the hour today.

Floods and Tribal Women : One of the most serious environmental backlashes resulting from unchecked deforestation, modification of natural drainage patterns, faulty agricultural and settlement policies of flood, the frequency and magnitude of which have increased greatly during the recent years in the Brahmaputra and Barak valley. Most of the rivers and tributaries which cause flood in the region flows through hilly areas mostly dominated by the tribals. A large number of wetlands, natural depressions that lie close to the rivers are also present in both the valleys. The construction of faulty embankments on the rivers further creates problems like flood. Control of deforestation, checking jhumming cultivations, coupled with soil conservation

measures may help improve the problem. Furthermore, tribal women can take part in restructuring the cropping system as mentioned, along with other flood prone measures. Deep water prone varieties of rice, winter cropping (Rabi), Aus or Ahu, Bodo paddy in peaty land, multiple cropping etc. can be practiced during flood.

Cruelty on Animals and Birds and Tribal Women : Animals and birds, specially wild animals and birds are of great importance in maintaining environmental balance. Indian women like Menaka Gandhi, Renuka Choudhury takes various measures to prevent cruelty on animals and birds. A case in the district of North Cachar at Jatinga during the month of July to October, shows 'Suicidal' tendency. Taking the advantage of natural 'suicidal' tendency of the birds the villagers and sometimes people from outside capture and kill birds. This annual massacre of birds has been going on since the Pnars (Jaintias or Syntengs) settled there long before. It is because of ignorance and lack of consciousness about environment that tribal of the locality kill birds and preserve by smoking it to serve as food throughout the year. The women segment of the tribals can play vital role in prevention of such cruelty on birds in collaboration with Assam forest department officials. If the women participate in the process it may be easier to stop menace.

Wasteland Development and Tribal Women : Wasteland means degraded land, but which can be brought under vegetative cover with a reasonable effort. Wasteland development through afforestation and tree plantation with peoples participation need to be popularized. The tribal women of North East India are contributing much for the development of wasteland in this region. It is needless to mention that re-use of wasteland can remove poverty, regenerate and help restore ecological balance. It has been seen that in the state like West Bengal women has successfully managed such wasteland.

Anti-liquor Movement and Tribal Women : 'Arrack' or 'Ju' is a kind of indigenous wine locally produced by mostly tribals.

This has relation with their culture and traditions. But, extensive use of wine pollute social environment and degrade economy. So, the task ahead is the judicious use of 'Ju' or 'Arrack' only in cultural and religious functions. But, today addiction to liquor has become a fashion in the society. It is seen that people are more addicted to foreign produce wine than locally produced 'Ju' or 'Arrack'. The licensed wine shops are contributing to the problem. This leads to social problems in terms of anti-social activities, disruption of family, accidents on road etc. Addiction to liquor is not only a problem for the rich, but also those living below the poverty line. So, it is a serious issue for the women how they become successful in the anti-liquor movement.

Non-conventional Energy and Tribal Women : The combustion of fossil fuel causes serious harm to environment. But the use of non-conventional energy sources in domestic work can help in creating a cleaner environment for the women at home, relieve them of the burden of collecting fuelwood, cleaning the sootladen utensils and reduce the occurrence of smoke related respiratory diseases as well as eye ailments. The use of non-conventional energy like solar, wind, biomass, biogas etc. will not harm environment. The tribal women can play a role for protection of environment using these sources.

Water Problem and Tribal Women : Human activity is one of the forces which leads to wastage of water and excessive contamination with other chemicals leads the pollution. The fresh water, ground water, industrial effluents, agricultural wastes, radio active and thermal waste and even domestic waste water and sewages creating lots of problems. Pure drinking water problem is common for the tribals. So, tribal women have to fetch or collect pure drinking water from place which is far away from their resident. Extensive training programs for the tribal women specially on pure drinking water will reduce the health related problems.

Farming and Tribal Women : As mentioned above Tribal women can play a vital role in farming for a balanced

environment. The development of scientific technology for economic development at the cost of environment can not be encouraged. One must bear in mind in this regard that development and economical needs must be properly balanced with environmental condition. An integrated systematic approach must be evolved in farming sector. For example, integrated pest management and organic farming with active participation of tribal women would help in safeguarding the ecosystem.

Social Environment and Tribal Women : In Tribal Societies family plays the major role in socialization and suitable social environment conducive for peace and progress. Occupational trainings, religious beliefs, social customs, cultural norms and values all are basically learnt within the family. The girls are assigned their respective role in their social system. So, the women in their society has a great role to play to uplift the degraded society of late. Apart from economic and social inequalities, another form of inequality that is deeply rooted in the tribal society is gender bias. Even amongst the most educated sections of the society, it is common to see families bringing up their sons and daughters differently. For them the drop-out rate in the school is higher than the others and again the girls drop-out rate is higher than it is for the boys, inspite of the fact that girls tend to outshine academically. However, it is expected that empowerment of tribal women will be helpful to prevent anti-social elements of their society and maintain a conducive social environment.

Tribal women do not have any leisure since leaving her bed early in the morning and till going to bed at night. They always remain busy in domestic works, piggery and poultry farming, weaving, social and customary functions.

Possible Strategies and Actions by the Government and other Agencies :

For the empowerment of tribal women and their respective communities for environmental protection the government and

other agencies should demonstrate real commitment to the principle and practice of environmental protection and sustainable development. The institutions and agencies must take action to focus their attention on environment, population and development issues.

They should :

- 1) Use every opportunity to raise awareness by publicly speaking out on the importance of environmental concerns.
- 2) Increase in the funding of interdisciplinary environmental research.
- 3) Encourage outstanding scholars from the tribal women segment who are engaged in research and teach environmental topics and help them lead other scholars in this direction.
- 4) Establish programs in all major disciplines to teach about environment specially meant for tribal women.
- 5) Appoint advisory committee to promote environmental programs in their locality.
- 6) Encourage multidisciplinary thinking by organising seminars, workshops, case studies among them.
- 7) Establish environment study centres in tribal dominated areas to engage them in the process.
- 8) Develop cooperation with the academic institutions to enhance their capability for population, environment and sustainable development.

Conclusion : The need for environmental awareness has been felt by the North Eastern States. The participation of the people specially weaker sections along with women is vital in conserving biodiversity preventing pollution and maintaining a balance. Several NGOs have come up in Assam and in other North-Eastern states which are functioning along with the government departments for environmental protection.

The overall participation of the women in environmental protection in various parts of the country is quite encouraging. But for the tribal women of our state Assam, what is important is, they should be empowered. They should not only be empowered for environmental sustainability, but also for social and economic upliftment. It is felt that the future of every child with respect to health, education and behaviour rests in the hands of the mother. A healthy educated and enlightened mother will be able to develop their children and next generation better. Therefore, the women of the weaker sections of the society must be empowered. The awareness which has been created to empower them must go on, to achieve an ecologically balanced as well as a developed country. Tribal women must come free of superstitions, evil social practices, shed their shyness and hesitations, They should participate in nation building with enthusiasm and dedication.

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Watershed Management Programmes-An Instrument For The Socio-Economic Development of Tribal Women

Mrs. Leena Borah Hazari

Introduction :

Water has always been an integral part of the development activities of the human societies as it is essential for sustaining all forms of life. In the last few decades a large number of water resources development and watershed management projects were initiated in many developing countries like India for poverty alleviation and social development of the people. The past efforts in the watershed management in India were concentrated mainly on the soil conservation and neglected the land users. But today, water management requires long term measures to integrate the social and economic development together with water and soil conservation. It has been realized that the success of the programme is not possible if the local people of the area are bypassed in the planning and decision making processes.

The watershed programme is being carried out in flood prone, drought prone, desert, rain fed and hilly areas. DRDA/ Zilla Parishad selects the villages for development of watershed projects. Project implementing agency is also selected by DRDA/ Zilla Parishad. There are also other institutions through which this programme is being implemented like Agriculture Universities, Research Institutions, and Govt. Undertakings etc. The broad objectives of this programme are -

- to mitigate the adverse effects of natural hazards on crops and livestock.
- to control deforestation.

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- to encourage restoration of ecological balance and
- to promote socio-economic development of village community

Rural Development through Watershed Management :

The Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment, Govt. of India funds for watershed development schemes under Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP), Desert Development Programme (DDP) and Integrated Watershed Development Programme (IWDP) for plain and hilly areas. The Govt. of India has given much emphasis on watershed development and management selecting small areas of treatment for a particular stretch of time since 1956. The extended uncultured area were brought under treatment in consecutive phases of development. While selecting the micro watershed, they keep in their mind that, 1. The micro watershed should have preferably more than 50% areas for soil and water conservation treatment and 50% area under cultivation so that village people who are primarily depend on farming are directly involved and benefited. 2. A group of villages constituting a micro watershed having a preponderance of small and marginal farmers/beneficiaries, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes economically backward classes should get priority while selection of micro watershed to be treated and developed takes place.

The later one is important as it is (watershed development project) a special programme for the socio-economic upliftment of the rural tribal people. Most of the tribal groups are from rural areas and engaged in unorganized agriculture, forestry and other part time labour. The per capita incomes of tribal communities are much lower in comparison to other non tribal groups. Watershed development as a participatory community programme can play the role for bridging the gap between poverty line and per capita income.

For management of natural watershed resources, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is conducted to establish rapport with the village community as well as to identify and

define problems for prioritization in the village itself. Based on principle of listening and learning, PRA is the technique of immediate analysis and survey of village resources for participatory micro planning of development. PRA is a way of enabling local people to analyse their local condition, to share the outcomes and to plan their activities. PRA is both an attitude and methodology, which produces authentic information about the village problems and resources.

Thus, watershed development through PRA can be treated as a major task for rural development. In a state like Assam, it can be a powerful instrument as 75% of people live in rural areas and more than 50% inhabitants belong to SC/ST groups. The different feature of soil and water also permit to adopt this policy, as Assam has been experiencing severe flood during the cultivation time and it is also a delicate zone of soil erosion in hilly areas.

Women's Participation In The Projects :

Women play an important role in watershed development schemes and influence in various decision making processes of village activities in a significant way. Tribal women have an important role in maintaining the household livelihood system. In poor families, they are largely responsible for collection of food, fuel and fodder. Therefore, involvement of women in watershed development projects is very crucial. There are ample opportunities for empowering tribal women both in the political and socio-economic field if the project authorities endeavour to develop location-specific strategies to involve women in their areas in activities meant for women.

The watershed programme focuses on activities of women both for reducing drudgery and increasing their efficiency and also plans and provides for development of specific implements suited to women. They provide fuel efficiency devices and also promote healthy environment in homes and surroundings. Special training courses are generally arranged to train women in processing and handing of bio fertilizers to the entire block where

these micro watersheds are located. They can encourage formation of groups consisting 2/3 or 5/6 numbers of women. The women will take active role in self-help group formation where they will take up income generation activities like nurseries, food processing units, weaving centers, knitting and embroidery centers etc. Many small scale and cottage industries can be developed with the help of locally available resources. The poor landless women are willing to undertake land-based activities. The regeneration of wasteland holds promise for improving food security at the household level. Given rights over land they have worked on, leads to social, economic and political empowerment of tribal women.

In watershed development projects the rate of participation of tribal women in village organizations has been increasing. Traditionally, even among more egalitarian tribal communities, women have not taken part in the 'gram sabha', but this is slowly changing. The 'gram sabha' is the traditional community organization and the supreme decision making body is presided over by the elders. The more isolated the village from government programmes, the more important the 'gram sabha' is in organizing community development action.

Even in the 'panchayat' women are coming to have a more visible role. These days some 'mahila sangsthan' are beginning to represent women's corners at the village level, such as men's drinking. The dynamism and power of women's organizations are highly dependent on strong women leaders. Some villages also have other, often temporary, women's group, which are never registered. These are usually set up by the women themselves in response to their common concerns over a given social or economic problems. Examples of such groups are those motivated by local school teachers or forest guards to fight for causes such as the scarcity of drinking water or roads. Govt. agencies and NGOs have established various women's groups in many villages around development initiatives. The most common are women's groups for savings and credit and income generation schemes. The women's group that has grown out of the 'watershed development committees of the Rajiv Gandhi

Watershed Mission' is an example. In this case, women are encouraged to undertake income generating activities, open separate bank accounts and register their organizations etc.

Future Strategies :

In the near future through watershed development programme, as a people's participatory programme, women empowerment can be enhanced in the rural tribal areas with some strong strategies.

1. There is a need to make the society aware for this specific task through training and awareness campaigns. Awareness campaign should be also conducted to popularize for the ecological restoration in the rural areas.
2. There must be some coordination among various formal and informal organizations in the village and watershed committee that impinge on issues of tribal women.
3. It is needed to have a planned and systematic approach of the government for the involvement of voluntary organization in development of tribal women from time to time.
4. There is a need to analyse in a comparative perspective reasons for success/failure of watersheds in development of tribal women.

Thus in watershed development and management programme people's awareness, participation and response are of utmost importance in improving the economy of the beneficiaries and hence that of the community.

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Empowerment of Women for Peace Building in Assam

* Tom Mangattuthazhe

Our gathering here today comes at a particularly critical and challenging time. The events and atrocities which are currently unfolding in the region have shocked us all and continue to shroud community relations with apprehension and growing pessimism. The unspeakable suffering inflicted upon innocent civilians, women and children over the past few years constitutes a flagrant breach of national and international law and human rights. Despite international Instruments, Constitutional provisions, special laws, the status of women continues to be a cause of concern. The question, is : Have the women been able to reap the benefits provided for them under the Constitution of India? The answer, unfortunately is not encouraging. There is a long way to go to achieve the goals enshrined in the Constitution.¹

It saddens us and confounds our hopes and expectations that the dark legacy of cross cultural intolerance armed conflicts and violence, not only take a vast toll on human life, but also impedes social and human development and depletes resources. In situations of violence and conflicts, we have seen how the vulnerable and weaker segments of society - women and children - are to an alarming degree the primary victims and targets of these aggressions.

Our current disillusionment, however, should not lead us into greater pessimism and despair because I believe that humankind's dispositon for coexistence and peace outweighs the propensity for violence. It is possible and vital to dedicate and commit ourselves to avert violence at all levels, to resolve conflict through peaceful means and to forge attitudes of understanding

and active concern towards one another.

This is a moment of great peril, and great promise. We stand at a crossroads, where our region face the prospect of two widely different visions for our future: the potential for peace is greater than ever; the potential for violence and chaos is greater than ever. At a moment such as this, it is absolutely vital that we decide which vision we want to hold.

And by "we," I mean the people of this land particularly every women of this region. It is time for women to stand up and speak out. To make clear what we value, and what our vision includes. Women function as caretakers in our society. We care for ourselves, for our parents, for our children if we have them; and we care for the earth, for the peace and security of this and future generations.

2. Women is the Hope for Peace

The women will have to bring peace to our region. Men don't seem able to do it. I don't solicit this statement either; some of them do it seriously, and somewhat sadly.

It won't be the women alone who bring peace, it will have to be women and men together and women must come fully into their natural power. They need to organize and connect in ways that bring into balance the relative influence of men and women in deciding local and national perspectives, policies and actions.

3. Women Peace Makers Around the world

There are numerous examples of women who have taken the cause of peace around the world, let me give few examples.

Dorothy Day

Dorothy Day was born in Brooklyn on November 8, 1897. When the Second World War began, Dorothy Day retained the teaching of human brotherhood and would not give up her pacifism. In June 1940 their "Peace Edition" of the Catholic Worker (A news paper started by her) suggested that they could use nonviolent means to resist an invader. Day wrote

about the immorality of conscription, and she urged people to be Conscientious Objectors. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Catholic Worker headline and subhead line read. **Our Country Passes from Undeclared to Declared War; We Continue Our Christian Pacifist Stand. In addition to the weapons of starvation of its Enemy, our Country is now using the weapons of Army, Navy, and Air Force.**

Dagmar Wilson

Dagmar Wilson was the mother of three and worked as an artist illustrating children's books. She became concerned about the policies of the Cold War and was influenced by the ideas of Linus Pauling, Bertrand Russell, and Albert Einstein. After hearing a speech by psychiatrist Jerome Frank, she joined the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE). During the Berlin wall crisis she read about the protest of Bertrand Russell and was moved to do something about his arrest. When she learned that SANE was planning no response, she called her friends. On September 21, 1961 they came up with the idea that for peace women could go on strike for one day. The next day the women began issuing their appeal to "End the Arms Race- Not the Human Race, "proclaiming," We strike against death, desolation, destruction and on behalf of life and liberty. **Women devote their lives to raising children to be healthy and good citizens, but in the nuclear age all women, including mothers, have an urgent duty to work for peace so that their children will have a future.**

Barbara Deming

The tremendous influence of feminism on the peace movement in the 1960s and 1970s is perhaps best typified by Barbara Deming. Writing for The Nation and Liberation magazines, she described her participation in various nonviolent protest movements. She visited Cuba and North Vietnam and reported the viewpoints of the other side. She explained the philosophy and methods of the Committee for Nonviolent Action

(CNVA) and their recommendation of unilateral disarmament to all countries including the Soviet Union. In her account of the San Francisco to Moscow walk the mirror images of Russian and American fears and defense policies were revealed. At the same time the person-to-person effectiveness of nonviolent direct action was eloquently portrayed. By walking for peace in the South she combined the quest for civil rights and justice with peace and nonviolence. During the Vietnam War she lectured and wrote about the atrocities the United States was perpetrating against the Vietnamese.

Jody Williams

In 1997 Jody Williams and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) won the Nobel Peace Prize for helping to get 121 nations to sign the Mine Ban Treaty in Ottawa. Before she died, Princess Diana had also worked on this issue. As of 2005 this treaty has been ratified by 143 nations, but the United States, Russia, China, India, both Koreas, Pakistan, Israel, Egypt, Iran, and Iraq are among the 42 nations that have refused. About a hundred million landmines exist in the earth, and despite these recent efforts about 15,000 to 20,000 casualties still occur each year. Williams explained how landmines, once they have been placed, do not discriminate between soldiers and civilians, and after the end of the war they remain deadly indefinitely unless they are removed. She estimated that seventy countries have been contaminated by tens of millions of mines. Cambodia still has about five million from the 1970s. The United States military reported that about thirty million mines were scattered throughout Afghanistan in the 1980s. Six million landmines were sown in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Angola has nine million; Mozambique and Somalia have a million each. The number of landmines stockpiled throughout the world is estimated at 100-200 million.

Aung San Suu Kyi

Aung San Suu Kyi was born in Rangoon on June 19, 1945. Her father Aung San, who led the independence revolution

and was a national hero, was assassinated on July 19, 1947. Her mother Khin Kyi was ambassador to India 1960-67, and Suu Kyi was influenced by the nonviolent philosophy of Gandhi. She earned a degree in philosophy, politics, and economics at Oxford University in 1967, and she worked for the United Nations Secretariat in New York from 1969 to 1971. On July 23 General Ne Win, who had ruled Burma as a one-party state since 1962, announced his retirement and proposed a referendum on whether to have a one-party or multi-party system. The central committee of the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) elected new leaders who decided not to have the referendum.

Student demonstrations led to arrests, curfews, and declaration of martial law on August 3 as 10,000 people gathered. Five days later on 8-8-88 at 8:08 a.m. the pro-democracy movement was founded, and a general strike began with tens of thousands demonstrating in Rangoon. On August 15 Aung San Suu Kyi proposed a People's Consultative Committee to act as an intermediary between the students and the government. Eleven days later she spoke to a rally of a half million people outside the Shwedagon Pagoda, calling for free and fair elections as soon as possible.

Aung San Suu Kyi has written about the need for democracy, nonviolence, and national unity. She countered criticisms that democracy is not Burmese. In "Quest of Democracy" she described the ten Buddhist duties of kings, which are liberality, morality, generosity (self-sacrifice), integrity, kindness (courage), austerity (self-discipline), non-anger, nonviolence, patience, and not opposing the will of the people. She argued that these Buddhist values and principles of accountability were more likely to produce democracy, respect for public opinion, and just laws than a ruling class that does not honor the will of the people.

Medea Benjamin

Medea Benjamin worked for ten years as an economist and nutritionist in Latin America and Africa for the United Nations

Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Health Organisation, and the Swedish International Development Agency. After being a senior analyst for Food First, in San Francisco she co-founded Global Exchange in 1988. Ten years later the Washington Post credited this organization with putting labour right on the human rights agenda. Global Exchange helped to organize large protests against the World Trade Organization meeting at Seattle in December 1999. Benjamin was instrumental in coordinating the anti-sweatshop campaigns that have sprung up on college campuses, and she has led the effort to get corporations, such as Nike and the Gap, to establish ethical codes of conduct. In 1999 her work helped expose the indentured servitude of garment workers in Saipan that led to a billion-dollar lawsuit against seventeen retailers. She has also promoted worker right in China, the liberation of Indonesia from the tyranny of General Suharto, and self-determination for East Timor. Benjamin supported the peace process between the Zapatistas and the Mexican government and has struggled to get the embargoes against Cuba and Iraq lifted. In 2000 Medea Benjamin was the Green Party candidate for the US Senate in California. She has written and edited books to help the citizens of the first and third worlds, and she wrote a biography of Brazil's first poor and black woman senator, Benedita da Silva.

Peace Pilgrim

On January 1, 1953 a woman calling herself Peace Pilgrim began walking around the United States and Canada for world peace. By 1964 she had walked 25,000 miles, and she kept walking, praying, counseling and teaching until her death in an automobile accident on July 7, 1981. She owned only the clothes she wore, a comb, a folding toothbrush, a pen, a few letters. She walked until she found shelter, and she fasted until she was given food. She discovered the golden rule as a child and believed she could make friends by being friendly. She had a deep belief in God and prayer and taught spiritual principles to all she met.

4. Women Peace activists of India

"Mahila Shanti Sena"² (MSS), which means 'Women's Peace Force'. This 5,000-member strong cadre of women in Bihar, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Manipur is convinced that it can, by sheer moral force, tackle anything, from resolving the daily problems of villagers, farmers, women and other marginalised groups to holding a dialogue with hardcore militants.

And their magic appears to be working. In Assam's Nalbari district, for instance, the initiative has shut the people's doors to militants. And in Gokhar Dahak village in Bihar's Jamui district, MSS solved an irrigation problem faced by local farmers - through sheer hard labour. The farmers were worried because it was the second year that their crops were wilting for want of canal water. The government authorities did not show any interest and finally, when the men decided to help themselves, 300 women from the MSS present at the meeting volunteered their assistance.

MSS has been instrumental in forcing the closure of several bhattis (a place where illicit liquor is made). MSS forced the bhattis to close down, because the women of the village wanted it. Now the men do not drink frequently and the women are happy. Any woman over 18 years of age can become an MSS member by paying an annual fee of five rupees. However, potential members must not be affiliated to any political party. MSS members receive no remuneration or stipend for the work they take upon themselves.

MSS members are trained over a period of four to seven days. Apart from being oriented towards the movement's ideology, they also learn how to address and resolve various social issues. The training schedule is designed so as not to disrupt women's routines in their homes and to maximise attendance. MSS meetings are forums during which social and economic issues are regularly discussed, and members are taught not to discriminate against the girl child and to discourage the practice of dowry.

MSS members also maintain a register of women voters in their areas and motivate them to attend the gram sabha (village assembly), participate and raise issues related to education, health and development.

MSS activities are not limited to resolving domestic or local problems. In the militancy-affected areas of Assam, their intervention have eased tension in some areas. In Nalbari district, three kilometres from the Bhutan border, militants were using the area surrounded by forests as a hideout, both for themselves and for keeping the people they kidnapped for ransom. But over the past two years, kidnapping incidents have come down considerably here. This happened after 1,000 MSS members called a meeting and served a notice on the militants saying that they would no longer cooperate.

In October-November 2003, the ULFA cadres had ordered Hindi-speaking people to leave Assam; they had killed 80 migrant labourers working in tea gardens, and were spreading fear in the Kumarkata, Lakhimpur and Tezpur blocks. As a result, many of the Hindi-speaking people were seeking refuge in police stations at night. Then MSS marched through the streets carrying banners and proclaiming the message of peace. About 3,000 people joined this march; then people stopped going to police stations for refuge because they realised that the local people were with them. Despite the fact that MSS faces financial difficulties, they do not get funds from any agency; it continues to function as a force to reckon with.

Mother Teresa

The world may be full of good people, great humanitarians that really care, and people who donate billions of dollars for the a good reason but Mother Teresa was the one who dedicated everyday of her adult life caring for "The dying, the crippled, the mentally ill, the unwanted, the unloved" and she valued every minute of it. She fed them, sheltered them, and cleaned their wounds. She made them feel good, loved and wanted. In her life of more than eight decades, Mother Teresa made the poorest of

the poor feel a sense of belonging. She went out of her way to do everything possible to help people who were a burden to the society and shunned by everyone.

5. Women Peace Makers In Assam

Mrs. Indira Goswami is a powerful voice of our state and is associated with PCG. She said, "The government should listen to the boys. Why have they taken the path of violence? They are our boys, with guns in their hands. We have maintained the armed struggle for the last quarter of a century. So we cannot simply ignore them"

Diphu Citizens Peace Forum (DCPC) I can also tell about a number of women in Karbi Anglong who championed the cause of peace. Most of them are part of our civil society organization called Diphu Citizens Peace Forum (DCPF). The process of drawing women together across political, geographic and ethnic barriers has been particularly gratifying, especially at the grass-roots level during the conflicts in Karbi Anglong. These women in collaboration with other allies, have been actively engaged in promoting mediation, peace and dialogue often under extremely difficult circumstances. This has led to the creation of many women led local and regional networks for peace.

6. The Way Forward :- We make the future we want

Our region is a noble region, a beacon to the country: it can represent freedom, democracy, prosperity, civil rights. We need to relate to the rest of the world by sharing our good fortune and making our world more secure.

Our male leaders have too easily, too readily, too often turned to force to solve problems. As a result, our communities find itself increasingly isolated. Women can and should offer another way. When women talk about building security, we refer better relations, diplomacy, and efforts to stop the spread of deadly virus of violence and hatred.

We want to build a world where our families are safe; and to realize that vision, we think about extending a hand to all

likeminded persons. We believe that in the long run, we will be safer and stronger if it is respected, rather than feared. Some of the urgent tasks in this regard are the following.

Ensure Women's representation

The participation of women in power structures and their involvement in efforts for the prevention and resolution of conflicts is imperative for peace. As such, there is a need for increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and local institutions. Women also have an important role to play in advancing knowledge of world cultures and religions through incorporating the teaching of languages, history and socio-political thought of various civilizations concerned with building inter-cultural bridges and partnerships. There is the need to view women as much more than victims, empower them to make their full contributions at the peace table and in post-conflict reconstruction. We know these lessons well, but too frequently, in the process of responding to the latest crises, issues related to conflict prevention in general - much less the role of women in this process - get lost in the shuffle. And yet it is precisely in the midst of crises that these issues should take center stage.

Promote ethnic solidarity of Women

How do we organize the power and perspective of women? Connect women-based groups and individuals into one-on-one relationships with women-based groups so that they come to know each other directly and personally. Multiply these connections by tens of thousands with each group coming to know the members of the other by name, family, desires, needs, passions, and her or his living conditions. They come to know each "other" as "family" -- and that changes everything. As education and information flow both directions, a ripple effect begins where we all become better informed and more open, and the wisdom of the collective grows; and as wisdom grows, violence loses meaning and muscle. We enter a time of greater sensitivity, awareness, understanding, expertise, and complexity.

It must be global with national and regional and grass root level orientation because violence is global, national, regional and very much local. This work needs to be supported as the very substance of peace in Northeast India.

Strengthen Women's capacity for leadership and Peace

This is why there is a need today for a more positive and influential role for women in promoting the values of peace and tolerance in our societies. Women's capacity for leadership must be utilized to the full and to the benefit of all in order to progress towards a culture of peace. Their historically limited participation in governance has led to a distortion of concepts and narrowing of processes. "The Assam Movement led by students and the newly formed Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) of the 1980s was characterized by mass representation of women. But one never say any woman make it to the ranks of their decision making bodies, be it the AGP office or in any students union bodies. One also did not see any individual women or member of a mahila samiti address the misdoings of those people (Whom they supported during the Movement) who consequently became political leaders and ministers".³ This is the crux of the problem. Mahila Samities have not been able to question the bastion of the power structure, which is predominantly male, be it in the Congress, AGP or any other political party of the past and present. Today, the call for women to transcend their traditional roles can no longer be considered merely an issue of equality of human rights. It has become a requisite if we are to hold our societies together. Women bring to the cause of peace among people to distinctive experiences and perspective. Women's role in giving and sustaining life has provided them with skills and insights essential to peaceful human relations and social development. Women subscribe less readily than men to the myth of the efficacy of violence, and they can bring a new vision to a joint effort of moving towards peace. "A significant case at hand, of a women's body asserting itself in the broader framework of the Naga Civil society for socio-political

transformation is the Naga Mothers Association (NMA). With their theme: Shed No more Blood and their active involvement as negotiators and mediators of peace and justice beyond tribal lines, they have become a part of the vanguard of the process of attaining justice and peace for the Nagas.¹³

Work towards a regional Vision

To speak of our regional vision realistically, we know that the time has come to mobilise the talents and energies of all the members of our societies. Only in that way can we achieve sustainable and equitable economic and political development. It is time for women, side by side with men, to assume an effective and positive role in planning and implementing these vast developmental tasks, and in time play a more positive role in the international arena. Today's globalization intensifies the process of marginalization among all the tribes. With greater effort to take control of the resources of the Northeast, one can expect more resistance from the local people and greater repression in the name of national security. That is where the social leadership, the voluntary sector, religious leaders and education have to come together to develop alternatives to these processes. Traditionally, government policy and programmes have focused on providing for women's practical needs such as health care, education, literacy programmes, housing utilities and other basic services. Now there is a pressing need for long term thinking and planning for women's strategic needs.

Specific Peace Building activities by women

- * Development of early warning mechanisms and post-conflict reconstruction mechanisms.
- * Building partnership for information sharing, advocacy and campaigning on conflict prevention and conflict resolution.
- * Education and awareness raising on the role of women in peace-building and conflict resolution.
- * Monitoring women's participation in conflict prevention and peace-building.

- * Support for processes and policy reform to stop the manufacture, importation and usage of small arms in order to facilitate the promotion of a culture of peace.
- * Exchange and mentoring programmes for women leaders working on conflict issues.
- * Capacity building for conflict resolution and training on conflict management skills.
- * Information sharing and partnership development for research on women's role in conflict mediation and resolution.
- * Research and documentation of women's role in conflict resolution.

References

International Instruments for women Empowerment

At the International level, prohibition against sex discrimination was first articulated in the United Nations Charter of 1945 and later reiterated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. Since then, virtually all human rights instruments have reinforced and extended protections against discrimination. The International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights adopted in 1966 guarantees equal protection of the law to both sexes. The International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also adopted in 1966 promises women equality of status. The Fourth World Conference on Women, held at Beijing brought us further forward by reaffirming gender equality as a fundamental pre-requisite for social justice.

Perhaps the most important conceptual advance in the international law of women's rights is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), effective 1981, which provides that women be given rights equal to those of men on equal terms. The Preamble of CEDAW maintains that the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields.

National Instruments for women Empowerment

The Preamble to our Constitution refers to the promise of social justice. Right to equality has been enshrined as a Fundamental Right under Chapter III of the Constitution, which also has a provision for affirmative action in favour of women.

Article 14 confers on men and women equal rights and opportunities in the political, economic and social spheres.

Article 15 prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, etc.

Article 15(3) makes a special provision enabling the State to make affirmative discriminations in favour of women.

Article 16 provides for equality of opportunities in matter of public appointments for all citizens.

Article 39(a) lays down that the State shall direct its policy towards securing all citizens, men and women, equally, the right to means of livelihood, while Article 39(c) ensures equal pay for equal work.

Article 42 directs the State to make provision for ensuring just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

The Constitution imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen through Article 51A(e) to renounce the practices derogatory to the dignity of women

² <http://www.indiatogether.org/2005/jan/wom-pecforce.htm>

³ Monisha Behal, *Women's Collectives in Assam: A short History of their Status and Present Day Realities*, in *Changing Women's Status in India: Focus on the Northeast*, Walter Fernandes & Sanjay Barbora (eds) NESRC, Guwahati, 2002, (p-139-150)

⁴ Dolly Kikon, *Political Mobilization of Women in Nagaland: A sociological Background*, in *Changing Women's Status in India: Focus on the Northeast*, Walter Fernandes & Sanjay Barbora (eds) NESRC, Guwahati, 2002, p. 174-182

⁵ Walter Fernandes & Sanjay Barbora (eds) *Changing Women's Status in India: Focus of the Northeast*, NESRC, Guwahati, 2002, p. 136

Role Of Vocational Training For Economic Empowerment Of Karbi Women

Ms. Chitra Sarma*

Introduction :

Women constitute 48 percent of the Indian population. But when we discuss about human rights, we often forget that women as human beings are also entitled to fundamental human rights. We have denied and continue to deny them basic human rights. Even after 60 years of independence these women continue to live in a state of neglect and exploitation. The issue of women and their rights has been an ongoing topic of discussion now-a-days. In recent years, all over the world emphasis have been given mainly on women issues.

In post independent India the constitution framework and policy initiatives have stressed on promoting gender equality in all walks of life. The constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the state to adopt measures of affirmative discrimination in favour of women. The notion of equality is also stressed in the National Policy on Education 1986.

The Concept-Women Empowerment

The Concept of women empowerment was introduced at the International Women Conference at Nairobi is 1985. The term empowerment was defined as "a distribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women". Empowerment is not something which could be made available in form of an object to those whom we think are in need of it. It is not just a concept that could be defined with the help of an universally accepted parameters. It is considered as a process which includes some components.

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1. Equal access to opportunities for using Society's resources.
2. Prohibition of gender discrimination in thought and practice.
3. Economic independence.
4. Freedom from violence.
5. Participation in all decision making bodies.
6. Freedom of choice in matters relating to one's life.

Empowerment is actually a process that addresses all sources and structures of power. The process has to work on an individual as well as a collective level. Women have to be organised and acknowledged in the political field also. The process has to challenge both gender. At the same time development of individuality should also be taken into consideration. Because it is the basic concern of empowerment processes. The very purpose of empowering women is to give equal opportunities to women as that of men so that an egalitarian Indian society could be established in true sense of the term.

Empowering Women Through Education

The most powerful instrument for making women aware of their right is education. It is a milestone for women empowerment because it enables them to respond to opportunities, to challenge their traditional rules and to change their lives. Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. Educating women benefits the whole society. It has a more significant impact on poverty and development than men's education. The role of education in empowerment is not only learning of three R's (reading, writing and arithmetic) but includes

- * Raising awareness.
- * Critical analysis of various structures and
- * Acquiring knowledge for empowerment at all level.

Education should include not only formal education but also skill training and functional literacy. First and foremost of all

it should be inculcated that girls and women are not only housewives and mothers but they are also workers in the economic since they should be educated to perform an indispensable role in the home and in the household economy, as well for bringing enlightenment and emancipation. Empowerment of women through education will develop :

1. Self esteem and self-confidence of women.
2. A positive image of women by recognizing their contribution to the society, economy and polity.
3. Developing decision making abilities.
4. Ability to think critically.
5. Involving in areas like education, empowerment and health.
6. Equal participation in the process of development.
7. Provision of legal literacy and information relating to their right and
8. Knowledge and skill for economic independence.

It is well proved that economic development, social development and education are interdependent and we can not achieve sustainable development when any one of these are missing. It is the responsibility of everyone to remove all the obstacle for women active participation in all spheres of life.

The contemporary Indian society is in a transitional stage which is changing vastly. It also creates a growing realisation among the people that development would have never become self sustaining unless it is accompanied by corresponding changes in the attitudes, values, knowledge and skill of the people as a whole and more particularly of women. In such a situation the role of education is to make the change desirable. It is education that creates modern outlook among women which in turn strengthens their claim for better status in the society and empowering themselves. So in the present context the most important thing is to impart education to women and to make them aware about their status, rights, privileges and make them economically independent.

Economic Status Of Women In India :

According to the census report, 2001 the women literacy is 54.16 percent which is lagging behind the literacy of men which is 75.85 percent. This wide gender disparity in literacy explains why women are backward. Moreover, gender disparity is also neglected in all type and all levels of education. Reserach studies reveal that 80% of the female population in India is rural, economically very active but poor illiterate.

They face enormous problems in labour market. Female workers are engaged in multiple activities which vary from unpaid family work to wage labour outside the home. Their participation in labour force is not only smaller in preparation but also deplorable. They carry out equal responsibilities with their female counterparts but do not get to enjoy equal position. Hence in India, women constitute a deprived section.

Need of Vocational Training For Empowering Women

India lives in villages. Rural women constitute a significant majority of illiterate and poor daily wage earners. They need education and vocational Training that empowers them with basic knowledge, skills and attitudes. Basic education must ensure her economic interdependence, psychological security, political consciousness and healthy life. It also provides her freedom in different ways. That is why appropriate vocational training for them is the need of the hour for economic empowerment. NGO and Voluntary Organisations have a potent role to play in this context. Vocational Training in all those subjects that are inexpensive and requires a little investment in terms of raw materials, equipments, maintenance and space should be incorporated. In this regard short term training courses can be organised and at the same time attitudes for self employment should be fostered among all types of women irrespective of their socio-economic status, level of education and locality.

It is felt that sometime, even a little education greatly increases a woman earning capacity which leads to the changes

in the attitudes, values, knowledge and skills of the girls. Without access to education women are denied the knowledge and skill needed for vocational training. That means, education and vocational training creates the awareness of economic self dependence.

Role of Vocational Training Centres in Bringing About Economic Empowerment of Karbi Women.

The example of economic empowerment is very much prominent in the small town of Diphu which is the headquarter of Karbi Anglong District of Assam. In this backward hill District the Karbis and other tribal people have now a days become very much conscious about economic empowerment. They feel that only education can make them conscious about economic empowerment.

Though Karbi male gives equal treatment and respect to their female counterparts but, there is a vast difference between a literate and an illiterate girl. A little eduction helps them to realise the need of economic independence and thereby they commands higher wages than an illiterate girl. This also creates a need among them to join into some vocational training centres so that, with these vocations they can earn their living and can thereby maintiain a better and healthier life with better status, rights, knowledge and privileges.

Some vocational training centres and production centres in Diphu have been playing a vital role in putting effort for bringing consciousness about economic empowerment among tribal girls. To name a few the efforts of the District Mahila Samiti, Handloom Production Centre, Training cum production Centre for Women. Vocational and Commercial Training Institute, Handloom Training Centre, Moromi Enterprise, Baby Art. Centre, Purnima Jute service Centre have been involved in giving training in some vocations like typing, weaving, cutting, knitting, embroidery, painting, toy making and Jute handicraft etc. Thereby they are trying to give the opportunity to do something in the right earnest.

The table given below shows the numbr of girls trainees in different vocational Centres at Diphu.

Sl. No.	Name of the Vocational Centres	No. of Trainees
1.	District Mahila Samiti	45
2.	Handloom Production Centre	7
3.	Training cum Production Centre for Women	50
4.	Vocational and Commercial Training Institute	17
5.	Handloom Training Centre	14
6.	Moromi Enterprise	20
7.	Baby Art Centre	8
8.	Purnima Jute Service Centre	12

While working in this tribal belt for nearly eight years, it is felt that isolation and lack of exposure to the outside world is a major factor contributing to the negligence of education which has also created unemployment problems. But the establishment of the above mentioned vocational centres have indirectly helped in wooing away the unemployed young tribal girls to be engaged in generating income for sustainable living through some vocation. Most of them have just completed their primary education. They still regret for not completing their schooling because of financial hardship or for some other domestic problems. But a little education have pushed them to take vocational training in their institute and thereby become economically empowered. They also feel that education is needed to achieve equality with the boys. In these centres vocational training courses are for 1 to 6 months duration.

The District Mahila Samiti is a NGO which was established in 1968. The trainees in this NGO are in the age group of 15 to 20 years. There are other four self financing private training Centres and except one, i.e. the Vocational and Commercial Institute, the other three centre are run by women where the

trainees are also girls. It is basically a typewriting training school where both the girls and boys trainees are equal in number. The Handloom Production Centre is the only semi Govt. centre in Diphu. Half of the finance is sponsored by the govt. and rest comes from selling the products of the Centre. The Handloom Training Centre and the Training Cum Production Centre for Women are the two govt. vocational training centre in Diphu. In the former Centre there are 15 seats where 5 seats are for boys and rest 10 seats are for girls and widows. But surprisingly all the 15 seats are occupied by girls. This has given the changing scenario of attitudes, values and urge for education among the girls.

So from the above study it has been found that the vocational training centre in Diphu of Karbi Anglong has inculcated the attitudes among the girls that education can change their present and future lives for the better. It is education which is positively correlated with their attitudes towards economic empowerment. With little education and vocational training they are determined to start their own centres in future. It also creates a modern outlook amongst the girls which in turn strengthen their claim for better status in the society. Because, lack of education implies lack of awareness about their own right and privileges, which ultimately become a factor in deteriorating their status.

Conclusion

Weaker section is not biological or psychological concept but a cultural conditioning. Economic dependence of women forces them to suffer. In fact in male dominted society women have inequal access to employment because majority of them lack education and training which is the surest means to get employment. The only solution to make them economically empowered is to make baic education compulsory and inclusion of vocation subjects in the education systems. At the same time a new environment has to be created and it has to be social movement beginning at the grass root. As a part of the human

family, it is the responsibility of every one to make sure that all of god's creatures are treated with respect and dignity. Now is the time for everyone to take responsibility for our duties to work for the common good of the world. It is also hoped that by empowering women, economically, politically and socially we can bring development and happiness to our society.

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A Glimpse on the Status of Plains Tribal Women of Assam in the Perspective of Women Empowerment

Binita Das*

Introduction :

The Indian society has accorded different status to women from time to time. In ancient India women enjoyed almost equal status with men. During the medieval era, the status of women vis-a-vis went down considerably. The position of women in Modern India has changed significantly. There is a growing awareness that gender inequality is detrimental to the development process of a nation. Of late, in India, the concept of 'empowerment,' 'social justice' have become topics of hot discussion among politicians as well as academicians. It is a fact that the downtrodden castes and groups of India. i.e. scheduled caste, scheduled tribe and other backward castes are as a whole lagging behind, not to speak about the women section of these groups of people. So, along with schemes for empowerment of these groups of people, special steps are taken by the government to ensure advancement of women in all spheres of life.

Objective :

The focus and objective of this paper is to highlight the social status of the plains tribe women of Assam. Here "status" means the position or condition of the plain tribal women folk in the society. It is a humble attempt to look through the problems and prospects of the plains tribal womenfolk of Assam in the perspective of women empowerment.

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Methodology :

The study is based on purely secondary sources i.e. books and journals.

The paper contains four parts. In the first part, it proposes to give a very brief idea on the term "women empowerment". Next, it attempts to give a brief introduction to the Tribes of Assam, both hills and plains, along with a special reference to the characteristic features of tribal women. The third part of the paper deals with the main thrust of the study, i.e. the present status of the plains tribal womenfolk, their problems and governments development schemes concerning tribals in general and plains tribal women in particular. In the concluding part along with some observations it tries to propose some suggestions for improvement of the condition of the plains tribal women of Assam.

(I)

Considering the fact that half of the population of the world are women, progress of any state or society is largely dependent upon the condition of women. Hence the concept of women empowerment rise. Empowerment may be understand as a process of increasing the spiritual, political, social and economic strength of marginalized individuals and communities. Empowerment of women means a better definition of power relations between men and women. Women's participation in decision making in socio - economic and political spheres can bring about women empowerment. Women empowerment is an indispensable tool for economic development and reduction of poverty of a country. According to United Nation population network (POPIN) Guidelines on women's Empowerment, it has five competents, viz, women's sense of self worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social and economic order, nationally and internationally. (Women Empowerment and SHGs, Mukul Saikia, Assam Tribune, 13/07/2007)

The complexity of the problem of women empowerment process itself requires both macro and micro considerations and it is difficult to pass a judgment on its success by using a single or just a few selected criteria. The major discussion of empowerment process pertains mainly to the profile of women workforce, status of female - headed households, policies and programs related to women, empowerment of women through literacy and women in panchayat. Hence, women empowerment has to be understood through these dimensions in conjointly rather than in isolation.

In India, right from the beginning of Five Year planning (1951-56) there has been endeavor towards the development of women, however, Sixth Plan(1980-85) has been marked by a clear shift in the approach, from 'welfare' schemes to 'development' oriented plans towards women. More recently, the Ninth Plan (1997-2002) made two significant changes in the conceptual strategy of planning for women development. The ongoing Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-07) continues with the strategy of Empowering women as an agent of social change and development. For this purpose a sector specific three-fold strategy Social Empowerment, Economic Empowerment and Gender Justice has been adopted. (Empowering Women, Arundhati Chattopadhyay, YOJANA, Oct. 2006)

The policy of the Government of India for empowerment and development of women lays emphasis on removal of women's illiteracy and obstacles inhibiting their access to elementary education, women's participation in vocational, technical and professional education at different levels.

(II)

Tribes Of Assam :

Assam is blended with many hills & plains. The land is a melting pot of diverse ethnic groups. It is the homeland of different indigenous tribal people. Before going to the point of the discussion a brief introduction of the tribes of Assam demands

its necessity. Tribes living in the states of Assam are categorised into fourteen hill tribes and nine plains tribes as shown below :-

Scheduled Tribes (P)

- a. Birmans of Cachar.
- b. Boro, Boro Kachari.
- c. Deori.
- d. Hojai.
- e. Kachari, Sonowal.
- f. Lalung (Tiwa).
- g. Mech.
- h. Miri.
- i. Rabha.

Scheduled Tribes (H)

- a. Chakma.
- b. Dimasa Kachari.
- c. Garo.
- d. Hajong.
- e. Hmar.
- f. Khasi, Jaintia, Synteng, Pnar, War, Bhoi, Lyngngam.
- g. Any Kuki Tribes (37 groups)
- h. Lakher.
- i. Man (Tai Speaking).
- j. Mikir (Karbi).
- k. Any Naga tribes
- l. Pawi.
- m. Syntheng.

Basic Features : Of The Plains Tribals Of Assam :

Each tribal community of Assam has its own customs, religion, language and a way of life and as such each one has a distinct identity of its own. There race for development also differs from tribe to tribe and from region to region. The plains tribal society are patriarchal. Agriculture is the mainstay of the tribal communities of Assam. Besides paddy they cultivate mustard, pulses, jute and vegetable to a limited extent. The tribal people of Assam rears animals like cow, goat, pig, buffalo and birds like duck, hen and pegeon etc. Rice beer is their most favourite beverage.

Among cottage industries mention may be made of manufacturing of bamboo and cane products. Sericulture,

specially, rearing of Endi, Mulberry silk and muga is a very important cottage industry confined mainly to the womenfolk of all the tribal communities of Assam. Spinning and weaving are very common sight in every tribal village. In fact a tribal women without having knowledge of spinning and weaving is rather unthinkable and in the marriage market a girl having no knowledge of weaving and spinning has no place at all.

Although most of the tribal communities in Assam profess their traditional religions, a smaller section of the plains and hill tribes have accepted christianity. Through christianity rays of western education and modernisation entered in those societies.

The tribal communities of the North-East including the plain tribals are still having their traditional institutions like the village councils/panchayats, bachelors dormitories institution of mutual help and co-operation.

Traditional Role Played by Women In the Society :

The tribal women play distinctive role in various sphere of their socio-economic and cultural life. It is a general view that the women's status as a whole is better in the North-East than in the mainland of India and even better in the tribal communities than in non-tribal societies. Studies on tribal women also show that women have occupied more or less equal status with men though not high. In the tribal societies of Asam whether hills or plains, women are found to be more laborious than men and in reality they work more than men without practically having no leisure from morning till leaving for bed at night. Except the construction of house and ploughing, the tribal women do all outdoor and indoor jobs. Their duty is to collect firewood, fetch water, cook food, brew rice beer, thresh paddy and dehusk it, catch fish, manage piggery, goaterly and poultry, weaving besides agricultural work.

The wife and husband in the tribal societies of Assam are equal partners in their day to day life. Most of the marriages among them are concluded by the people who know each other intimately.

Tribal women in fact play an important role in their economy and occupies an important place in the socio-economic structure of their society. The womenfolk earn for themselves through their livestock, poultry, weaving etc. Although they play a vital and indispensable role in the economy contributing much more labour than men, they are denied right to inherit property. Moreover, though at home men and women are equal partners and in every household decision of womenfolk are respected, in social life however, women can not speak or give decision in the village council. They have to do what the male say and are bound to obey them.

(III)

Government's Role In Empowering Tribal Women Of Assam :

According to International Labour Organisation, "Development is defined as a process which involves improvement in the quality of life of the weaker sections and a greater participation and involvement of the masses in the process of decision making in the economic, social, political and cultural life of a society."* The purpose of development, is thus, to provide increasing opportunities to all people irrespective of sex for a better life. It demands equal right and opportunities for men women to develop their personalities and a congenial atmosphere for their enjoyment. The socio-economic scenario of India indicates that scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and some minority communities, including the women population in general and women of these sections in particular are backward socially, economically and educationally. It may be stated that their educational backwardness is the major cause of backwardness in other fields. In the post-independence period several efforts have been made by the central and state governments for the development of the backward communities including the tribal

* Tapan Neeta, "Tribal Rights In The Global Development Paradigm" in Tribal Issues in India I", Ed, Sah, D.C. and Sisodia Yotindar Singh

all over India. Special provisions has been made in the article 46 of Indian Constitution to promote with special care the economic and educational interest of the scheduled tribes.

Several economic programmes and projects have been undertaken to improve the economic condition of the tribal people. Integrated tribal development project (ITDPs), vocational training in tribal areas are inaugurated especially for the development of the tribals. For the upliftment of the tribal people who has lived under below poverty line, various programmes are implemented. The bulk of ST/SC people are living in rural areas of Assam and the government has adopted Rural Development Schemes specially for their development. "The concern for ST/SC that is reflected under the Rural Development Programmes of the Government" as observed by Bhaskar Barua, in his article Rural Development and scheduled castes/scheduled tribes development.*

The programs specially taken for poverty alleviation or economic development in rural areas including tribal areas are Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Training for Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM), Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCR), Jawahar Rojgar Yojana and many others. Among these the DWCR is a sub scheme under the IRDP introduced in 1982-83 with the primary objective of upliftment of rural women below the poverty line. These were the beginning only and some other schemes are implemented to promote the economic condition of the tribal (plains and hills) people and special attention is given for the upliftment of the tribal womenfolk.

Then, for educational development of the tribal people certain policies are adopted by the government. In fact, in the development schemes special provisions for the spread of education and eradication of illiteracy are made concerning the weaker section of India, i.e. STs, SCs, and especially the womenfolk of these groups. The ongoing 10th plan has laid adequate emphasis on universalization of Elementary Education

* Bulletin, TRI, Vol-I, No-V, 1987.

(UEE) with a view to ensuring completion of five years of primary schooling for all children by 2007. Among the five parameters of the scheme one is Universal Enrolment where provisions are made for enrolment of all children including girls, disabled children and children belonging to S.Cs and S.Ts in primary classes and provision of upper primary education for them. In the programmes specific steps are taken for correction of gender imbalances as well as caste imbalances. Some such schemes are (a) National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL), launching of residential school for girls under Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya camps for out of school girls, (b) DPEP In low female literacy districts, (c) Mahila Sanghas under Mahila Samakhya Scheme for women's empowerment, (d) free education for girls (e) Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (K G B V) scheme seems to meet social equity as it caters to the educational needs of girls belonging to S.C. and S.T. and minorities in educationally backward blocks. The scheme has a target of enrolling 75% of the children belonging to minorities, SCs/STs in these schools. In the field of non-formal education and total literacy programme in tribal areas and specially women are an area of special concern. Thus development programmes for the upliftment of the tribal women through education are implemented. But the question is what have we accomplished and how far these programmes help the plains tribal women of Assam to enhance their prestige in the society or empower them.

During the first two decades of the 20th century formal education among Boro Kacharis and other plains tribal women has begun. Of late, some tribal women have come up in the field of education, but their number is so poor that their presence is not felt by the society. Better education and reservation policy have enabled some tribal women to enter into a variety of occupations. Now there are many tribal women who are showing success in many spheres. There are plains tribal women in medical, engineering, administration, teaching, etc. and show their worth though the number of such women are very small. The programmes for development of women and children in rural

areas has speeded up income generating activities in tribal districts. It has given them self confidence and helped the process of their empowerment. Few plains tribal women take active part in politics too. One of the most important features of the political scenario of present days Assam is ethnic conflict. Many plain tribal communities like the Bodo, Mishing, Tiwa, Rabha etc. have started their struggles of ethnicity, of which causes are rooted deep in the colonial and post-colonial period. The ethnic movements are of no concern in this discussion, what concern us is that of the women's parts in these movements. These movements have brought an awakening to the womenfolk of those communities and they have played an important role in the ethnic movements. Those women who take active part in the movements have come to prominence and earn for themselves a prestigious position in the political and social life of the community as well as in the state. Different Plains tribal women's organisations have sprang up during the last decade of the 20th century. Some of the important plains tribal women's organisations are Mishing Women's Association, Bodo Women's Justice Forum etc. These organizations have some progressive outlook and their mission and vision are to fight for the cause of the all round development of their communities through empowering their womenfolk.

(IV)

Conclusion :

Mao-Tse-Tung had once said, "Half the sky, thou art woman." No society can advance without giving women their due recognition. In India, there is now a widespread consciousness of the necessity of engaging in gendered analysis that recognizes both difference and inequality, and its implications for development design. Policy makers of India suggest specific strategies, policies and programs for the empowerment of women. The policy of the Government of India for empowerment and development of women lays emphasis on removal of women's illiteracy and obstacles inhibiting their access to elementary education, women's participation in vocational, technical and

professional education at different levels. Specific policies for enhancement of the status of the plains tribal women are also adopted by the government.

But the question is how far have we accomplished? No doubt the development programs have enhanced the self confidence and economic independence of one section of the plains tribal women of Assam. Though the number is insignificant, plains tribal women enjoying different professions prove their worth. But, as a whole, the scene is not encouraging. The development programs being, male oriented, fail to reach the womenfolk. Many of them still remain bound to certain ethos, norms and traditions which stand as obstacles towards their emancipation. Illiteracy is very much there in its ugliest form, which in the process has made them stuck to some age old irrational traditional superstitious beliefs. They have poor access to nutrition, health education and so on. Except the few empowered women of the plains tribal population majority live in the same age old condition which is most unsuitable at modern times. Social change no doubt has come, though slowly. Some radical changes in dress, pattern of behaviour, occupation, life style have been welcomed by the womenfolk and the society too accept them. "But this material change", as observed by S.L. Barua, "has not improved their status in the real senses of them, making them capable of decision making process inside and outside the family." (Tribal Women and Development : Tradition, Culture and Status of Women in N.E. Tribal Societies, S.L. Barua, Tribal Women and Development, P.14). One of the major factors of the slow progress of the government's scheme of empowering plains tribal women is that most of the tribal villages are situated in remote areas which are lagging behind in development process comparing with other parts of the country. Bad communication still is a major problem of many tribal areas.

So, to face the obstacles of empowering tribal womenfolk of Assam we may propose some suggestions.

Suggestions :

Emphasis should be laid on overall socio-cultural development and not merely on material progress. Development planning should be worked out taking into account the customary traditions of the tribal people.

Formal and non-formal education must be imparted to the tribal women so as to enable them to raise their status and come forward for development of the community as a whole.

In formulating scheme for the development of tribal women against illiteracy, exploitation and social injustice, special attention should be given in implementation of the scheme.

The problems and situation of rural tribal women are peculiar and need close study while formulating any programme for them.

Scheme should be designed and implemented especially for tribal women which will open up new avenues for their employment and make economically independent.

Scheme should be designed in such a way that their inner skills come out can be engaged in income generating activities.

In designing future planning, there is need to include women's advisories at all levels.

In the programmes of educational development social worker too should take part.

For economic development of the plains tribal women they should be encouraged for undertaking business of their choice-animal keeping like piggy, goater, poultry etc. and handicraft products, which are in fact their household activities, in co-operative system. The SHG system is already in operation and more priority should be given to engage more of the plains tribal womenfolk of grassroots level.

There is no easy or quick fix remedial to the problems related to empowerment of women in India or in Assam, whether in case of tribal or non-tribal. The real solution lies in a holistic

approach that deals with all the major interrelated issues of economic welfare, social justice, education, health, religious and customary traditions. The agenda of empowerment of women would simply not be accomplished through legal and constitutional provisions. Women will gain power only when both men and women begin to respect and accept the contribution of women to the society.

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The Social Status Of Women In Dimasa Society In North Cachar Hills District Of Assam

*(An Observation In The Context Of
Empowerment Of Tribal Women)*

Shri Dadul Borah*

Introduction:

In this post modern society it is felt that there is virtually no difference between man and woman except that of the biological difference. Both man and woman are found to participate in any of the activities that a human being can perform. And many of the women through out the globe have excelled in the fields like politics, defense, science and technology and even religion and have proved their potentialities. But it is true in case of a limited numbers of women only. Women in general are lagging behind men almost in every walk of life. It is because of lack of their exposure to many walks of life. Therefore the question of empowerment of women assumes attention of the intellectuals, governments as well as N.G.Os. In India the issue has got much importance because in the traditional Indian society women were deprived of participating in many walks of life. And most of the tribal women in India are still unknown to modernity. Therefore, the empowerment of tribal women in India is a most important issue which should be given particular attention if we are to be a developed nation within the first quarter of this century.

For careful initiative of empowering the tribal women it is very much essential to understand the socio cultural life of the

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tribes. Because the procedures for empowering the tribal women in various walks of life must not stand in opposition to the preservation of their culture. Among other subjects, the status of women in various tribal societies in the North-Eastern region of the country is gaining importance as it indicates the social problems of the women folk in the region. However, very few works in the subject are done in the context of Dimasa tribe in the N. C. Hills District of Assam. Therefore, the author of the paper makes a humble attempt to throw some lights on the social status of women in Dimasa society in N. C. Hills District of Assam with a view to chalk out the problems on the way of empowering women in Dimasa society. The analysis is based on secondary sources of information, personal observation together with informal talks with Dimasa intellectuals.

The term 'status' may simply be defined as "the position a person occupies in the social structure." The term is often combined with another term 'social' role'. Therefore, these two terms (status and role) have an integral relation with each other. "Status" is the position in relation to other positions and 'role' is the pattern of behaviour expected of persons who occupy a particular status. Thus, status is only a social identification tag. A significantly large number of social interactions between individuals in society are status interaction and not personal interaction. Society is the "web of social relationship", as Mac Iver puts it, or "a complex of forms or processes each of which is living and growing by interaction with the others", as C.H. Cooley defines it. This social relationships or interactions are not something static; it is always changing because of the changing nature of society. Therefore, if we consider a period of time, both status and role would also appear to be dynamic concepts. Status changes in relation to other statuses from time to time. And there is a corresponding change to role also. Hence, the term status is a centripetal force for making proper integration of social interaction and to make the social relations in order in various societies throughout the world.

It is an undeniable fact that the women are in key positions

in social as well as family lives of any society. Therefore, the status of women in a society is the index of the standard of its social organization. The standard of a particular society rises and falls in correlation with the rise and fall in the status of women. Of various social relationships, those between male and female are most intimate and stable. The status of women differs from society to society and from time to time in the same society. It is so because of dynamic nature of society.

Now, without going much to the textual references about the status of women the author first tries to give a brief account of the Dimasas and then a general status on women in Dimasa society in N.C. Hills District of Assam basing on the indices viz., status in the family, economic status, religious status, political status and educational status, derived from the universal institution that are available in human society. Finally, the author will try to present a picture of changing trend of the status of women in Dimasa society based on his observation made at Gidingpur village of Maibang, N.C. Hills District of Assam.

The Dimasas--A Brief Note

The North East India is an India in miniature in terms of diverse colourful groups of population belonging to different races and linguistic groups with their distinctive culture. It gave shelter to streams of human waves carrying with them distinct culture and trends of civilization. Austro-Asiatic, Negritos, Dravidians, Alpine, Indo-Mongoloids, Tibeto-Burmese and Aryans have penetrated North east India at different points of time. In such wave of migration the Dimasas - an Indo-Mongoloid group migrated well before several hundred years B.C. Racially although they are Indo-Mongoloid; linguistically they fall under Tibeto-Burman group.

There is a lot of controversy regarding the origin of the word Dimasa. It is better interpreted as DIMANI B'SA - DIMA B'SA - DIMASA, 'Sons of a great river' (Di - Water, Ma - Big, and Sa - children). But the identification of the river is again a controversy. According to some section of people the great river

is the mighty Brahmaputra while others refer to the Dhansiri on whose bank Dimasa civilization developed.

The Dimasas today live mostly in the districts of North Cachar Hills, Karbi-Anglong, Cachar and Nagaon of Assam, Dhansiri valley of Nagaland and a small section of Dimasas are found in Meghalay also. They are broadly classified into five according to their place of inhabitation. They are DIJUASA - Dhansiri valley of Nagaland and Karbi-Anglong District of Assam, DEMBRASA - Kalang - Kapili valley of Nagaon and Karbi - Anglong districts of Assam, HASAUSA - North Cachar Hills, HAWARSA - Barak valley of Assam and SEMSA - Semkhor village in North Cachar Hills district of Assam. With the variation in the place of inhabitation there is a little variation in language, culture, social custom and traditions among the above mentioned groups of the Dimasas.

However, the Dimasas are usually represented by those from the North Cachar Hills in all spheres and particularly in their social life as the district is considered the homeland of the Dimasas.

At present majority of the Dimasas are found in the N.C. Hills district. They are the dominant group in the district with 41% of the district's total population of 1,86,189 as per census 2001. They practise shifting (Jhuming) cultivation while some of them resort to settled cultivations in the little plains available in the Hills district like the Mahur valley at Maibang. Whether they practise Jhuming or settled cultivation their villages are permanent with their traditional village organization.

The Dimasas living in N.C. Hills and Karbi Anglong districts are specified as Hill Tribe by the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Amendment) Act, 1976. The Dimasas living in other parts are specified as plain Tribe.

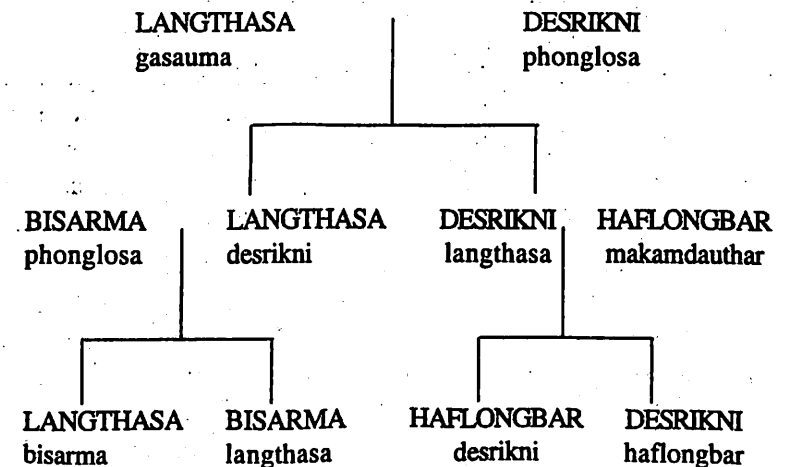
Now, leaving aside this general description of the tribe, the author attempts to present a picture of the status of women in Dimasa society in N.C. Hills district on the basis of the indices as stated earlier.

The Status Of Women In Dimasa Society In N.C. Hills District

a) Status of women in the family :

The Dimasas follow patriarchal system of family structure. But the existence of double descent system is a distinctive feature of Dimasa tribe in the North East India, which is found only among the Toda tribe of Nilgiri Hills in the country. The Dimasas have both patrilineal and matrilineal decent. Hence it is a bi-lineal tribe. Every man and woman in the Dimasa tribe bears allegiance to two clans. A boy and a girl inherit the respective patriclan and matriclan of their parents. Again a father and a son belong to the same patriclan but they belong to two different matriclan. The same is true of a mother and a daughter also. It is so because clan exogamy in terms of both patriclan and matriclan is strictly maintained in Dimasa tribe.

The Clan Exogamy among the Dimasas can be presented as follows :-



(Note : Block capitals signify the primary affiliation and the small letters the secondary affiliation)

* [Source : Danda, D.G. (1984) in 'Tribes of North-East India, Kerotemprel, S. (ed) Calcutta; Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd. P. 420-421.]

The model here shows the clan exogamy form of marriage among the Dimasas. But from the model it is clear that cross - cousin marriage is possible in the Dimasa society. However, it does not happen because of the closeness of relation.

However, after marriage a woman's part clan is changed to her husband's one through a ceremony called **KHELHABRIBA** or **MADAIKHILIMBA**. There are originally altogether forty part clan (**SENGPHONG**) and forty two matriclan (**JULU** or **JADI**). But now the list is increasing because of inclusion of other community members through marriage which is done very carefully by the society to prevent massive inclusion of other community people which may in turn effect their socio-cultural identity. From this existence of a separate clan for women in Dimasa society it can be said that a Dimasa woman has got a social status of her own. But, for official purposes she writes the patriclan as surname.

Clan exogamy and tribe endogamy are strictly followed in the society the violation of which leads to ex-communication from the society.

Marriage through negotiation is the prevailing practice among the Dimasas. But the consent of both the boy and the girl is a must in selecting his/her mate by parents. This fact shows the honourable status of the girl in pre-marital stage as she cannot be given in marriage forcefully to a boy of her disliking.

There is the prevalence of bride price that they call **KALTI**, which is fixed through negotiation. Actually, at present, it is followed only in the name of custom and not as the price of the bride because it is observed that no huge amount of money is paid for the same. The existence of this bride price stands opposite to the existence of dowry in other societies in India. This again shows an honourable status of women in the society.

Divorce is rare in Dimasa society. Pre-marital sex relations are a taboo. If it happens accidentally, the village council penalizes the accused with a fine, which must be paid to the society. If

the girl becomes pregnant due to the said relation the boy is forced to marry the girl. Otherwise he has to pay a fine to the society and compensation to the girl (in the form of money), that they call **KORAT**.

In case of childbirth some pre-natal customs are followed. In the advance stage, she does not move outside the village, nor does she go to the forest or visit cremation ground for fear of harming the baby in the womb by the evil spirits. Also she is not allowed to attend any funeral. Fish without scale and meat of tortoise are strictly prohibited to her. She can carry on her regular household works. The post-natal period is strictly followed. Just before childbirth when the woman starts feeling the pain, a ritual called **KHARAOBA** is performed by sacrificing a duck or an egg. Generally the husband performs it. The mother and the baby is considered polluted till the umbilical cord of the baby gets dry and falls off. During this period the baby and the mother are segregated and she is not allowed to do the normal duties. Nobody is allowed to touch her. When the umbilical cord of the baby falls off, both the parents have their purificatory bath, ceremonial shaving of the head of the newborn baby (**KHANAIGUSUGARBA**) and bathing are done. The house and the household goods are cleaned and with this the period of pollution ends. Following of these customs during the post-natal period ensures the good health of the woman and the baby.

Of course, to run the household Dimasa woman has to work a lot. The works she has to do exclusively are cooking and offering rice (the Dimasas are rice eaters), pounding rice in the mortar and pestle (or carrying rice to the power hullers), brewing of rice beer (and even the distilled one), cleaning in and around the house, offering food to the fowls and pigs etc., and weaving in handlooms. Other works those are performed by both male and female are collecting fire wood, fetching water, collecting roots, plants, leaves, wild fruits and vegetables from the forest etc. After all, heavy works are done by the males and the lighter one by the females.

So it is seen that a woman in Dimasa family has well

defined roles to play in the family and she enjoys equal status with her male counterpart.

b) Economic Status :

Agriculture is the primary occupation of the Dimasas. In the hilly portions they practise shifting cultivation where besides paddy, the staple food - they also cultivate other crops and vegetables as mixed crops. The other crops include cotton, maize, brinjals, ginger, okra, yam, chilies, sesame, mustard etc. In case of shifting cultivation women also help men in all sorts of works except cutting and burning jungles. Women co-operate with men in works like sowing seeds, harvesting products and even selling the surplus product in the market. If, the woman sells the products in the market, she use the cash income for fulfilling common needs or she can keep it for her personal use and need not give in the hands of the male like many other community woman.

Besides shifting cultivation, they also practise settled or plough cultivation in the little plains available within the hills and valleys of the rivers like Mahur Valley at Maibang. Here too, the women do the works of rooting out the paddy plants, planting the plants in the agricultural field, rooting out the weeds and harvesting the paddy crops. In this case also, the surplus paddy is sold in the market both by men and women and the cash income accrues from this goes in fulfilling common needs.

Besides agriculture, animal husbandry and poultry farming are also their secondary occupation. The cash income accrues from these too are commonly used.

The Dimasa woman rears Endi-worm (a kind of silk worms) and weave Endi scarf. The cash income by selling the cocoons or endi scarf is exclusively owned by her. The Dimasas eat the Endi-worms inside the cocoons. Such naked worms picked out from cocoons (LODAMA) are sold in the market @ Rs.120/- to 140/- per Kg. Therefore, besides getting Endi-thread, they earn money by selling the worms. Hence, rearing of Endi-worms is having double benefit for a Dimasa women (i.e. earning of money by selling Endi-scarf and worms). She is also expert

in weaving clothes in her handloom. If there is any cash income by selling the clothes, it also exclusively belongs to the woman. It is particularly true in case of young girls.

As regards inheritance of family property it is observed that the mother's properties like ornaments, clothes and looms etc. go to the daughter(s) and father's properties like land, weapons etc. go to the son(s). Both share the utensils and other household properties. However, it is also observed that in many cases a share of landed property is also given to the daughter if it is available with the parents.

Thus economically a Dimasa woman enjoys greater independent status as compared to many other societies.

c) Religious Status :

The Dimasas have their own religious practices. Animism is still prevalent amongst the Dimasas. Though they had accepted Hinduism as their religious faith during the reign of king Krishna Chandra, they are still performing some religious rites and rituals in their own way which are sharply different from that of mainstream Hindu people. The women folk in Dimasa society are allowed to play active role in religious functions. After the birth of a child a ritual on the bank of a near by river by breaking an egg for the welfare being of the new born baby is exclusively done by women (by the midwife and assistant midwife called HOJAIJIK and SANGJAODI or BARWAJIK respectively). Again another ritual called SIMANGGERBA (worshiping of the dead before taking food in a community feast) is also exclusively performed by women. In the same way MIDOGERBA (worshiping of Gods SIBARAI and HAMYADAO before taking food in community feast) is done only by male folk.

Other two rituals where male and female participate together are HAMLAIHUBA (under Amla tree) and KHANDE (under a tree that they call KHANDE). The first one is bigger in which a female goat and five hens/ cocks are sacrificed. The second one is smaller and only a hen is sacrificed. In these two,

the participation of female is compulsory.

In the worshipping of HEREMDI, GATHAR and HAGRANI MADAI, women are not allowed to participate. Again in the worshipping of DAIKHO female are prohibited. There is no women priest in Dimasa society. At the time of death of a person, few female close relatives of the deceased sit around the dead body and start weeping by singing a very melancholy song called GARASIMANG. Women play active role in the funeral procession. While the funeral procession starts and goes on, a woman continuously throws paddy, coins and cotton thread on the way from the house to the crematorium. Apart from this even in community feast women are allowed to take food along with male folk.

Therefore, the religious status of women in Dimasa society is also very high as she is indispensable in many religious functions.

d) Political Status :

A traditional village council headed by the village head called KHUNANG governs Dimasa villages. He is assisted by another position called DILEK. All the elderly male in the village are its members. No female members are allowed in the village council. They call their judicial system SALISKHAMBA. Elderly females are allowed to sit only in cases of giving complaints and as witness etc. However, in the matters concerning JULU or JADI the presence of the elderly women is a must. In the same way, in trial of divorce, the women involved can participate. But under no circumstances a woman can become village head.

However, the trend has changed and with the introduction of modern political system, the Dimasa woman along with her male counterpart enjoys equal rights and freedom guaranteed under Indian Constitution. She now enjoys adult franchise and participates in the voting process for the selection of Members of Autonomous Council, Legislative Assembly and the Parliament. Even, sometimes women contest in the election to the Autonomous Council and one Mrs Promila Hojai became Member

of Autonomous Council also.

Thus the political status of woman in Dimasa society is also high both in terms of tradition and modernity.

e) Educational Status :

The exact percentage of female literacy among the Dimasas could not be ascertained. But surely the situation in literacy front has increased as female literacy as a whole in the district is 59.4% and the Dimasas comprises 41% of the district's total population. The modern educational network has been extended to them as a result of which a good number of Dimasa women has become educated. In the specialized educational lines like medical and vocational trainings a few girls are enrolled now a days. A few numbers of women doctors, engineers, lecturers and civil servants have excelled in their professions. One lady each in the post of Additional Deputy Commissioner, Deputy Principal Secretary, N.C Hills Autonomous Council, and Deputy Director of Higher Education, Govt. of Assam have been showing the efficiency of Dimasa women. Besides a good number of Dimasa women are serving the society as teachers in the primary and secondary schools in the district. From personal observation of the author it can be said that Dimasa female students are doing much better in the qualifying examinations of Boards/Councils/Universities than that of the male counterpart. This transition among the Dimasa women, which started hardly after Independence of the country, has achieved a lot. Therefore, the present young generation of the Dimasa women can not be called having less educational status as compared to the male folk.

Changing Trend of the Status of Women :

An Observation Made at Gidingpur Village

The author has been doing some fieldwork in connection with another field of research at Gidingpur village. The village is situated at a distance of about one Km. in the eastern direction

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The author has been doing some fieldwork in connection with another field of research at Gidingpur village. The village is situated at a distance of about one Km. in the eastern direction

of Maibong town. The village sits on a small hill and well connected by a Black Topped road with an R.C.C. bridge upon a stream. It is permanently settled with boundary fencing of timber and bamboos. The boundary fencing around the village is given because the villagers rear buffaloes and they are kept inside the village from the starting of paddy cultivation till it's harvesting. There is a gate made of timber on the main approach road. The village has got 59 (fifty nine) households at present. The processes of transition in the pattern of family, housing pattern economic activities etc. are noticed. Of 59 total households 13 are joint families. In the housing pattern only a few traditional thatch roofed houses are noticed. The rest are modern pattern of houses roofed with tin and bamboo walls with timber frame and some of these are having pucca floor. Only 5 nos. of pucca (cement brick concrete) houses are noticed in the village.

The household activities of women in the village include cooking food, cleaning in and around the house, fetching water from personal wells or public wells or from near by streams (at present there is no water supply facilities in the village), washing cloths, cleaning utensils, brewing rice beer etc. The other works in which man also helps woman include collecting firewood, collecting wild vegetables and fruits etc, buying and selling goods in the market etc. The women no longer pound rice in mortar or pestle, as there are 3 nos. of power huller for pounding rice in the village. But there is no electric power operated huller in the village.

Although agriculture is the traditional primary occupation of the villagers, many persons are engaged in govt. services and business. So far agriculture is concerned about 20 households practise shifting cultivation. Those who practise this type of cultivation, all the members of the household irrespective of male and female go to work. The work of women include clearing the slashes, sowing seeds, harvesting crops and even selling the surplus product in the market. The household who practise shifting cultivation cultivate only a small portion of land (one to two bighas of land per household). Therefore, the practice has not

any remarkable economic impact in the village in total.

Of the 59 households in the village 8 nos. do not have land for wet cultivation. Among others who have cultivable land no huge cultivator is found in the village. The individual farmer found to cultivate only an average of 8-10 bighas of land. Therefore, the surplus paddy production from wet cultivation is also very rare. All women folk in the village go to work in the agricultural field.

Both traditional loin looms and fly shuttle looms are found to exist in the village. Each and every woman in the village has the knowledge of weaving in looms and most of them are expert in it. But rearing of Endi worm is rarely seen in the village. The few women rearers collect the castor leaves themselves and any income thereof belongs to them.

In case of inheritance of family property also a few females are found to inherit landed property of the parents and they constructed their own houses and live permanently in the village with their husbands irrespective of whether, their husbands are from the same village or from outside. Besides, she is the only successor to her mother's properties like ornaments, clothes, looms etc. She also inherits other movable properties like utensils etc. Some parents are found to give their daughter who is already married, a portion of cultivable land.

In the political sphere, the women are not allowed to participate in the traditional village council. In cases of the matters concerning women, only the elderly women are allowed to participate. But they actively participate in the present day universal adult franchise in selecting representatives to the Autonomous Council, State Assembly and the Parliament. But no political female leader of any political party is found in the village.

In the educational aspect, all the women of the young generation are literate. But among the old generation there are hardly any literate women. Maximum educational attainment by female in the village at present is H. S. Exam. passed. Only one lady is in govt. service of a teacher in primary school.

The process of modernization has been creeping in the village and infrastructural facilities like electricity etc. are available in the village. But at present there is no cable connection in the village, although few years back it was present. There are 4 household having disc TV/Tata sky TV. connection. Some others have their TV sets which are used for enjoyment through CD, DVD players. The status of young women is also changing with the process of modernization. The young girls are going to schools and exposed to modernity. Along with traditional loin loom clothes, easily available mill clothes are also worn by young womenfolk. Drudgeries like carrying water from distance places, pounding rice in the mortar and pestles, working in Jhum land, collecting firewood are found to be gradually removed from that village. All these show relieving of women from drudgeries and indirectly upgrading their status. After all, while visiting in certain households in the village the author noticed no difference between a young Dimasa woman in these families and a typical Assamese young woman.

In conclusion the author feels that the Social status of women in Dimasa society is very high as compared to the mainstream societies in the rest of the country. However, there are gradual changes in the status of women in Dimasa society in the present times as a result of modernization process. But these changes are to be carefully monitored for keeping intact the rich cultural heritage of the Dimasa society as a whole and of N. C. Hills District in particular. The Dimasa Society itself is very much favourable for receiving the plans and programs of the governments and N.G.O.s because the so called social problems as found in the mainstream Indian societies are not found to be rooted in the society. Therefore the government and N.G.Os should come out with their plans and programmes for the welfare of women for empowering the women folk in Dimasa society.

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Role Of Karbi Women In Income Generating Activities

(A Sociological Study With Special Reference To Karbi Anglong District, Assam)

Ranima Saikia*

Introduction :

It is an established fact that womens' contribution in income of a family is of paramount importance for nutritional, economic and educational upliftment of the family. In India, out of 30 million women work force, 20 million live in rural areas. Women constitute at least one-third of the country's economically active population. Rural economy in India is based on agriculture as well as on the livestock's they possess. Women have always worked along with men in fields and have helped their families in other related pursuits. One must therefore not overlook the major task performed by women in agricultural settings where the distinction between farm and housework gets blurred. While observing casually and going through the literatures about the roles of farmwomen, it is found that it is the rural women (tribal or non-tribal) who is responsible for all sorts of jobs related to agriculture and allied activities. Further, many researchers revealed that in a developing country like India women spend many hours a day in agriculture field and allied pursuits which in turn influence the overall economy of the family in addition to their daily routine of managing the household. Women are the nucleus of all the activities, be it the domestic front, farm front or allied activities. This economic role played by women cannot be detached and overlooked from the framework of development of the country because they constitute almost half of the population of India.

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Women, by all means can be a very effective agent of changes for better economy. But their contributions are not usually recognized and counted in formal statistics. For integrating rural women in development process, it is necessary to know how women are placed under setting and also their economic contribution and potential as economic empowerment is of utmost significance in order to achieve a lasting and sustainable development of society.

So, in order to access the economic empowerment of women in India we need to know the women force involved with agriculture and allied activities in rural areas. The present study was carried out considering the Karbi tribe. It is an ethnic tribal group residing in the hill district Karbi Anglong, Assam. Karbi society is a classic case of tribal society with gender equality to a certain extent. Karbi society is the right platform for true assessment of womens' contribution to farm work. The findings of the study are considered significant with a hope that it would bring emancipation particularly to Karbi women and to the other women at large which will contribute towards the growth of the human society.

Review Of Literature

Various studies conducted in the country also revealed and supported that women, more specifically the rural women, played multifarious socio-economic roles inside as well as outside the home. Devdas et al. (1972) found that farm women spent on an average 10 hrs to 13 hrs on household and agricultural activities daily during ordinary days and peak period. Similarly, Munjal et al. (1985) found that farmwomen on an average worked for 13.62 and 12.19hrs daily during peak and slack agricultural seasons.

As a matter of fact, it has long been recognized that women played an important role in livestock care and management. Plamer (1975) found that in entire himalayan region, the women perform 70 per cent of the task, because animal husbandry is the business of women exclusively. They shoulder

entire responsibility of bringing grass for animals, milking, churning etc. Similarly, the role of farm women in 24 villages of Nazafgarh block of Delhi territory studied by Puri (1971) indicated that 11 activities related to animal husbandry were wife centered, these were bringing fodder, chaffing fodder, making curd, butter etc. Devdas (1983) reported that rural women in our country share abundant responsibilities and perform a wide spectrum of duties in running the household and the family (like child care, collection of fodder and fuel, cooking, etc). as well as attending to farm activities, animal husbandry and extending a helping hand in rural artisanship and handicrafts.

Evidently in the past no attempts have been made to determine to what extent the hill women involved in farming and allied activities to extend economic support to the family and the society at large. Thus, keeping in view the need of the hour the study entitled 'Role of Karbi women in income generating activities' was undertaken to find out what exactly the Karbi women have been doing, where they need help and where they can contribute more to their economy. The findings of the study will give a clear picture regarding the involvement of Karbi women that will help both governmental and non-governmental organizations to undertake training and educational programmes targeting those sections where help is needed. This will help them to increase their knowledge regarding various developmental aspects to increase their efficiency and raise their standard of living.

Objectives

- (i) To study the socio-economic profile of the respondents
- (ii) To study the extent of involvement of women in farm and allied activities.

Methods And Materials

A multistage purposive cum random sampling method was adopted to carry out the study. The study was conducted in the

Langsomepi Development Block, Diphu Sub-division of Karbi Anglong district, Assam. Three percent of the villages of this block were selected purposively. A list consisting of number of households in each of the selected villages were collected and from that list 10 per cent of the households were selected from each villages i.e.; proportionate to the total number of households.

Women of the selected households were considered as the respondents for the present study. Thus, a total of 110 Karbi rural women constituted the sample of the study. Data was collected personally by using structured interview schedule. Simple frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were employed to analyze the data.

Findings And Discussion

Majority of the women (76.5%) were middle aged. 70 per cent of the women were having nuclear family. Majority (75.45%) of the women were illiterate. Agriculture was the main source of income for cent percent of the women. More than one forth (90.9%) of the respondents had monthly income in between Rs. 3000/- to Rs. 4000/-

Extent Of Involvement Of Women In Farm Activities

Data on extent of involvement of the women with respect to all the identified farm activities along with respective percentage analysis is presented in Table 1. As seen from the data, contribution of women in farm activities is indispensable. It is apparent that majority of the women showed high and medium level of involvement in most of the farm activities. The activity-wise analyzed and interpreted data is as follows.

Selection of seeds including husking

It is evident that from the Table-1 that a great majority of the women showed high level of involvement in both selection of seeds and (79.09%) and cleaning of seeds (77.27%).

Land Preparation

Land preparation operation comprises of five activities viz.; clearing field, spading, land leveling, manure application, and cleaning of boundaries. A close perusal of the table shows that majority of the women (65.46%) had low level of involvement in clearing *jhum* fields.

Further, the data indicated that 65.46 per cent of the women showed high level of involvement in spading of land and land leveling. In manure application women's participation was found to be low. Among the selected sample 71.8 per cent showed medium level of involvement in cleaning of boundaries.

Sowing activities

It is clear from the table that more than half of the women had high level of involvement in mixing of seeds (83.36%), broadcasting (92.72%), dibbling (90.90%) whereas medium involvement of women was found in care of germination (59.10%) and watching of seedlings (62.72%).

Inter-cultivation activities

With regards to inter-cultivation activities, involvement of women was recorded to be high in both weeding (90.90%) and in ward and watching of standing crops (53.63%).

Harvest and post-harvest activities

In table-1 it is also revealed that women were highly involved in all the harvest and post-harvest activities like reaping of crops (94.54%), carrying of crops from field (70.90%), winnowing of grains (87.28%), storage of grains (68.19%), storage for seed purpose (79.10%), drying of grains (76.37%), de-husking (79.10%) and cleaning of grains (76.37%).

Extent Of Involvement In Allied Activities

As the Karbi people are agriculturist, livestock plays an important role in their economy. They rear pig, poultry, and rarely cow. Every Karbi women have their own piggery and poultry. The Karbi women are expert weavers. Apart from this major work, the business run by Karbi women for selling rice beer (*horlang*) is also noteworthy. Data regarding their involvement in selected allied activities are presented in Table-2. Activity-wise analysis is done as follows :

Cattle rearing

It is clear from Table-2 that level of involvement of women in cattle rearing activities was very low; it might be because cattle rearing is not a common practice. It was observed that more than half of the women (80.9%) had showed low level of involvement in activities related to cattle rearing viz.; collection of fodder, feeding, cleaning of animals, cleaning of shed, care of young one's, care for sick and milking. Data regarding preparation of cattle feeds showed that cent percent of the women had low level of involvement.

Poultry rearing

It was found that in case of poultry rearing, majority of the respondent showed high level of involvement in almost all the activities viz.; feeding (59.20%), cleaning of rearing area (77.27%), making hatchery bed (87.28%), and care of young one's (68.18%).

Piggery

Pig rearing is found to be common practice among the women. 86.37% of the women was found to involve in feeding and 59.10 per cent in cleaning of keeping area. Half (50%) of the women showed both high and medium level of involvement in care of young one's.

Silkworm rearing

Rearing of silkworm was found in every household. From the analysis of the data it was observed that in case of silkworm rearing, supply of feeds and care for cocoon formation were performed by cent percent women. In collection of fodder and cleaning of the worms keeping area women also showed high level of involvement (92.72% and 89.10% respectively).

Weaving

More than 80 per cent of the women were found to have high level of involvement in spinning of cocoon (86.37%), reeling (100%), and weaving (81.81%). Activity like setting on warp was performed by cent percent women.

Preparation of Rice beer

Though in the early times Karbi women used to make the liquor only for family consumption, the scenario has changed drastically now. It is evident from the data presented in Table-2, that majority of the women were highly involved in all the activities related to preparation of rice beer viz.; collection of ingredients (100%), processing (85.46%), brewing (89.10%), and proper storage (100%).

Marketing

The analysis of Table-2 revealed that majority of the women showed high level of involvement in selling of poultry products (46.37%), endi chrysalis (87.2%), rice-beer (96.37%), agricultural products (83.63%) and forest products (83.63%). Close examination of the table also specifies that equal percentage (40.9%) of the women had high and medium level of involvement in selling of piggery products. It is worth mentioning that cent percent of the women had low level of involvement in sale of dairy products and cocoons. Table-2 further revealed that majority of the women had low level of involvement in selling of home woven cloths.

Conclusion

The present study shows that the women participated in agriculture and allied activities at varying degrees. Women were found to be involved to greater extent in almost all the farm activities except reclamation of jungles, it focuses that women are the backbone of hill agriculture. So, it is high time to organize intensive training for these women, which will help them in better performance and raise their standard of living. Moreover, Government should take initiative in giving agriculture related training to the women and implements which are basically meant for men folk only. Our agriculture scientists should take initiatives to build equipment, which can help these women to do quality job with less effort, so that they find time for other activities like personal health and hobbies.

Apart from this, private entrepreneurship should be encouraged among the Karbi women and co-operative societies should be built up. For example, in Karbi society, the rearing of pig and poultry has been confined to women folk, they rear in traditional way, which is mostly done on small scale due to paucity of money, if they are sanctioned loans to build such animal farms on a large scale, not only it will earn them money but will give them a social recognition of being a business woman. But effort should not end there, they should be helped to get their products marketed as well. They should as well be trained technically and scientifically for proper maintenance of these livestock's and hygiene related issues. Workshops dealing with such issues can prove to be helpful, Weaving being a common household practice among the Karbi women should also be encouraged. Efforts should be made to showcase these talented weaver women in national scenario. With fashion houses making rounds everywhere these indigenous skills can really be transformed to a flourishing business. Technical improvements in the weaving industrial training schools can provide them a common platform to start their business in a better fashion.

So, it is the need of the hour that the government and

non-governmental organization should make effort to give them training in improved methods to increase their working skill and earning capacity, so that they can enhance their family income and get due recognition of their labour. As the status of a society is judged by the status of women in that society a crusade should be launched at the grass root level to raise their standard of living, so to invite a better future for all.

Table-1 Extent of involvement in farm activities

N=110

Activities	Extent of involvement (%)		
	High	Medium	Low
1. Selection of seeds including husking			
(a) Selection of seeds	79.09	20.91	-
(b) Cleaning of seeds	77.27	22.73	-
2. Land preparation			
(a) Clearing land	4.54	30	65.46
(b) Spading	65.46	30.9	3.64
(c) Land leveling	65.46	30.9	3.64
(d) Manure application	-	-	100
(e) Cleaning of boundaries	19.1	71.8	9.1
3. Sowing activities			
(a) Mixing of seeds	83.63	16.37	-
(b) Broadcasting	92.72	7.28	-
(c) Dibbling	90.9	9.1	-
(d) Care of germination	40.9	59.1	-
(e) Watching of seedling	37.28	62.72	-

4. Inter-cultivation activities			
(a) Weeding	90.9	9.1	-
(b) Ward and watching of standing crops	53.63	46.37	-
5. Harvest and post-harvest activities			
(a) Reaping of crops	96.37	3.63	-
(b) Making bundles	94.54	5.46	-
(c) Carrying of crops from field	70.9	29.1	-
(d) Threshing	87.28	12.72	-
(e) Winnowing	87.28	12.72	-
(f) Storage of consumption	68.19	31.81	-
(g) Storage for seed purpose	79.1	20.9	-
(h) Drying of grains	76.1	23.63	-
(i) De-husking of grains	79.1	20.9	-
(j) Cleaning of grains	76.37	23.63	-

Table-2 Extent of involvement in allied activities

N=110

Allied activities	Extent of involvement (%)		
	High	Medium	Low
1. Cattle rearing			
(a) Collection of fodder	-	19.1	80.9
(b) Preparation of cattle feed	-	-	100
(c) Feeding	14.55	4.55	80.9
(d) Cleaning of animals	-	19.1	80.9
(e) Cleaning of shed	19.1	-	80.9
(f) Care of young one's	17.2	1.9	80.9
(g) Care of sick	19.1	-	80.9
(h) Milking	19.1	-	80.9

2. Poultry rearing			
(a) Feeding	59.1	31.8	9.1
(b) Cleaning of rearing area	77.27	22.73	-
(c) Making hatchery bed	87.28	12.72	-
(d) Care of young one's	68.18	22.72	9.1
3. Piggery			
(a) Feeding	86.37	13.63	-
(b) Cleaning of rearing area	50	50	-
(c) Care of young one's	59.1	40.9	-
4. Silk worm rearing			
(a) Collection of fodder	92.72	7.28	-
(b) Supply of feeds	100	-	-
(c) Cleaning of keeping area	89.1	10.9	-
(d) Care in cocoon formation	100	-	-
5. Weaving			
(a) Spinnig of cocoons	86.37	13.63	-
(b) Reeling	90.9	9.1	-
(c) Setting on warp	100	-	-
(d) Construction	81.81	18.19	-
6. Preparation of rice beer			
(a) Collection of ingredients	100	-	-
(b) Processing	85.46	14.54	-
(c) Brewing	89.1	10.9	-
(d) Proper storage	100	-	-

7. Marketing			
(a) Sale of dairy products	-	-	100
(b) Sale of poultry products	46.37	28.18	25.45
(c) Sale of piggery products	40.9	40.9	18.2
(d) Sale of cocoons	-	-	100
(e) Sale of endi chrysalis	87.2	9.1	3.7
(f) Sale of woven materials	19.1	37.27	43.63
(g) Sale of rice beer	96.37	3.63	-
(h) Sale of agricultural products	83.63	16.37	-
(i) Sale of forest products	83.63	16.37	-

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Some Observation On The Rangdani Rabha Women In The Rural Context Of Assam

Running title : Some Observations on the Rangdani
Women

Key Words : Rabha, Rangdani, Women, Status, Assam

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Women are the neuclei of each society. For the peace and acceleration of a society the women should have some respect and liberty in decision making. To achieve the desired goal the women of a society should be educated and they should be socialized in such a manner that they could easily adjust in the changing situation of the society. It has been observed that the women of the North-East India, particularly the tribal women, of this remote part of the country are yet to acquire required features with the help of which they could act as strong catalyst for the quick achievement of the society. In this paper an attempt has been made to examine the present position of the Rangdani Rabha Women in three villages of Goalpara District of Assam.

(I)

It must be acknowledged that the special awareness of the rights, status, and issues of women was reinforced with the women's liberation movement in the West, particularly it begins from 1960's in the United States. However we cannot say that awareness and struggle for women emancipation was not there

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before inception of the battle for that in the United States. During the pre-independent period the great patriot of our country raised his voice against the vulnerable condition of women of India. He was successful in making conscious the fellow country men against Sati-daha (burning of the living wife in the deceased husband's pyre) and to put into motion widow marriage.

Generally, it is believed that the condition of tribal women of India, more particularly in North-East India is better than that of the women of the rest of the India. In the tribal societies there is no Purdah system, widow marriage, etc. In many tribal societies, there are prescribed rules for pre-martial sex relation; even in some of them post martial sex relation is also allowed. Due to the absence of caste system, the tribal women have not suffered low status integral to birth. Except for certain ritual taboos, she is allowed to move freely and talk freely with her society members. The reknown anthropologist Furer-Haimendorf has observed such praiseworthy conditions among the women of Naga Society and writes.

"..... many women in more civiliszed parts of India may well envy the women of the Naga Hills, their high status, and their free and happy life and if you measure the cultural level of the people by the social position and the personal freedom of its women you will think twice before looking down on the Nagas as savages" (1993 : 96).

Singh and Mann (1985) have also observed that the tribal women in general and in comparision with caste women enjoy more freedom in various walks of life. According to them, traditional and customary norms are comparatively liberal to women of the tribal societies.

To study the conditions of the tribal women, their status have to be examined. The word 'status' itself is an ambiguous word. However a great deal of the content of 'Status' is evaluated in terms of development indicators-income, property or opportunity and use of training in skill that open up changes of employment, health level etc. On many account the Indian women are discriminated against in day to day life. Illiteracy is rampant

among women and social and cultural taboos., and many other restrictions which hinders the acceleration of Indian women, particularly the tribal women of the country.

Lowie (1920) Malinowask (1949), Majumdar and Madan (1969), and many other scholars from different disciplines have studied the position of women in different contexts of the world. From the different opinion of the Scholars it is evident that the tribal women's position in different societies is different. Some scholar opine that the tribal women enjoy high status while in the other opinion in the tribal societies women were no better than a mere sex object, or a second sex or otherwise of an inferior sex.

It is pertinent to note here that one has to explain and judge the position of women in terms of the particular culture and economic activities on which the society depend. Keeping these remarks in the mind, a humble attempt has been made to examine the position of the Rangdani women of the Goalpara district of Assam. For the present study, three villages of the said district, viz Kuruabhasa, Bhaisekhuli, Garaimari, have been selected. All three villages are homogeneous in nature and inhabited by the Rangdani Rabhas only. The villages are situated at a distance of around 12 km. The villages are situated more or less adjacent to each other at about one or two km area in the same direction of Goalpara town at a distance of 10 km. The mainstay of the villages is Agriculture and the principal crop is Paddy. Along with paddy they cultivate mustard, black gram, etc: in the kitchen garden they raise potato, different kind of vegetables, etc. Agriculture is the nucleus of the Rangdani. Rabha society and they observe a good number of rituals integral to agriculture. Among the villagers there is strong kinship ties established principally through marriage. Each villagers has fictitious relation also with some of the inhabitants of the other villages generally maintained through fictitious kinship terms.

(II)

The Rabhas are the branch of the Bodo group of the Mongolian race, who entered North- East india in groups from

the north western side of this country.

The origin of the Rabha is not known in details. But according to Endle (1975: 84-85) they are believed to have originated through the marriage of a Hindu man with Kachari women in remote past. For this reason, Rabha has a higher social standing than the Kacharis and so no Rabha takes the food cooked by a Kachari, though a Kachari can eat food cooked by a Rabha.' (Medhi, 198:40)

Gait (1892) writes 'There seems to be a good deal of uncertainty as to what these people really are. In lower Assam It is asserted that they are an off-shoot of the Garos while in Kamrup and Darrang' it is thought that they are Kacharis in the road of Hinduism. That they belong to the great Bodo family is certain....' (cited in Das, 1960:3)

The Rabha is the agglomeration of a number of socio-cultural groups like Pati, Rangdani, Maitori, Totla, Bitlia, Dahuri, Chunga and Kocha. They are distributed in undivided Kamrup, Goalpara and Darrang districts of Assam. A sizeable section of Rabha also inhabit the northern region of the Garo Hills district of Meghalaya. The main concentration of the Rabhas is found in the districts of Goalpara and Kamrup of Assam.

Among all the divisions of the Rabha, the Rangdanis have preserved a good number of pristine culture traits including their Tibeto-Burman language. The main concentration of Rangdani are found in Goalpara District of Assam. All the groups of Rabhas practiced agriculture as their mainstay. The women also take active part in agriculture. Along with agriculture they also work in clockwork precision for the smooth maintenance of the families. They are expert weavers and produce intricate designs in their looms. Cooking, fetching water and fire wood, cleaning the utensils, washing cloths, taking care of the babies and the domesticated animals are the feminine jobs.

In the present study a humble attempt has been made to evaluate the factors and forces responsible for the emancipation of the womenfolk of the Rangdani society of Assam by examining their status.

(III)

The basic structure of the Rabha tribe is governed by the ethnologic ideas contained in the local customary laws. The customary laws of the Rangdanis have been framed by the consensus of the village people on the basis of customs, traditions and religious values and beliefs. It is believed that Rabhas including the Rangdani's were once a matrilineal tribe. Their belief is based on the prevailing custom of reckoning descent from the female line and the practice of including the children of a marriage into the clan (Barai) of the mother. Probably due to diffused culture traits from the surrounding patrilineal people, the Rangdanis have gradually acquired the traits from such societies and their society possesses traits from archaic Matrilineaty and also from acquired patriliney.

It has been observed that they practice equigeniture among sons in view of property inheritance. A girl child inherits no property unless the father makes arrangement for her share before his death. A widow is not entitled to inherit property of her deceased husband even though she is encumbered with issues. Her male children will automatically come to inherit their father's property.

The work load of women are much higher than the males. All the females in each villages are engaged in household works and also they have to work with their husbands in the crop fields. Even they have to look after their children, their inlaws and other family members. It seems that the burden of work is automatically higher than the males of their family. From the other point of view the investigations noticed that the daughter, daughter-in-law and mother and mother-in-laws status are equal in Rangdani society. Daughters are treated in the same manner as their sons. But in some cases, like in property rights there seems to be a difference between son and daughter. There is no bound rules and regulations that a girl child must get a amount from their father's property. Females of a Rangdani society are mostly engaged with their household works like cooking their food, fetching water, looking after their children

etc. There is only one rule that when a girl child is born in one family the mother has the right to give her child a name. In social gathering the males and females are equally treated. But in some religious festivals females sit separately. They never sit together with males in any functions. But all the females have the right to attend all the functions and festivals of their community. They have liberty to join the different rituals and festivals along with their counterpart. However there are some rituals where the women are in debarred from the vital activities. The women are not unhappy about such norm of the society, even the educated.

The investigators noticed that most of the Rangdani women have to work in both agricultural fields and household works. Ploughing, leveling and threshing are the main agricultural works of the males. Transplantation, weeding, harvesting and carrying the crops from the fields to home are done by both males and females. Husking and grinding is the duty of the women folk. The Rangdani women are expert both in spinning and weaving. Normally they prepare their own apparels including some garb used by the males. It appears that all three villages weaving is not only a secondary source of livelihood to a women but a part and parcel of their material culture. Mostly women is sale their products in the Hat on weekly basis. Some of the women have their own poultry farm and they sale their poultry product in the local market.

(IV)

The norms and patterns of the society provide some facilities and some obstacles to the Rangdani women. In all three villages most of the women are deprived from all requirement of their life. From the economic point of view, still they are dependent on their husbands and grown up sons. They do not have right to take any strong decisions in their family matters. The age old superstitions has made the women's condition pitiable. The Rangdani women are illiterate. The number of school dropout is very high in the studied villages. Because of illiteracy women get married at an early age. Not to speak about

the knowledge of political scenario of the country and the world most of the Rangdani women do not know about AIDS, family planning, loan facilities given by various banks, government, NGO, etc. They are used to weaving traditional low cost dress and ornaments which are bought from the nearby town and weekly market. In case of a difficult delivery, they have to go to the government hospitals of Goalpara town or are forced to consult with the physician. But to cope with the present environment, the Rangdani women are yet to acquire the required knowledge for which the womenfolk of the society are yet to pave the way for conspicuous progress.

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The Women In The Tai-Phake Society

Tiluttama Barua

Assam is the homeland of a large number of ethnic group which includes both tribals and non-tribals having varied socio-cultural traditions. These ethnic groups have come into the realm of existence as a result of migration and assimilation of the local cultures at different historical periods. About two hundred years back a few Mongoloid populations in small numbers entered into Assam by the same geographic route which was followed by the Ahoms in the thirteenth century. The Tai-Phake is one such population of the Tai group that entered in the later half of the 18th century. The Tai-Phakae is an integral part of greater Assamese nationality. Presently they live in nine villages of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts of upper Assam. The villages are, Nam-Phakae, Tipam Phakae on the bank of river Buridihing of Naharkatia region in Dibrugarh district. Manmowmukh, Borphakial, Mounglang Manlong or long phakae, Ninggam Nonglai and Phaneng in Ledo and Margherita of Tinsukia district.

Ethnically the Tai-Phakae belong to Mongoloid group and linguistically belong to Tibeto Chinese families. Their main occupation is agriculture.

In the present context, the status of woman has attracted every body's attention in every society. The womenfolk, both tribal and non tribal, play different significant roles as a mother, sister, daughter and wife on one hand and as the preserver of the culture, customs and traditions of their own society on the other.

The Tai-Phakae women of present day society are not confined to home only, rather they are increasingly undertaking new roles with new status in the society.

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The Tai Phakae are patrilineal in nature. Though male is the head of the family the position of woman is not subordinate to man. Both male and female do the arduous tasks of the family, such as the male takes the responsibility of preparing the fields for cultivation and other outside activities. The women hold primary responsibilities for good ordering of the house. She cooks, washes, sews, cleans, cares for the livestock, carries water, and lends a helping hand in the fields at planting, harvesting and weeding time. Weaving is another major task. The Tai-Phakae have their own traditional colourful dresses for both males and females and the female folk always wear these dresses which are woven in every house by the women. They use to weave their apparels like *Mekhela (Chin) Nangwat (riha)*, *lungi (fatong)*, white *turbarn (fahaho)*, *Tang-Khan*, etc. In one aspect they preserve their tradition and culture through these woven materials. Even in shoulder bags (*Thung*) which the women folk weave in their own loom give some attractive attention to the outsiders or tourists. The women like the service holder or studying girl can weave and in the Tai Phakae society it is a matter of shame if a girl can not weave. In every family two or three looms are always seen. The art of handloom weaving is an integral part of the socio-cultural life of the Tai-Phakae. Textile production is the exclusive preserve of the women folk and they produce in their indigenous and improved looms the various textile items with distinctive ethnic features. Harmonious management of colour with cheques and strips are the unique features of the textile of the Tai-Phakes. From a very early stage of life they acquaint themselves with the weaving. Their loom is traditional loin loom. Throughout the day till late night womenfolk of the Tai-Phakes remain busy with various household and agricultural tasks. Both the male and female service holders also during planting and harvesting time have additional works to do in the fields. The old women do not go to the field, rather they mostly stay at home helping their daughter-in-law in various household works, such as preparation of meals, keeping the small children etc. Sometimes they weave cloth and sometimes go to the forest to collect various herbs, creepers etc.

As they are Buddhist in religion in every village there is a beautiful Vihar which is the nucleus of the village activities. Daily life of the Monks is totally different from the common villagers. Though all the Monks in the village Vihar the lady monk which is known as *Yasi* is not allowed to stay in the Vihar at night. A Phakae woman can become a nun by dedicating her life for the cause of religion. Generally a childless widow prefers to become a nun. Like the Sraman the Nun also has to observe the *Asta Sheela*. She also shaves her head fortnightly and wears yellow dresses. She can perform the day to day household activities. She should not wear ornaments. Night meal is also prohibited to her. Only in day time she can visit the Vihar.

The Tai Phakae also follow some customs after a woman gets pregnant. As for example there are some diet restrictions for the pregnant woman as they should not eat *Kakila* fish (a kind of local fish) and crab. It is believed that if she eats then the child will smell very bad. There are some taboos during the time of pregnancy which should be maintained by both husband and wife such as they should not touch a dead body. According to them if they disobey this taboo it would result in complication and delay of the delivery. Again nobody should kill a serpent during this period. No good works is started by the husband during the time of pregnancy. During this period though no special diet is given to the lady she is not allowed to carry any heavy burden.

Birth should take place in the husband's house. It is a belief among the Tai-Phakae that serious misfortune occurs to the child if the birth takes place in the women's father's house. Now a days in some cases this is changing.

Though now a days for the safe delivery they prefer to go to the Govt. Hospitals and private nursing homes but before going to the hospital seeking the blessings of the ancestors is still prevalent among them. Earlier during delivery they used the skills of local women who were experts in conducting delivery. After birth of the child the mother has to stay lying near the fire, which is called '*uufai*' or being near the fire. A big fire is lit and

the mother reclines close by exposing her abdomen and back. The period of lying near the fire depends upon the health of the mother, if she feel strong and healthy then a period of three or four days of lying near the fire is sufficient, but for a weak woman a longer period may be deemed necessary.

Childhood of a Tai Phakae girl is a very enjoyable period because, she is least burdened with domestic activities. When a girl attains puberty she has to stay inside for two days. The father consults the old man of the village and fixes a date for the puberty rite. In the family nothing is taboo, but the girl is not allowed to go to the worshipping place. On the third day the girl takes her bath early in the morning. In a particular day some women are invited and a feast is arranged. Young girls are invited for preparation of the feast and they come early in the morning and make the feast ready by 9 a.m. After taking bath the girl comes inside and her mother gives her a white '*Chaddar*' and she has to wear the *chaddar* regularly from that day. The girl wearing this *chaddar* and taking a basketful of flowers and bows down before the invitee women and they bless her for a happy life. After that the women are entertained with the feast which includes '*topola bhat*' (steamed rice) *daal* and other items.

In a marriage a childless woman is debarred from some rituals integral to a marriage ceremony.

Overall every female members enjoys freedom in the Tai-Phake society. Unlike many societies, sophisticated or unsophisticated birth of a female child is very much rejoiced signifying Tai-Phakae attitudes towards the fair sex. As she grows up she starts participating in major household activities.

As a lady of the house she enjoys a status quite different from women of other societies as she lives in a free and independent atmosphere, taking important decisions for her household as well as in their economic life she is skill-full as an intricate weaver.

The relation amongst family members are cordial. Cases of wife beating and adultery is almost unknown. The relation

between mother in law and daughter in law have been found to be mutually co-operative and congenial.

Although it is not a common phenomenon, divorce is allowed in the Tai Phakae society. No social ceremony is necessary for divorce and the verdict of the village elders is consider final in this regard. Widow remarriage is acceptable. There is no elaborate ceremony in widow remarriages.

Thus, atrocities and exploitation of women like dowry, wife beating, bride burning and prostitution are almost unknown in the Tai-Phakae society.

Though the literacy rate was not so high in the female section but now the wind of change is blowing. Parents are taking keen interest for the education of their sons and daughters.

By observing the Tai-Phakae society from a close range this scholar fully agrees with S.K. Chatterjee's comment.

"Among the Mongoloid tribes women have far greater freedom in marriage, divorce and other matters than we find in orthodox Hindu Society."

The status of the Tai-Phakae woman is not miserable, though it can not be said as very high. A woman is the working head of the family, the wife of a household head domesticate animal, weave cloth, plant flower and fruit plants in homestead garden, prepare food according to her own desire. She can go to market or public place without any hesitation. The age-old customs restrict her to take part in some of the rituals and festivals. The educated Tai-Phakae women also do not intend to break those traditions. Wife beating is not present among them. Practice of monogamy also facilitate in getting a higher position by the women in the society. Though divorce is allowed, it is rare among them. Practice of Buddhism has restricted the women to take part in some of the rituals. In some crisis periods women are not allowed to enter the village shrine, cook-shed or to take part in community festival. Though there are some restrictions in the movement and other works attached to the Tai Phakae women, they are never treated as the subordinate to the male member of the society.

With this background of their glorious heritage and age-old custom of honouring the fairer sex with respect and status equal to that of man, Tai-Phakae women with some exposure to modern education and enlightenment could considerably contribute towards achieving a respectable and dignified status for women at large amongst tribal as well as non-tribal societies in this region in particular and the country in general.

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Role of the Karbi Women in their Socio Economic Life : A study in Diksak Village, Khetri, Kamrup

Dhrubu Moni Misra*

Introduction :

The Karbis constitute one of the important hill tribes of Assam. They are mentioned as Mikirs in the constitution order, Government of India. But they prefer to call themselves Karbi and sometimes 'Arleng' which literally means a man. Although Karbis are found to inhabit mainly the Karbi Anglong district of Assam, some scattered Karbi inhabited pockets are found in the North Cachar Hills, Sibsagar, Nagaon, Darrang, Sontipur and Kamrup districts. Racially they belong to the Mongoloid group and linguistically they are included in the Tibet - Burman group. They are a colourful tribe with their traditional dresses, ornaments, dances, music and folklores.

The original home of the Karbis are not known. According to some legends, they came from somewhere in south-east Asia.

'Diksak' is a village which is located in the district of Kamrup and is about 50 KM east of Guwahati. From the administrative point of view the village is under the jurisdiction of Khetri Police Station.

The present study has been undertaken with a view to know the general socio-economic status of the Karbi women of Diksak village of Dimoria Tribal Development Block.

Materials And Methods

The data of the present study were collected by prepared questionnaires, observation and interview methods. The study takes into account the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the people. Exclusive interviews have also

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been conducted when it was found necessary. There are altogether 53 Karbi families with a population of 324 nos of which 174 (53.7%) are males and 150 (46.3%) are females.

The Results And Discussion

It appears from the study that the people are mainly agriculturists and agriculture is the main principal support for the families. *The practise (Ahu) rice and (Sali) rice*. In the field men and women work equally. It is evident from the survey, 80 percent of the women are engaged in agriculture, of which almost all have their own land and the rest are agricultural labourers. Besides paddy, the Karbi women of the village produce mustard seeds, different types of vegetables, betal leaves etc. Some of the households have their own orange garden. It is seen that the surplus products produced in their field after consumption are sold in the nearby market. They also practise shifting cultivation commonly known as **Jhum** cultivation in the hill slopes. The **Jhum** fields are required to be protected from wild animals, birds etc. by constant watching and for this purpose they erect watch towers on the branches of big trees. Livestock plays an important role in their economy. Most of the Karbi women of the village have their own piggery and poultry. They rear fowls, ducks, pigs, goats and cows. The poultry and pigs are not only reared for household consumption but these constitute as a source of income for purchasing yarn, clothes, ornaments etc.

Rice beer (Horlang) is prepared in every household and this area of work is dominated by women. It is served to all irrespective of age and sex. It is considered as a most valuable item and is used in every festival whether social or religious. The Karbi women of the village not only make liquor for family consumption, they also make it for selling in the market.

Weaving is an important cottage industry among the womenfolk. They are expert in weaving and most of the clothes are produced in their family looms for domestic use. Besides weaving for household purpose they also produce clothes for marketing which generates income.

Another important activity of the women is freewood collection which requires them to walk to a distant place. Their collection mostly fulfills their household requirements.

Fishing is an important occupation of the elderly women, sometimes they make a good collection. Community fishing is a common affair among the village of Diksak particularly in the winter season when the water levels of the *beels* and rivers go down.

It is found from our study that 95% of the respondents support family planning. 70% have accepted family planning and all of them expressed that they have got full co-operation from their husbands. 65% of the children were born in hospital.

Conclusion

The survey reveals that the village is deprived of many development programmes undertaken in the nearby areas. Educational level of women is very low and the engagement in service like Governmental Department, Educational Institutes etc are not satisfactory. Women of the village know about the developmental programmes in the nearby areas, but no opportunity is being offered to them. The Governmental and voluntary organizations and agencies should motivate them to come forward to receive education and training which would help them in future to attain a higher standard of living.

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The Special Features Of Tribal Textile In Assam : A Case Study Of Women Artisan

Rajesh Bhowmik*

Introduction :

The basic requirements of human being are food, cloth and shelter. When their stomach is full, they feel the necessity to cover their body by clothes and at a later stage they need shelter. These are basic needs of human being.

In the ancient period, primitive men used to have their food from the forest collecting fruits etc. During this period, they had nothing to wear, Gradually primitive men started a settled life - a major shift from the nomadic one. With the beginning of an agrarian life they felt the necessity of covering their bodies with the jungle leaves, barks of trees, animal skin or hide etc.

So, clothing one self is of second in importance of life. No one in the world would not like to wear clothes/garments to protect their bodies. When some people met together they agreed to share their productivity so that they came to know the process of jhum cultivation. Jhum cultivation is the best procedure to grow cotton. And almost that kind of cultivation was following by each tribal community of North East Indian from their forefathers custom. Assam is a big state among the North East States which has a greater land to cultivate the same. As per 1971 census, the tribal communities of Assam constitute 10.99 or 11% of the total population of the State. The total number of scheduled tribes are twenty three and these tribes are residing in two areas like plain and hills. The following tribes are found in these areas :-

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Sl. No.	Hills tribes	Sl. No.	Plain tribes
1.	Chakma	1.	Barman of Cachar
2.	Dimaasa Kachari	2.	Boro, Boro-Kachari
3.	Garo	3.	Deuri
4.	Hajong	4.	Hojai
5.	Hmar	5.	Kachari, Sonowal
6.	Khasi, Jaintia, Pnar	6.	Lalung
7.	Lakher	7.	Mech
8.	Man	8.	Mishing
9.	Mizo tribe	9.	Rabha
10.	Karbi		
11.	Naga tribes, etc.		
12.	Pawi		
13.	Syntheng		
14.	Kuki tribes, etc.		

Methodology :

The tribal communities throughout North East India have different religious beliefs and different style of wearing their dress which befits their custom and tradition. In Assam, each tribe has their specific design in their costume which carries a significant meaning. It has been found that in every case, only the womenfolk weave the dresses for their members in the family. The tribal womenfolk are very expert to do the work of weaving specially the traditional garments. They engage themselves from the process of collecting seeds to the production of raw cotton and dying of warp to weaving. Even to operate a loom, mainly loin loom or fly shuttle loom and in handloom the tribal women artisan of Assam are skilled enough. Almost every tribal woman has a very powerful artistic sense and they create beautiful designs which reflects their skill, hard work and their patience. So in a tribal society, weaving is a common practice which is gradually becoming popular in the North East regions. The womenfolk engage themselves from their childhood at the age of 10 to 12. Generally, there is no training programme for them to handle the loom. They acquire this skill as they go on

assisting their grand mother while she weaves the indigenous clothes. The girl follows the tradition and gradually she gets maturity.

Findings :

The indigenous clothes of tribal communities of Assam gets popularity due to the following special features :

1. The dress used by the tribal people of Assam has a reflection of the colorful custom found in their society. The primary colors that are used in their dress are mainly red, yellow and blue. At times, black, deep brown or green are used in between these colors.
2. Each community use a traditional design and so this is accepted popularly among the members of that particular community.
3. Often the same design is repeated in the upper part of the dress of a male or female member of the community. In some cases it reflects the beliefs and truths of the tribal society. The design used in the dress gives pleasure not only to the user but also to the weaver and it must carry also ideas and meanings.
4. The propose of weaving dress is not always the same. Sometimes some dresses are used by womenfolk of a specific tribal community for their day to day activities. Sometimes some dress are used during some festivals or dance programmes. Some special dresses were used by only head hunters or warriors. Generally the dress is used regularly does not carry any special meaning.
5. In the costumes it is found that there are often human, animal and natural objects woven on it by the tribal women in Assam. Some clothes are used only to maintain a certain social status in a society. Some clothes are only worn for ritualistic activities. Generally common people do not used these clothes ordinarily. Some forms indicates some special ideas and events in a given society.

6. Clothes are normally used by the tribal of Assam as in other societies also to protect one's body from heat, cold and wind etc. Even for the common purposes the tribal women use a variety of costumes.
7. Generally the main purpose of weaving among the tribal women is to meet their domestic needs and if there is any surplus it is taken to the market to be sold. Usually the male members of the family go to the market with the surplus product. So, weaving becomes one of the main occupation of the tribal women and they manage it along with their other household activities.
8. The clothes woven by the tribal women are designed with laces, borders and sometimes there is a divisions of horizontal and vertical lines. This is one of the prominent feature found in this type of clothes. In some cases, the dress is a two part while in other cases it may be more than two parts stitched together to form one complete dress.
9. Different natural objects, geometrical shapes or other images are objects of design in the clothes woven by the tribal women in Assam. Natural objects like sun, moon, stars, mountains etc. give an impression of the local atmosphere wherein a tribal society exist. In some cases, some natural objects like a certain variety of flowers found in the near by forest and used as design by the great grand mothers is used even today by the tribal artisans as a mark of respect to the tradition though the flower may be extinct by now.
10. Some common motifs are used repeatedly in the clothes. Simple and straight forward lines are drawn following the tradition. Similarly dotted motifs, bands etc. are normally used in the same textile wherever these are necessary. Again for the purpose of beautification, they weave diamonds, lozenges, zigzag and different kinds of angular shapes.
11. They use home made colors and prefer contrast of different colors in their clothes. The rate of contrast varies from one tribal community to another. The local artisans prepare both

the bright colors and the deep colors. The preparation is known to them traditionally. The sources of the preparation of these colors are indigenous herbs, flower and leaves, the bark of the specific woods and some sort of seeds found in the forest or in the bank of river of the Brahmaputra valley. The color extracted from the natural sources is used to dye the handmade yarn. In this way, a tribal woman artisan produces colorful costumes with the help of this dyed yarn.

12. The techniques of production and the tools used by the different tribal communities of Assam are almost same. Generally, they use loom-a loin loom or a fly shuttle loom for the purpose of weaving. Every community have a specific name for this loom. Of course, the size and shapes may vary from one community to another depending on the processes and techniques and on the availability of raw materials also. These tools are generally made out of bamboo and cane and wooden pieces. Even this tool is indigenously made.
13. These indigenously woven clothes are sold in weekly or bi-weekly markets or in nearby urban markets. A survey was undertaken in different markets of Assam State and it is found that the demands for such clothes woven by tribal women is high, which shows the demands of the tribal product among the non-tribal. Although the clothes produced by the multinational textile companies are cheaper it seems the indigenous clothes has attracted other peoples because these clothes may brightened the social status of this class of the non tribal population.

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Role Of Non-Governmental Organisations For Development Of Tribal Women In Assam

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Social Welfare has its roots in voluntary action and had been sustained from several centuries in the past up to the present. Non-governmental voluntary organizations are apt ones to mobilize villagers inclined for constructive work. They are best suited to channelise their spare time and energy and by doing so, they foster the growth of leadership at various levels of the rural society. Also, they are more capable of bringing in their work the 'human touch' that follows from a less formal but equally effective approach. As these organizations develop and show increasing competence in assuming larger responsibilities, they become qualified and fit for some additional functions which at present are vested in regular bureaucracy. For this reason, they are at a great advantage in securing popular support for their cause and public participation in their programmes.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are sometimes supposed to be potentially superior to official agencies in three respects: (a) their workers can be more sincerely devoted to the task of reducing the sufferings of the poor than the Government staff; (b) they can have a better rapport with the rural poor than government employees; and (c) since voluntary organizations are not bound by rigid bureaucratic rules and procedures, they can readjust their activities quickly and continuously as they learn from experience.¹ Besides, they have a considerable background of experience and conduct of welfare programmes and can react more quickly to changing social needs than can be expected of official machinery.

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The closest possible collaboration between NGOs and Government are absolutely essential. Regarding the relation between State and voluntary action in the field of social welfare, the Report on Charitable Trusts published by the British Government says : State action and voluntary action were not the antithesis of each other; rather they sprang from the same roots, were designed to meet the same needs and had the same motivating force behind them. Indeed, historically, the state action is voluntary action crystallized and made universal. An analysis of public welfare action at any time would reveal mixed motives, some genuinely humanitarian, some inspired by cupidity or self arrangement. But neither in the historical record nor in an examination of their motives would there be discovered the making of a fundamental distinction between state action for public welfare and voluntary action for the same purpose.²

The word 'voluntary' does not suggest total absence of state control. Voluntary organizations have to operate within the framework of laws enacted by the State. They, for instance, have to comply with the Societies Registration Act, Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, Income Tax Act, Industrial Dispute Act, Labour Laws etc. There accounts are subject to audit and the Government has power to investigate any foreign assistance to voluntary organizations. According to Lord Beveridge, a voluntary organization, properly speaking, is an organization which, whether its workers are paid or unpaid, is initiated and governed by its own members without external control.³ Definitions given by Mary Morris and Modeline Roff are also similar. The only addition, Modeline Roff makes is that these voluntary organizations should depend in part at least, upon finding support from voluntary resources.⁴

Michael Banton defines voluntary organization as a group organized for the pursuit of one interest or several interests in common.⁵ In the words of David L. Sills, voluntary organization is a group of persons organized on the basis of voluntary membership without state control for the furtherance of some common interests of its members.⁶ Attempting a comprehensive definition of voluntary organization, Prof. M.R. Inamdar observes :

A voluntary organization in development to be of durable use to the community has to nurse a strong desire and impulse for community development among its members, to be economically viable to possess dedicated and hard working leadership and command resources of expertise in the functions undertaken. Norman Johnson in his examination of various definitions of voluntary social services points out four main characteristics : (i) Method of formation, which is voluntary on the part of a group of people, (ii) Method of government, with self-governing organization to decide on its constitution, its servicing, its policy, and its clients, (iii) Method of financing, with at least some of its revenues drawn from voluntary services; and (iv) Motives with the pursuit of profit included.⁷

Studies made by Choudhury (1971)⁸ Lalitha (1975)⁹ and Mukherjee (1979)¹⁰ shows that a significant change has taken place in the structure of voluntary action. In earlier times most of the volunteers were unpaid, but now they are gradually being replaced by professional and paid worker. For the full time given to voluntary work the workers have to earn a living to maintain themselves and their families. The work too, demands sustained attention of qualified personnel. Studies also show that workers in voluntary organizations in many cases function as multipurpose functionaries largely due to inadequate personnel and material resources. Consequently, they are often found doing work unrelated to their educational and professional competence.

India has a glorious tradition of organizing voluntary work for social good. As a matter of fact, the history and development of social welfare in India prior to independence is primarily the history of voluntary action. The roots of voluntarism in India can be traced to the nature, social milieu and ethos of Indian people who believe in acts of charity rendering help to the people in distress caused by natural calamities, rural poverty, exploitation and denial of social justice.

The tribals were isolated in India under British rule. It was never a matter of concern for the colonial administration to enable them to take advantage of the technological order of the modern civilization. During that time, it was the exclusive burden

of the non-official agencies to look after the welfare of the economically, socially and politically backward tribal communities.

Under the impact of Gandhian age, a very prominent member of the *Servants of India Society*, Thakkar Bapa laid foundation of An Ashram at Dohad in Gujrat (then a part of the old Bombay Presidency) in 1921. By single minded devotion and hard work, he established 21 institutions in various parts of the country including two institutions in Assam.¹¹ Besides; it had 62 other affiliated or recognized bodies five of which were working in Assam. After independence, several such organizations have been formed in the tribal areas of different states which are working for the tribal development with the financial assistance of the government and public donations. Among these organizations, the most important is Bharatiya Adimjati Sevak Sangha, which was set up in 1948 on the initiative of Thakkar Bapa and was registered in 1949. Its objectives were: The development of tribal communities in India --- socially, economically, culturally and educationally, with a view to enable those to take their legitimate place in national life of the country as equal citizens.¹²

Article 19 (1)(c) of the Constitution of India confers on the Indian citizens the 'right to form associations'. Freedom of association is rightly regarded as taking high rank among the liberties of man. It is the liberty of the widest scope for man may wish to associate for any purpose which two or more of them may have in common. They may wish to associate to do something together, or to get something done to further their own or other people's interest, to resist oppression or injustice or to practice either to pursue great or small, general or public object.¹³

It was only after 1947 that voluntary organizations had anything to do with the Government. The Government, on its part, not only started operating some programmes of social welfare directly, but also started a programme of financial assistance to voluntary organizations. A provision of Rs. 4 crore was made in the first Five Year Plan for assistance to voluntary

organizations as they were found to be 'capable of dealing with social problems for which the State cannot provide in sufficient measures.'¹⁴

In the successive Five Year Plans the importance of the role of voluntary organizations for successful implementation of plans was reiterated. Discussing people's participation on an ideological level, plan document found it necessary to give it a concrete shape and observed: In the activities in which official agencies are engaged, there is a large sphere in which the co-operation of the people can be sought and secured to achieve a degree of success which would otherwise not be possible. These tasks should be identified precisely and the obligations and responsibilities of the people in relation thereto made known clearly. The concept of public co-operation is related in its wider aspect to the much larger sphere of voluntary action in which the initiative and organizational responsibility rests completely with the people and their leaders. So vast are unsatisfied needs of the people that all the investments in the public and private sectors together can, at this stage, only make a limited provision for them.¹⁵

To deal with the voluntary organizations, different bodies are constituted in India. The Ministry of Rural Development set up a body to deal with voluntary organizations: The Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART). CAPART was set-up in 1986 by merging in it two existing organizations, namely People's Action for Development (India) and the Council for Advancement of Rural Technology. CAPART channels funds to the voluntary organizations for implementing rural development programmes, and to this end a portion of the funds available under different anti-poverty programmes, like Integrated Rural Development Programme, Rural Landless Employment Generation Programme, National Rural Employment Programme, Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas, Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme and Low Cost Sanitation is made available to CAPART for use by the voluntary organizations.

More specifically, CAPART has been established 'to encourage promote and assist voluntary action in the implementation of projects for enhancement of rural prosperity and to strengthen and promote voluntary efforts in rural development with focus on injecting new technological inputs in this belief.¹⁶

In 1953, The Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) was established under the chairmanship of Durgabai Deshmukh, the then member of Planning Commission. The CSWB provides support to NGOs under variety of programmes in order to facilitate and strengthen their role in empowering women through education and training, through collective mobilization and awareness creation, through income generating facilities and by the provision of support services.

The Assam State Social Welfare Advisory Board (ASSWAB) was set-up by the Government of Assam, in June 1954 by way of concurrence between the CSWB and the State Government. It is a state level organization for the management and implementation of programmes sponsored by the CSWB.

The CSWB and ASSWAB have prepared some conditions for an applicant NGO to be eligible for grants under the CSWB programmes. At the time of sending applications to the ASSWAB, the voluntary organizations are to be registered under an appropriate Act or to be regularly constituted branch of a registered welfare organization. No organization is eligible for grants from the board under any scheme without completing at least two years after registration. In case of the scheme of Family Counseling Centers, completion of three years after registration is necessarily required. Relaxation may however, be made (i) in case of institutions in hilly, remote, border, backward and tribal areas, (ii) in case, where the need for starting services are not available, and (iii) in case, where the need for starting a new service is recognized.¹⁷

The applicant voluntary organizations are required to constitute Managing Committee with clearly defined powers, duties and responsibilities and written Constitution of it. To

intimate the activity for which the grant is required the voluntary organizations must accumulate proper facilities, resources, personnel, managerial skill and experience. The financial position of the voluntary organizations is looked into before allotting the grant. The financial position of the organizations must be sound and the activities of the institutions must be opened to all citizens of India without distinction or religion, race, cast or language. Besides, the voluntary organizations must submit separate accounts audited and bearing the seal of a Chartered Accountant, in respect of grants sanctioned and released by the CSWB in three forms i.e. Receipt and Payment, Income and Expenditure and Balance Sheet along with utilization certificate. These could be submitted within six months of the closure of the financial year to which the grants are sanctioned or released.¹⁸

The CSWB assists the voluntary organizations for seven different kinds of schemes. These are condensed Courses of Education for women, the Vocational Training Programme for women, Awareness Generation Programme, family Counseling Centers, Working Women's Hostel, Creche Units and Socio-Economic Programmes.

Condensed Courses of Education for women is the scheme which aims at facilitating social and economic empowerment of women by providing them education and relevant skills. The scheme is specifically designed to help dropouts and failed candidates to complete their school education. Under this scheme, courses can be organized for women of the age of 15 years and above. In Assam, the women are provided two year non-residential education courses to enable them to appear for recognized primary, middle, metric, higher secondary or equivalent examination as private candidates. A scheme for skill development is also provided for this programme of assistance. Besides, one year non-residential education course for women is also conducted for women who have failed in High School Leaving Certificate Examination as private candidates. A number of voluntary organizations are working in this field in Dhemaji, Lakhimpur and Sonitpur Districts (Table - 1.01).¹⁹

Table - 1.01

**Voluntary Organizations Conducting Condensed Course
Of Education For Women in Dhemaji, Lakhimpur
And Sonitpur Districts**

Voluntary Organization	Address	Level
No. 2-Bajyantipur Samaj Kalyan Samiti	P.O. Jairampur, Dist. Dhemaji	M.E. Level
Panbari Samoguri Nabajyoti Sangha	P.O. Panbari, Dist. Lakhimpur	M.E. Level
Lakhimpur Sishu Aru Matrimangal Samiti	Millan Nagar, Dist. Lakhimpur	M.E. Level
No.2-Napam Mautgaon Yubak Sangha and Ramkrishna Puthibharal	No 2 Mautgaon, P.O.Saraimria, Lakhimpur	H.S.L.C Level
Bhakatnala Samuguri Miri Yubak Sanga	P.O-Kadamguri, Dist. Dhemaji	M.E. Level
Pragati Yubak Kendra	Vill-Gosain Pukhuri, Adi Alengi Satra, Dist. Lakhimpur	M.E. Level
Saimari Kacharigaon Abhijan Sangha	P.O. Deori Barbam, Dist. Dhemaji	M.E. Level
No.1 Baijayantipur Raisumai Yubak Sangha	P.O. Kadamguri, Dist, Dhemaji	L.P. Level
Lakukijan Surujmukhi Mahila Samiti	Vill:Lakhukijan, P.O. Jairampur, Dist. Dhemaji	M.E. Level
No.1 Dharamapur Dailun Yubak Samiti	Vill & P.O. Dharamapur, Dist.Dhemaji Dist Dhemaji	M.E. Level

SOURCE : File Document, Assam State Social Welfare Advisory Board, Guwahati.

It is observed that most of the voluntary organizations prefer to take M.E. level courses only. Most of them take financial help only for one or two financial years and discontinue their programme. Again new voluntary organizations come forward to conduct the programme. The voluntary organizations discontinue the programme not because of unavailability of needy people but due to inappropriate maintenance of audit and accounts by the organizations.

The Vocational Training Programme for women is formulated for vocational training of needy women in the age group of 15 years and above. The Advisory Board provides assistance to the voluntary organizations having requisite capability, experience and infrastructure to conduct this programme. The vocational courses are divided into seven distinct categories²⁰ : a) Commerce and Business related Vocations, b) Engineering based Vocations, c) Textile Vocations, d) Chemical based Vocations, e) Home Science Related Vocations, f) Para Medical Vocations, g) Miscellaneous Vocations.

In Assam, the duration of the course can vary between one to two years. Training programmes of less than one year duration can also be considered. Preference is given to destitute women, widows, women belonging to weaker sections, specially those belonging to Scheduled Tribes and backward classes. A number of voluntary organizations of Mising populated areas are engaged in these programmes.²¹

Broad based voluntary organizations can avail of grants from the CSWB and ASSWB to assist women beneficiaries to set up agro based units like Dairy, Poultry, Piggery, Goat Rearing and Weaving. The applicant organizations should be exclusively women organization with a membership of at least 20 women. A grant of up to Rs. 3 lakh can be provided to facilitate the setting up of a production unit by the grantee institution. The institution also requires contributing a limit of 15 percent of the project cost. A number of voluntary organizations of Mising populated areas are conducting these programmes (Table : 1.02).

Table : 1.02
Voluntary Organisations Conducting Agro-Based Socio Economic
Programmes In The Mising Populated Areas

Voluntary Organisation	Address with District	Schme
Kalyan Jyoti Mahila Samiti	Vill: Khoga, Tinikuti, Dist:Lakhimpur	Piggery
Jyoti Millan Kendra	P.O. Sandahkhowa, Dist: Lakhimpur	Poultry/Press
Noikosh Mahila Samiti	P.O. Machkhowa, Dist: Lakhimpur	Handloom
Srimanta Sankardev Samaj Kalyan Kendra	P.O. Likhak Chapari, Dist: Lakhimpur	Handloom
Milita Mahila Samiti	P.O. Dikrong, Dist: Lakhimpur	Handloom
Prakritik Chikitcha Kendra Aru	Vill-Maghowa, P.O.-Padampur,	Handloom
Bhagawat Ashram	Dist:Lakhimpur	
Dakhin-Pubnarayanpur Sanmilita Silpi Sangha	P.O. Panbari, Dist: Lakhimpur	Dairy
Sarbodaya Samaj Kalyan Samiti	P.O. Machkhowa, Dist: Lakhimpur	Dairy
Behali Samaj Kalyan Sangha	P.O. Gangmouthan, Dist: Sonitpur	Mahila Mandal
Batiamari Mahila Mandal	P.O.Batiamari, Dist: Sonitpur	Mahila Mandal

Source : File Document, Assam State Social Welfare Advisory Board.

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Most of the voluntary organizations working in Mising dominated areas are small women and youth organizations. Their area of jurisdiction is also a limited one.

Under such background the role of Tezpur District Mahila Samity has to be looked into which has become an influencing force in assisting rural and tribal women over the last eight decades of its existence. The Tezpur District Mahila Samity (TDMS) was established in 1928 in Tezpur of Sonitpur District. Adhering to Gandhian ideology, it works towards self-reliance. In 1947, Tezpur Mahila Samity extended its organizational activities, federating a large number of primary or village Mahila Samities under it. As a federation of almost 100 rural and tribal mahila samities, there is total membership of 10,000 women under TDMS.

The primary objectives of TDMS are to empower women among primary Mahila Samities around issues of livelihood, health, legal aid, and credit facilities. The entire decade of the 80s and 90s of TDMS was invested on high quality training to women of tribal and rural mahila samities in order to revitalize their organizational capabilities and knowledge base.

For TDMS, facilitating economic empowerment of its members has always been a priority, either through micro-enterprise or a group enterprise. The women members in the villages, mostly engaged in self-employment or agricultural labour, have been supported through activities like handloom, weaving, sericulture and legal counseling. A group enterprise was established through the research-cum-training centre. TDMS has developed a Health Unit to work on reproductive health issues. By the end of February, 2000, five health centres were established with communities support in Patgaon, Silonighat, Gorbil, Bannupam and Bardikrai. All these five are Mising villages in Sonitpur District. The objectives of the Health Unit includes -- (a) to make people aware of the importance of reproductive health, (b) to generate awareness and adopt suitable measures to safeguard the health of new born babies, (c) to motivate people to adopt correct contraceptive methods to curb population

and accept small family concept, (d) to generate gender awareness, and (e) to enhance qualitative and quantitative use of health services from Public Health Centers. With these objectives, its awareness meetings have already covered the topics like Malaria, Water borne disease, Hygiene sanitation and Reproductive Health.

The Legal Aid Cell of TDMS, established in 1992 with a grant from the Global fund for women (USA), continues to impart legal aid and counseling. The success of earlier interaction and initiatives led to the selection of TDMS as the implementing agency for the project--- Legal Literacy, Legal Aid and Education of Rights. The one year project was funded to the tune of over 3.2 lakh.²² The project aimed to generate legal capacity at the grassroots level, increase public awareness, sensitize authorities responsible for administration of justice. It sought to network among community and women social workers and the general public with the intension of creating a human approach to crimes against women. The foremost importance of the project was the desire to create an effective climate for the promotion of legal rights of women and their protection against violence and abuse. The numbers of cases registered in the TDMS Legal Cell are as follows : (Chart I)

CHART - I

1995	...	...60 Cases
1996	...	...56 Cases
1997	...	...69 Cases
1998	...	...68 Cases
1999	...	...38 Cases
2000	...	...130 Cases
2001	...	...141 Cases
2002	...	...83 Cases

2003	...	...102 Cases
2004	...	...151 Cases
2005	...	...213 Cases
2006	...	...200 Cases
2007(Up to June)	...	...98 Cases

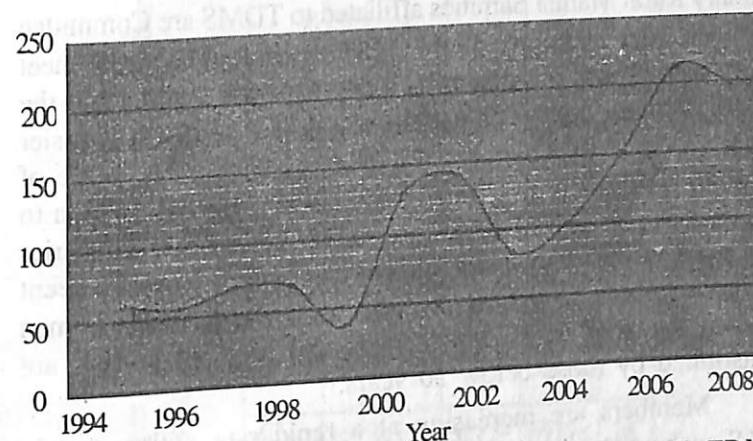


Chart-I : Year wise registration cases in Legal Aid Cell, TDMS (1995-2007)

Women's Thrift and Credit Co-operatives Society, popularly known as the Mahila Sanchay Samabay (MSS), is a project run successfully by TDMS. The Fundamental concept of MSS is that money raised by women themselves will then be available for them to use as loans, income generation and add to asset creation in their names which is rare in traditional economy.²⁴ The main objective of MSS is to increase women's participation in economic activities through which a change could be brought into their living pattern; economic status; literacy rate and health standard. It was expected that women's progress would lead to progress for the family and the community. Another objective of the MSS is to minimize the power of money lenders. The long

term goal is to raise women of weaker sections into autonomous and bankable individuals.

Each MSS has a President, Secretary and book-keeper, constituting its Committee. They have been trained by the TDMS team to handle its committee. Most MSS have one sub group for every 10 members (smaller groups have 5 members) with a leader (Dal Netri) for this sub-group, selected by its members. In many villages committee members and members of the Primary Rural Mahila Samities affiliated to TDMS are Committee members and members of the MSS as well. The MSS meet every month on a pre-determined day between 2 and 12 of the month, without fail.²⁵ The pattern is repeated so that it is easier for the women to remember the date of meeting. The place of see meetings being held in the courtyard of homes of functionaries of the members across the 20 MSS are constituted by women between the ages of 30 to 70 years and only 10 percent are constituted by those below 30 years.²⁶

Members are increasing at a rapid rate within certain MSS such as Bordubia, Balikhuti, Gerua, and Tumuki. For the convenience of book-keeping, members in these villages have been divided under two groups. While in Bordubia, there are two sets of functionaries for the two groups, in other villages the President of the MSS, Secretary and Book-keeper are same for both the groups. Membership of the MSS is to be restricted only to those below the poverty line.

The numbers of members of some of the MSS with total fund in the villages as of June, 2007 are seen in the following list. (Table - 1.03)

Table - 1.03

Mahila Sanchay Samabay (MSS) Villages Under TDMS, The Number of Members and total fund (In Rs. As of June, 2007)

Sl. No.	Sanchy-Bharal	Village	Members	Savings	Surplus	Fund	Loan Distributed	Loan Return	Loan Outstanding
1	Pub Sotia	Sotia	165	48800	47974	101798	167800	163250	4550
2	Purbajyoti	Kasarigaon	114	20680	4823	25585	23200	14200	9000
3	Amarjyoti	Khanaguri	197	120000	216890	344623	887950	876400	11500
4	Manaka	Ranga Pukhuri	168	96440	33300	129750	176350	132700	43650
5	Charigaon	Jamuguri	50	6950	490	7440	7450	3025	4425
6	Srijani	Singri	350	177450	214799	394585	907025	693055	213970
7	Sarojani	Singi	300	151530	183139	334520	396630	736659	199971
8	Mother Taraja	Gharjuli	76	7380	76	7456	6000	400	5600

Source : File Document, TDMS, August, 2007

Being exclusively for women, the MSS are truly catering to their needs and long standing desire of 'owing what they were never expected to own'. In brief, the MSS are support to women's group in rural and tribal villages of Sonitpur District. The main advantage of the MSS is in its democratic framework where women take loans with minimal interest rates. Decisions are taken together with the knowledge of all members present in the gathering. Different NGOs from North Eastern states such as Naga Mother Association, Tripura Avivasi Mahila Samity; New Mandal Mahila Samity, Meghalaya; Rural Service Agency, Manipur; Pranit Mahila Unnayan Kendra, North Lakhimpur, Assam are seeking TDMS's help for training on thrift and credit. Its thrift and credit programme is gradually acquiring importance locally and regionally.

In this situation, a significant argument in favour of voluntarism is the fact that it makes moral hazard easier to overcome; decentralized agents delivering welfare are more likely to have knowledge of the circumstances in which welfare problems arise and be more alert to abuses of the system. This consideration would apply whether the welfare is delivered privately or publicly.²⁷ Every piece of social policy substitutes for some traditional arrangement.... in which public authorities take over, at least in part, the role of the family, the ethnic and neighborhood group, of voluntary associations.²⁸

Thus, it is sure that the role of voluntary agencies in tribal development and social welfare is undoubtedly important because of their special qualities like innovativeness, committed agency workers for effective implementation, flexibility in approach to suit local conditions, close contact with local people, high level of motivation and minimum procedural practices. A number of voluntary organizations which are working in Assam has been setting up examples in this direction.

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Status Of Women In Terms Of Sex And Marital Affairs Among The Monpa Tribe Of Tawang District, Arunachal Pradesh

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The term status has an integral relation with role. If we see the various human societies of the world the status and role of woman differs from society to society. This happens because the society is not static, it is dynamic and this dynamism helps for the changing status of woman in the societies whether it may be patriarchal or matriarchal. Therefore, the status of women means the position of women in a particular society. Every society accords social status of women members as per its own perspective. In this present endeavor an attempt has been made to evaluate the status of Monpa woman of Tawang district in terms of sex and marital affairs.

(I)

When God created man. He also created woman. The word 'woman' encompasses the word 'man', she shows a man what love and care, sharing and sacrificing are all about. In the apron string of the woman is hidden the great power which can make a paradise on earth. Undoubtedly woman is a magnificent creature a power of benevolence and tolerance, a protector and provider, an embodiment of love and affection, and epitome of integrity and understanding all wrapped in one, and hence, in the writings of different scholars women have covered pages through years claiming their position in the earth. And in this regard, Anthropologists had studied women and their conditions long before women's studies became known as such. Today women's studies have been recognized as one of the most important

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areas of academic studies integrating women's perception, problems, perspectives and experiences all over the world.

The term 'status' is a very deceptive one. Status can be studied in relation and inter subjectively and also from the position. The relation of expected role which focus the rights and opportunities provided to individuals by the state and social cultural institutions and the actual role performed by the individuals can observe status. One of the paramount issues of the present day's world is women's status. When one speaks of the status of women, then, one is speaking of conjunction of positions a woman occupies at any point in time, as a worker, student, wife, mother, sister, political leader of whatever, of the power and prestige attached to these position and of the rights and duties she is expected to exercise in her active role as an occupant of these positions. Status of women is represented by a multidimensional cluster of variables allowing for variations in women's right and obligations in different countries and are rooted in political, economic and social structure, the cultural framework and the level of development of each country. The status of women particularly in tribal societies can be understood in terms of prestige and honor attained through birth, inheritance or acquisition of property, power and authority, political participation, level of literacy, decision about marriage, management of domestic affairs etc. by the women in the society.

(II)

Tawang District, as a whole is populated by a single tribe, i.e., Monpa, unlike other districts of the state, is situated in the westernmost part of Arunachal Pradesh. Out of the total population of 38,924 in 2001, 17,078 were recorded as females. The Monpas belong to the Tibeto-Mongoloid stock. 'Monpa' is a generic term used by the Tibetans to denote the people living in the lowlands, south of Tibet. 'Mon' means lower country and 'Pa' means belonging to (Choudhury, 1996, : 41). They are well-built, fair in complexion and medium to tall in structure. They are gentle, courteous, friendly and simple in their behavior. The cultural and religious life of the Monpas center around the Tawang

Monastery. The altitude of the valleys occupied by the Monpas vary greatly from 914 to about 3,658 meters. It is therefore, extremely cold out there. The people live in houses constructed of stones with wooden planks, usually double storied. Agriculture and rearing of cattle are the mainstay of the Monpas. They are good cultivators and understand the importance of manuring. They practise a mixed type of agriculture comprising of both shifting form of cultivation as well as permanent cultivation according to the different plots of land. The Buddhism practised by the Monpas community is akin to that of Bhutan and Tibet. The religious establishment among the Monpas is the image of the Lord Buddha and also Buddhists scriptures.. Monpas are famous for mask making, carpet weaving, bamboo-works etc.

The family is patrilineal and patrilocal. The owner of the house is usually the executive head of the family. As per their customs, as soon as the eldest son marries, the parents and other offsprings should vacate the main house and reside in the out house situated nearby. The Monpas of Tawang are often called as Northern Monpa as the Southern and Central Monpa are inhabited in Kalaktang and Dirang of West Kameng district respectively. Tawang Monpas are the largest Buddhist population in Arunachal Pradesh (Dutta Choudhury, 1996)

(III)

The very word status has two connotations: it gives an idea to the position of an individual within a group. Further it does not refer to specific individuals, but points their position with the larger framework which they form a part with. Status is also used to refer to a rank of hierarchical position in society. "Role is the consequence of occupying a status. A role requires certain forms of behaviors and involves a variety of relationships with others" (King and Koller, 1975). An individual's respects, prestige, and influences are determined by social status. Any social status, either ascriptive or achievement, is attached to certain role, performance. The roles and position have been distributed in many areas while proceeding to evaluate the status of Monpa women.

Monogamy is the common norms in marriage, however, polygamy is also permitted in Monpa society. It has become a fashion at present for the wealthy persons to go for a second wife. The wives are found to be the sisters of the first wife though it is not compulsory. In general, when the first wife is barren or dead one goes for the second wife. However, one must take consent of the first wife to marry another girl. Among the wives, the first wife enjoys the higher status in the family.

In Monpa society, the institution of child marriage is conspicuously absent unlike in many tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Girls are not given in marriage unless they attain puberty. They are married between the age of 16 and 24. Most of the marriages are settled by parents by negotiation but consents of the boy and the girl are taken prior to its settlement. Her opinion is given due importance. If the prospective partner selected by her / his parents is not to his / her liking, the parents do not force him / her to marry.

Love marriages are popular among the Monpas. Marriage by elopement are also not uncommon. Levirate (marriage with a childless brother's widow), sororate (marriage with a wife's sister) and cross-cousin marriages in various forms are also recognized. But there is no social acceptance for parallel cousin marriage between children of brothers. One can marry his mother's brother's daughter or father's sister's daughter but not his or her father's brother's daughter or son as the case may be. The marriage is normally performed in the off season when there is less volume of work in the agricultural field.

The custom of bride price is prevalent in the Monpa society though not observed strictly. It is called *Dhong - Sen*. The articles amount to be given as *Dhong - Sen* depends upon the status of both the families involved. It varies from 10 *betangs* (silver coins) to 100 *betangs* and some livestock. But it is to be noted here that the bride price is normally, not asked for. It is given at free will. Today in most cases, only Rs.101 or 501 is given as a token bride price. When the girl is sent to her husband's house, she is given enough clothes, utensils, ornaments and food

grains etc. Except the food grains which are consumed, she has right over the articles given by her parents. After her death, most of the clothes and ornaments are inherited by her daughter, if any. Some of her articles are sold and the money is used for performance of rites for the peace of the departed soul. Where there is no daughter, most of the articles of the deceased are either given to the daughter-in-law, if any, keeping aside a portion for rites or all are sold for performance of rites in the name of the deceased.

When we are telling about sex and marital affairs it would be appropriate to discuss at some length about their attitude towards chastity, adulter, divorce etc. In Monpa society, chastity is expected from both the sexes but lapses are condoned unless it becomes too apparent or too frequent. If a child is born out of such union, the boy is persuaded by the parents/relatives of the girl to marry her. If the boy refuses, he is fined by the village elders when the matter is reported to them. Otherwise he goes scot-free. Fidelity is expected from both the husband and the wife. Lapse on the part of the wife is seriously viewed and sometimes leads to the breakdown. The man is fined commensurate to the status of the aggrieved husband and the wife is not treated well thereafter by the husband. She may be beaten up also. But, lapse on the part of husband generally does not raise much hue and cry. At most he may be fined nominally by the parents of the girl. At home also, he won't face much problem except nagging taunting from his wife for sometime.

In their society, both the husband and wife are equally free to seek divorce, but it is rarely sought. Not with standing - the short comings on one or either side or incompatibility it is endeavoured by both the husband and the wife and their relatives that the family does not break. But in certain cases it becomes quite impossible for the couple to live under the one and the same roof. Hence divorce is the only way out.

In the event of divorce the children are shared between the husband and the wife. The husband will keep all the boys and girls will go with the mother. If the wife is not at fault the

village council or elders may direct the husband to give her the share of his movable property like clothers, utensils, etc. besides the articles brought by her from her parent's house. If she is at fault, she will have to be satisfied with only those articles brought from her parent's place. The social status of a divorced woman is not much affected. She can go for remarriage or can go to her parents. She will be readily accepted by her parents as it means an additional helping hand. Normally, young divorcee with or without issue goes to her parent's house as staying in her deceased husband's house she may face certain problems. Nocturnal visitors are attracted towards such women with the consequence that her neighbors get chance to wag their tongues to malign her. Same is the case with a widow. If she has grownup children they look after her. In case of her having minor children she either goes to her parent's or remarries any brother near or distant of her deceased husband. In such case the children are looked after by the men. If she remarries she can also stay in the house of her deceased husband without going for remarriage.

The status of women marrying outside the society is not much affected too. It's the discretion of the parents whether to give her the share of property or not. Marriage with outsiders is not accepted by most of the parents at first but with the passage of time she is accepted by her parents and villagers. But tribal endogamy is strictly maintained. The monks (Lamas) are not allowed to marry. In case a monk marries, she must leave monk hood. Such a monk is demoted to the lower rank of priest hood and is not allowed to stay in the Gompa.

Status varies depending on the cultural ethos, modes, and interpersonal relations. In the Monpa society cultural contact with outsiders and modern education are the two most important factors. It has led to the change in their social behaviour, social structure, and social and cultural values. Thus old order yielding to new. Likewise every human society keeps on changing with the change in space and time, the status of Monpa woman also change alongwith other aspect of Monpa life. Factors like cultural

contacts, modern transportation system, increase in opportunities for economic participation, modern democratic system, provision in the Indian Constitution and, over and above, the modern education have brought changes in the status of women. Along with the habitational, professional, and educational variations in the Monpa society, changes are also seen in their marriage system. Earlier most of the marriages used to be settled by negotiations between the parents. It is a known fact that there were good numbers of love marriages in the past among the Monpas but the number of such cases have increased conspicuously. Now-a-days, most of the youngsters choose their own life-partners. Today, many marriages are settled with the payment of only a token bride-price. Marriages with outsiders are not uncommon. It is not a matter to be surprised if we see many more changes in terms of their marital affairs like in metro city in the near future.

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জনজাতীয় মহিলাৰ সবলীকৰণ

ড° লিলি ৰাজবংশী

জনজাতীয় মহিলাৰ সবলীকৰণ বিষয়টো গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ। কবি গুৰু ৰবী ঠাকুৰৰ ভাষাত — “না জাগিলে ভাৰত ললনা, এ ভাৰত আৰ জাগিবেনা।”

আজিৰ পৰা তিনিবছৰ আগতে আমাৰ দেশ আছিল পৰাধীন। সূৰ্য্য ডুব নোযোৱা দেশৰ এটা পৰাক্ৰমী জাতিৰ তলত গোলাম আছিলো আমি। এই গোলামীত অসহ্য হৈ এদিন এজন স্ফীতপ্ৰজ্ঞ ব্যক্তিয়ে সংকল্প লৈছিল এই পৰাধীনতাৰ শৃঙ্খল খুলিবই লাগিব। তাৰ বাবে অস্ত্ৰহিচাবে লব লাগিব দেশৰ মানুহক। মূল মন্ত্ৰ হ'ব সত্য, অহিংসা আৰু প্ৰেম। সেইজন মহামানৱৰে জন্ম দিন দুই অক্টোবৰ দিনটো আজি ৰাষ্ট্ৰ সংঘই বিশ্ব অহিংসা দিবস হিচাবে সমগ্ৰ বিশ্বতে পালন কৰাৰ প্ৰতিশ্ৰুতি দিলে। মানৱ জাতিৰ এজন সৰল পৰিচালক হিচাবে এইজন মহানায়ক জাতিৰ পিতা মহাত্মা গান্ধী সময়ৰ অগ্ৰদূত হৈ আমাৰ মাজত, মানুহৰ মাজত আজিও জীয়াই আছে, থাকিবওঁ।

গান্ধীজীয়ে ভাৰতবৰ্ষ স্বাধীন কৰাৰ পহিলা অস্ত্ৰ হিচাবে লৈছিল স্বাবলম্বী এখন সমাজ। মানুহ স্বাবলম্বী হ'ব লাগিব, অনুন্নতক উন্নত কৰিব লাগিব। এই অনুন্নত সকলৰ ভিতৰত প্ৰথমেই মহিলা সকলকে ধৰি লোৱা হৈছিল। জনসংখ্যাৰ অৰ্দ্ধভাগ মহিলাৰ বেছিভাগেই আছিল পিছপৰা গাঁৱৰ বাসিন্দা। জাতি-জনজাতি নিৰ্বিশেষে এতিয়াওঁ বেছি ভাগেই ৰাষ্ট্ৰনীঘৰৰ বেটনী ভাঙিব পৰা নায়। ভাতৰন্ধা, কাপোৰ ধোৱা আৰু সন্তান জন্ম দিয়াই একমাত্ৰ কাম হ'ব নোৱাৰে। সন্তানক উপযুক্ত মানুহ হিচাপে গঢ় দি দেশৰ বাবে সুশিক্ষিত উত্তৰপুৰুষো তৈয়াৰ কৰিব লাগিব এগৰাকী মাতৃয়ে। সেই মাতৃ পৰ্বততে থাকক বা ভৈয়ামতে থাকক।

অসম এখন ঐতিহ্যমণ্ডিত দেশ। চৌদিশৰ পৰ্বতৰ আবেষ্টনীৰ মাজত সোমাই থকা জনজাতি মহিলা সকলে নিজৰ নিজৰ ঠাইত খেতি বাতি কৰি শান্তিপূৰ্ণ ভাবে সমাজৰ অস্তিত্ব ৰক্ষা কৰি আহিছে। পৰিয়ালৰ শৃঙ্খলা, সমাজৰ বান্ধোন, ভাষা, কৃষ্টি আদিৰ পৰম্পৰা ৰক্ষা কৰি জনজাতি মহিলা হিচাবে নিজৰ পাৱদৰ্শিত্ব এতিয়াও অক্ষুণ্ণ ৰাখিছে।

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জনজাতি মহিলা বুলিলে পৰ্বত ভৈয়ামত বাস কৰা বিভিন্ন জনগোষ্ঠীৰ মহিলা সকলৰ কথাই মনলৈ আহে। নগাভূমি, মিকিৰ পাহাৰ, খাচী-জয়ন্তীয়া, গাৰোপাহাৰ আদিৰ মহিলাসকল যি সকলক লৈয়েই আজিৰ বৃহৎ মহিলা জাতি। আমি সকলো পৰম্পৰে পৰম্পৰৰ বহিভনী। এই সকলোৰে উমৈহতীয়া সবলীকৰণ সকলোৰে কাম্য। নানা জাতি-উপজাতিৰ অৰ্দ্ধ অংশ মহিলা বাস কৰে গাঁৱত। এই সকল চহৰত বাস কৰা মহিলাতকৈ নানান কাৰণত পিছপৰা। বিশেষকৈ শিক্ষাৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত। গাঁৱৰ মহিলাই স্কুলৰ শিক্ষাতকৈ ঘৰুৱা কাম বনৰ শিক্ষাতহে বেছি জোৰ দিয়ে। যেনে ছোৱালী সন্তান জন্ম হলে সিহঁতে পিছৰ সন্তানক ছোৱা চিতা কৰিব, মাকক ঘৰুৱা কামত সহায় কৰিব। ডাঙৰ হলে ৰন্ধা বঢ়া বোৱা কটা আদি শিকি আন এঘৰৰ গৃহিনী হ'ব। এনে ধৰণে উচ্চ শিক্ষাৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত পিছপৰি থকা ভিতৰুৱা গাঁৱৰ মহিলা সকলো এখন দেশৰ এক বলিষ্ঠ শক্তি হ'ব পাৰে। এই শক্তিক সজাগ কৰি গ্ৰাম স্বৰাজৰ মাজেৰে দেশ গঠনৰ কামত আত্মনিয়োগ কৰাৰ চিন্তা কৰিয়েই গান্ধীজীয়ে মহিলা সকলক পিছপৰি নাথাকি সমাজৰ আগলৈ ওলাই অহাত প্ৰেৰণা দিছিল। তেনে প্ৰেৰণাৰ মূল হিচাবেই আজিৰ চৰকাৰে জনজাতিৰ মহিলা সকলোকো মন্ত্ৰী, এম, এল, এ, পঞ্চায়ত গাওঁসভা, মিউনিচিপালিটি আদিত উপযুক্ত যোগদানৰ ব্যৱস্থা কৰিছে।

প্ৰাক স্বাধীনতাৰ কালছোৱাত গান্ধীজীৰ আহ্বানত অসুখম্পশ্যা মহিলাও পদুলিলে ওলাই আহি দেশৰ স্বাধীনতাৰ বাবে নিজ নিজ অৰিহনা আগবঢ়াইছিল।

উল্লেখ কৰিব পাৰি যে মহিলাই নিজৰ মূল্য কেৱল ডিগ্ৰী লাভ বা উচ্চপদস্থ চাকৰীত আত্মনিয়োগ কৰাতো ক্ষান্ত নাথাকি অস্ত্ৰৰ ঐচ্ছিক বিকাশতো বিশেষ ভাবে মন দিয়া উচিত। প্ৰকৃত শিক্ষা লাভ কৰি সংস্কাৰ মুক্ত হৈ পাৰিপাৰ্শ্বিক অৱস্থাৰ লগত নিজৰ সঙ্গতি ৰাখি প্ৰগতিৰ পথত আগবাঢ়ি যোৱাটোহে নাৰীৰ প্ৰকৃত ধৰ্ম। সমাজত দিনে দিনে বাঢ়ি যোৱা ৰঘুমলা ৰূপী দুৰ্নীতি নিবাৰণতো মহিলাসকলে নিজৰ মন সবল কৰি সমাজলৈ প্ৰকৃত বৰঙনী আগবঢ়াব পাৰে। দেশৰ মেহনতি জনতাৰ পেটৰ ভাত কাটি লৈ এক শ্ৰেণী লোকে অবিবেচক ৰূপে বিলাসিতাৰ জখলাত উঠি যোৱাৰ দৃশ্য চাই আমোদ নোপোৱাকৈ অনুন্নত, উন্নত, জাতি, জনজাতি সকলো মহিলাৰ দায়িত্ব বোধ জগাই তুলি প্ৰকৃত শিক্ষিত সমাজে সৱলীকৰণৰ শিক্ষা দিয়াটো কৰ্তব্য। বৰ্তমান চৰকাৰে মহিলাক যথোচিত অধিকাৰ আৰু মৰ্যাদা প্ৰদানৰ ব্যৱস্থা কৰিছে। ভাৰতীয় সংবিধানে মহিলাক সমঅধিকাৰ প্ৰদানৰ দ্বাৰা সামাজিক পাৰ্থক্য, অত্যাচাৰ, উৎপীড়ন, যৌতুক প্ৰথা, বাল্যবিবাহ, সতীদাহ আদি, সামাজিক অৱক্ষয়ৰ পৰা ৰক্ষা কৰাৰ ব্যৱস্থা কৰিছে। মহিলা শ্ৰমিকক পুৰুষৰ দৰেই সম অধিকাৰ দিয়া হৈছে।

জনজাতীয় মহিলা সকলৰ সমাজব্যৱস্থা সাহিত্যৰ জৰিয়তেও প্ৰকাশ হৈ আহিছে। ১৮৯৪ চনতে ঔপন্যাসিক ৰজনীকান্ত বৰদলৈয়ে “মিৰি জীয়াবী” উপন্যাস ৰচনা কৰি সোৱনশিৰিৰ পাৰৰ ঘূনাসুতি মিৰি গাঁৱৰ সৌন্দৰ্য্য পৰিবেশৰ মাজেৰে ‘পানেই’ আৰু ‘জঙিকৰ’ নিভাজ প্ৰেম, সমাজৰ কটকটীয়া বান্ধোন আদিৰ পৰিচয় দি গৈছে। একেদৰেই জ্যোতি প্ৰসাদ আগৰৱালাৰ ‘ৰূপালীম’ বিষুপ্ৰসাদ ৰাভা, লুস্বেৰ দাই, ভবেন পেগু, যতীন মিশ্ৰ আদিৰ উপন্যাসৰ মাজেৰে মিছিং নাৰীৰ কৰ্মব্যস্ত জীৱনৰ ছবি মনৰ দৃঢ়তা সুন্দৰ হৈ প্ৰকাশ কৰিছে। ডাঃ জয়ন্ত ৰংপীয়ে কাৰ্বি জনজীৱনক লৈ ৰচনা কৰা উপন্যাস ‘পূৱাতে এজাক ধনেশ’ স্বৰ্ণ বৰাই ডিমাচা সকলক লৈ লেখা ‘ডিয়ুৱ নদীৰ গীত’ আদি সাহিত্যই জনজাতি মহিলা সকলৰ সৰলতা, সবলতা আদি প্ৰকাশ কৰি গৈছে। বৰ্তমান যুগত সাহিত্যৰ প্ৰকাশ ভঙ্গী সলনি কৰি সমাজৰ নিষ্ঠুৰ বান্ধোন লঘুকৰি পানেই জঙ্কিয়ে ভোগ কৰা চৰম শাস্তিৰ পৰা মুক্ত হোৱাৰ ব্যৱস্থা কৰিব লাগে।

বৰ্তমান চৰকাৰে অনুসূচিত জাতি অনুসূচিত জনজাতি, অন্যান্য পিছপৰা শ্ৰেণী ভাষিক আৰু ধৰ্মীয় সংখ্যালঘু জনসাধাৰণৰ সৰ্বস্বাধীন উন্নয়নৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত বিশেষ গুৰুত্বদিয়া পৰিলক্ষিত হৈছে। আইন কানুনৰ ধাৰাবোৰো আমূল পৰিবৰ্তন কৰি সকলোৱেই সুন্দৰ জীৱন যাপন কৰাৰ ব্যৱস্থা লৈছে। আত্ম সহায়ক গোটৰ দ্বাৰা সকলো পিছপৰিথকা মহিলাও নিজ নিজ সংস্থানৰ ব্যৱস্থা কৰা হৈছে। এখন সমাজত সভ্য আৰু সবল হবলৈ হলে প্ৰত্যেক গৰাকী মানুহৰে ঘাইকৈ দুটা বস্তুৰ প্ৰয়োজন। শিক্ষা আৰু স্বাস্থ্য। এই দুয়োটা দিশতে সজাগতা আনিব পাৰিলে দেশত কোনো গৰাকী মানুহেই পিছ পৰি নথাকে।

চাহ জনজাতি মহিলা সকলে কেৱল খুমুৰ নাচি, পাততুলি, চাহাবৰ বাংলাত কাম কৰি, লাওপানী তৈয়াৰ কৰি নিজে খোৱা আৰু বিক্ৰী কৰা কথাবোৰ বাদ দিয়াৰ সময় আহি পৰিছে।

অসমৰ এই বৃহৎ জনগোষ্ঠী চাহ জনজাতিৰ মহিলাসকলৰ বিষয়ে বিস্তৃত আলোচনা কৰাটো আজিৰ সচেতন মহিলাসকলৰ দায়িত্ব। বিভিন্ন সমাজ কল্যান অনুষ্ঠান, N.G.O. আদিয়ে এওঁলোকৰ মাজত প্ৰয়োজনীয় শিক্ষা ব্যৱস্থা কৰাটো একান্ত দৰকাৰী কথা। অসমৰ একঅবিচ্ছেদ্য অঙ্গ এই চাহ জনগোষ্ঠীৰ সৰ্বতো প্ৰকাৰ উন্নতিৰ বাবে চৰকাৰ আৰু সমাজসেৱী অনুষ্ঠানৰ কৰ্তব্য আৰু দায়িত্ব হোৱা উচিত। স্বাস্থ্যৰ প্ৰতি সজাগতা আনিব পাৰিলে, শিক্ষাৰ প্ৰতি ধাউতি জন্মাব পাৰিলে এইসকলৰ সমাজ ব্যৱস্থা নিশ্চয় উন্নত হব।

জনজাতি মহিলা সকলৰ নৃত্যগীত আদিৰ মাজতে সমাজ ব্যৱস্থাৰ জীৱন বুৰঞ্জী নিহিত হৈ থাকে। প্ৰচলিত এটা গীতৰ পংক্তি উল্লেখ কৰিলেই সমাজ

ব্যৱস্থাৰ পৰিচয় পাব পাৰি।

“চৰ্দাৰ বলে কাম কাম

বাবু বলে ধৰে আন

চাহাব বলে লিব পিঠেৰ চাল

হে বিদেশী শ্যাম

ফাকি দিয়ে আনিল আশাম।”

সাধাৰণতে জনজাতি মহিলা সকলৰ মাজত থকা, ভূতপ্ৰেত, ডাইনী যথিনীৰ বিশ্বাস প্ৰবল। এনে বিশ্বাসৰ বাবেই প্ৰতিবেশী মহিলাক ডাইনী বুলি কোবাই কাটি মাৰি পেলোৱাটো এক অন্ধবিশ্বাস বুলি পতিয়ন যোৱাবলৈ সকলো শিক্ষিত লোকৰ দায়িত্ব হোৱা উচিত।

মাদক দ্ৰব্য, লাওপানী, বিড়ি, তামোল পান আদিৰ অপকাৰিতাৰ বিষয়েও এইসকলক সজাগ কৰিব লাগিব।

বিশ্বকবি ৰবী ঠাকুৰৰ ভাষাত —

*"A woman is the builder and moulder of a nations destiny.
Though delicate and soft as a lily she has a heart far stronger
than that of man."*

Tribal Women And Rural Technology

Chandra Mohan Kalita*

The status of Tribal women refers to the social position occupy as household workers, householders and citizens, rights and duties they are expected to exercise.

There are few items which indicate the status of tribal women in recent days. These are education, prestige, power, autonomy in various social sectors like marriage, employment, health care etc.

Though most of the tribal women are facing the social trauma of restricted autonomy, but there are few tribal societies like Meena, Sema Naga, Tharus can be regarded as unrestricted autonomy over tribal women in India.

The lower autonomy among the tribal women are attributed to following reasons. eg. they have no access to knowledge, to utilize economic and natural resources in their vicinity, they have lowest degree of autonomy. But they are working equally with men folk. If the literacy is taken as the status in the society, it is seen that the literacy rate among the tribal women are very low barring one or two states in the country.

For example, the literacy rate among the general women was 39.3 percent in 1991 and the literacy rate among the tribal women was only 18.19 percent.

The percentage of tribal girls in literacy is higher up to primary level only. The reason is due to social stigma for sending girls to school among the tribal societies. Of course, it is complete different at present in forward tribal societies. After all, women have lesser role in micro level village communities in tribal areas. They have lesser representation in tribal councils and village panchayat.

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The state of rural Technology in Tribal areas :

In case of rural based Technology in Tribal areas of Assam, we hardly can talk about planning on eco friendly industry but definitely we can hope for a bee keeping technology, or Pisciculture or Duckery or poultry rearing or rearing scientific Milch cattle or weaving centre.

Likewise, erection of a heavy metal Industry is not suitable in remote tribal village of working by tribal women which is dangerous nature of jobs. But, planning a pottery or artifacts unit by tribal women is quite relevant in these areas.

This point will clear the concept of availability of natural based technology with linkage to modern technology for higher, economic growth. The point in hand a micro level case study in Kamrup district of Assam at Gumaria village which is hardly 30 km away from Guwahati.

But it should be borne in mind that this case study is a specific one and can't portray the whole of the economy of N.E. in general and Assam in particular. But an attempt towards such type of endeavour will definitely help in acceleration of economic growth of a developing area.

In this village, modern form of technology is used in Agricultural and allied areas only. The areas of prevailing activities are (i) Piggery (ii) Duckery (iii) Milch Cattle (iv) Power tiller etc.

These economic activities are executed by self-help groups (SHG), generally consist of 10 members in a group. There are male and female SHG's. There are 58 Self Help group, as per 2006 October Statistics. The data are found out through a brief socio-economic survey.

A total of 50 SHGs are run by women successfully. Out of 58 total SHGs, only 8 are run by their male counterpart in the village.

There are 205 households in the area spreading over six hamlets some in plains and some are in hillocks and foothills.

The village is branded as duckery village by state institute

of Rural Development (SIRD), when the former president of India Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam has visited the village, describing the village is one of the model village in the country to be followed by all.

The village is inhabited by 68% of plain Tribals, they are Tiwa, Garo, Karbi, Boro, Rabha, Kachari etc and 32% of total population are non-Tribals including general 20%, Chah Mazdur 3%, Koch 9% (OBC).

The occupation of the 90% people are agriculture and allied activities while 10% depend upon services and others. There is one primary school in the locality.

Out of total population engaged in the farm and allied sector i.e. 90% of total households 80% of the farmers are very poor. There are 75 households who are holding BPL cards, APL Card Holder 50, Antadaya Card holders are 25 nos.

Average land holding is 2 Bighas per household in the village. Despite these dismal economic variables, the village is lifted to the top category model village due to economic activities of poor tribal women under the banner of 50 SHG's.

What is the modus operandi ?

It is the simple way of -

Each member of the women self help group reared up at least 25 to 40 ducks. Out of which at least 15 to 20 are female ducks where most of the ducks belong to the species of "Sara Chambhell" a kerelian variety which gives maximum number of eggs. In this variety a single duck lays 270-280 Nos of eggs annually.

The state Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) regularly purchase the eggs and hatch at Khanapara in most modern hatchery, which makes it possible for quicker regeneration of duckery units in the state.

In all 12000 to 14000 eggs are alone purchased by SIRD weekly. The rest of the eggs collected by the ducklings units of village are locally consumed or sold out in local markets. The price of the eggs is Rs. 3.00 per unit.

The ducks are prone to 'duck plague' which is a common disease. The treatment is done by local veterinary units and the vaccines are supplied by SIRD to the SHG's managed by the tribal women of the village "GUMARIA".

The per capita income of the members of the SHG's manned by these tribal women are increasing at an encouraging rate and it is solely due to duckery units.

The income generation is more than 20 percent annually, which is marvelous. Out of this income, the women are repaying the loans to the bank before due time and savings of SHG's increasing at higher rate.

To conclude it is worth mentioning that Rural Technology and Tribal women are hand and glove. The other areas of importance are educational technology like audio-video aids and the like. Adult education, technical education at ITI level for women is quite essential.

In case of farm technology; the tribal women are to be trained in scientific agricultural practices is necessary to higher productivity. Higher productive horticultural activities like citrus fruits, pineapple, Guava, quick yielding mangoes, may be activated for fruit processing items. Poultry rearing units though scientific way will help in the supply of required meat and eggs to domestic and export market. This will simply requires high profile training.

Likewise fishery is also an important economic activities in the remote tribal villages which may be looked after by the women. Besides, Dress designing and I.T. are may also be penetrated into the remote tribal villages to be adopted by tribal women at all levels.

These will go a long way in the acceleration of economic growth in developing economy like India. These needs only coordinatd efforts by all related agencies and follow up measures by govt. agencies, NGOs and social workers etc.

At last, we can expect of higher growth of rural economy better than the that of China which achieved 10% growth rate.

Empowering The Tribal Women In Assam

Chandra Mohan Kalita*

Introduction :

In the pursuit of Development of Tribal society the improvement of the life of women is of greater significance. Among them are as follows.

(i) Education (ii) Health (iii) Income (iv) Food (v) Shelter

Among the above aspects, the education, Health, Income generation are being given priority. The logic is that -

Education gives an avenue to work for better livelihood, which helps in the growth of better human life. Again, that is related with earnings which is an important component of main health so, health status of Tribal women is quite essential.

Food and Shelter : Women folk in tribal society help their men folk in gathering food, fodder and maintenance of shelter.

But there is an automatic change in socio-economic parameters. Now a days e.g. upto late 60's even the tribal people were provided with abundant of natural & forest resources nearness to their homestead.

But today that scenario has totally undergone a change leading better job oriented education in the following manner.

- 1) Primary and general education
- 2) Vocational courses at pre-metric level
- 3) Secondary education
- 4) Technical education

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Educational status of Tribal women in Assam

The Tribal girls are not being educated as per desired level due to the following reasons.

1. The contribution of women (girl child) is much more for the entire day time in household works. They have no for education.
2. Nature of household jobs. They perform.
 - a) Cooking activities.
 - b) Washing clothes
 - c) Spin yarn
 - d) Wearer cloth weave
 - e) Fetch water from far flung areas
 - f) Collect firewood from the forest
 - g) Attend agricultural works

Even a girl child has to look-after the younger brothers and sisters and help their mother in daily household jobs and in Hill areas of Assam, girl child are compelled to leave for Jhum cultivation. Though some new efforts have changed the scenario to a certain extent but the work schedule of tribal girls and the time table of schooling contradicts e.g. a) School timings, b) Summer vacation timings, c) Educational infrastructure, d) Non use of mother tongue; etc.

Relating to adult education for women the tribal women are finding it difficult to attend the classes due to lack of infrastructural facilities, the location of adult educational centre in remote areas, etc.

Health Status of Tribal women :

The health status of tribal women depend on the following aspects.

- a) Safe drinking water
- b) Medical facilities in their locality

- c) Maternity benefit
- d) Balanced nutritious diet and knowledge about them
- e) Basic health tips
- f) Marriage after attaining 18 yrs. of age
- g) Physicians are not available in remote Tribal areas of the state
- h) Lack of Medicine in rural health units
- i) All types of medical facilities depend upon the income of the people.

Income of Tribal women in Assam :

It is quite noticeable that the income generation of tribal women depends upon the following items in Assam.

- i) Traditional economic activities like
- ii) Agricultural and allied activities
- iii) Non traditional activities
- iv) Service sector (Tertiary sector)

In traditional sector the income generation per capital unit is quite low because it generally requires low because it generally requires land and other resource supports.

In case of non-traditional sector-belongs to

- i) IT Sector
- ii) Other Sector (Professional sector, C.A, Physician, ITI passed out etc.
- iii) Service sector-women working in public sector and private plus corporate sector.

In the light of above scenario the tribal women are absent from the last two sectors in recent years in remote areas.

The traditional economy gives very lower income due to non-mechanization and unscientific practice of agriculture and allied sector.

The total empowerment of tribal economy in terms of women folk depend upon the economic planning of the state in particular and the nation in general.

Besides, the total professional income among the tribal girls depending upon the vocational trades in rural areas of the state suggesting the improvement of women lot among the tribal of plains of Assam and Hills.

- 1) Adequate attention may be given in the development of educational infrastructure like -
 - a) Roads to school b) School building, c) Trained teachers d) Use of local dialects in remote areas, e) Teaching of English, f) Teaching of state language, g) Teaching of national language, h) Basic sciences and Maths so, curriculum in tribal areas may be made simple and easy to understand.
- 2) Incentives to tribal girls may be given who are admitted and continued upto Xth standard.
- 3) Study materials may be supplied in time to the needy tribal girls.
- 4) Attitude of Man folk to their women folk should be changed.
- 5) Regarding vocational education the rural institute of vocational trades like IT, beauty & skin care, cloth making, fashion and design technology etc. may be initiated in the tribal areas.
- 6) Regarding food security, depends on the development of tribal women in agricultural sector, weaving sector etc. The reduction of unemployment through providing financial assistance by the regional rural banks.

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Conclusion :

The women in Tribal areas should be monitored by N.G.O. or Govt. organisation. All the schemes should be evaluated for better result. To conclude, it is worth mentioning that the better education, vocational training, and managerial education will help the remote villagers in these areas. Better sports and cultural facilities may be opened up in these areas. Better representation in govt. services and in political areas are important.

Self sustained economic activities of daily required items like food, cloth and in relation to shelter like low cost housing are to be decided by even the tribal women in these areas. Banking operations may be disseminated to the tribal women folk of Assam in phased manner by adult-educational programme, exhibition and seminar.