

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN NAGALAND: A CASE STUDY ON THE ASSEMBLY ELECTION.

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ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is the process by which it refers to the empowerment of women in social, economic, political and legal strength in all spheres of life. It also ensures equal-right to women, and makes them confident enough to claim for their rights. In this context, we will be talking about the education, training, raising awareness, building self-confidence, expansion of choices and to reinforce and transform the structures and institutions, and to maintain gender discrimination and inequality in order to empower women to claim for their rights. Women empowerment is one of the important means for achieving development goals and for building up a better community. The issue of 33% reservation for women has become one of the debatable issues among the Nagas. Organizations and individuals have reached their protest against the reservation for women. It also state that some are against the customary practices and law of the Nagas. In this research, it will be dealing on different issues faced by women in political arena, the role of women in the society, political life and in the administration fields. It will also deal on the problems and the effects of women in politics. This study would be done on the Naga people in Nagaland. It will also deal on the reason why women are not allowed to take part in the politics.

Keywords: empowerment, women, reservation, customary law, politics, role of society

INTRODUCTION

The concepts of empowerment of women have become one of the debatable issues in Nagaland. According to the alteration, it divulges that Naga women are comparatively disempowered and they benefit from somehow lower rank than that of a man in malice of numerous hard works undertaken by the government. Gender breach exists concerning contact to education and employment. Family unit pronouncement construction, authority and autonomy of pressure group for women differ significantly with their period, education and employment condition. One can also observe a large gender breach which exists in the involvement of women in politics. It is also observed that opening to education and employment are only the enabling factors to empowerment, achievements towards the goal. However, it generally depends on the outlook of the citizens towards gender equal opportunity.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 1994 also explains empowerment as a process which divided power from powerful to the powerless. They also assert that exclusive of empowering women, a development is not achievable and also a value of higher than unity would imply that females have better attainment than males. Also various agencies like Development for the Advancement of Women (DAW), Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) also held discussion on the Equal Participation of Woman in decision making process and also particularly emphasis on the political participation and leadership. They also assert that women are also the one who formulate and implement policies for nation building.

It is true that there is no open discrimination against women in Naga society but it is also an undeniable fact that the gap between the genders still persists particularly in activities like household chores, farming, and above all decision making. The gender disparities in areas like education and health are decreasing but economic workforce participation and decision making is still matter of concern. According to the recent study found out that, in Nagaland, domestic chores are mostly done by the women folk, where the degree of disparity between men and women, in this regard is as high as 93%. The study also shows that men folk spend much of their time for special activities such as meeting, discussion and planning etc, where the degree of difference comes out to be as high as 90%. What is more distressing is that man as, the head of the family, spends almost three hours leisurely on average in a day, whereas women folk gets only half an hour rest which shows that the degree of differences between the two is as high as

85%. Further, in decision making and all, father being the head of the family make decisions according to his own will, this is mainly due to the patriarchal system in Naga society. This shows the gender gap which exists between women and men. All these studies show that woman are giving less importance by man not only in family life, society but also in political life. However, despite of all this, there is a huge contribution of women on human well-being.

When we look into the political area, women role is very much limited. The women's Bill which was passed in April 2010, give 33% reservation for women in all levels of Indian politics. This will considerably change the demographics of class and caste among the women politicians in headship position not only in Indian politics but also in Nagaland state too. It will make a path for women from inferior classes and caste to enter in the state and national governments. In addition to the reservation for both ST and SC, one third of the candidates must consist of women. Whereas, even though the bill was passed and women has every right to contest and involve in politics, it seems it is quite unpleasant for men folk to give chance to women. The males are barred from the 33% reservation's seat but women are free to share any of the remaining 67 Seats. All the Seats, 100% of them appertain to all bona fides in the Society irrespective of Gender but 33% are specifically for the women only. Therefore, closer to home, now we are right now engaging on the issue of 33% for women. We all believe that women were made in the 'image of God' just as the men are. This implies that women should be treated with dignity and whatever rights are available for men, it should be available for women too. Therefore, women should also be given chance to seat in the table of decision making. This should however be base on the on the individual's merit. Some of the prominent women politicians credit not the reservation but merit. For instance, Margaret Thatcher, a well known women politician, her political carrier was shaped not through reservation but her amazing contribution of her wit, will, power and courage. Therefore, even women should have a freedom to serve and transform the society through political platform, based on her merit.

The Origin of 'Naga'

The name Naga is a general expression to refer a grouping of over thirty tribes inhabiting largely in Nagaland but also several mountainous area of some states.¹³ With regard to the using of names, most of the Naga tribes used different names meant for them, but the general names were known to them by the Non-Nagas. The origin of the word Naga is unknown. "Their migration, permanent settlement and nomenclature of their name as Naga are given to this tribe by the outsider. Thus Naga society is one of the oldest societies in the world."¹

The origin of the Naga tribe is still obscure and poorly documented. The Ahom were the first foreign friends known to them." There are different theories and myths about the word Naga. When study is done on each theory, they all describe the Naga character and behavior. Many scholars give different analysis about the origin of Naga, it have been a foundation of debate by different scholars of both Naga and Non Nagas. "The term 'Naga' was given to these people even before they migrated from Burma.

There are various views about the term "Naga," a Snake race, for "nagam" in Sanskrit means snake. Another version is the Assamese use of the word "Naga" meaning naked. The Kacharis called the hill people as "Nahungra" meaning "Warrior" or "Fighter." Most probably the word Naga is derived from the Burmese word "Naka" meaning people with pierced ear. "According to A.Z. Phizo, the most popular Naga leader maintained that Burmese word 'Naka' was the derivation of the word Naga. In Burmese 'Na' means ear and 'Ka' means pierced or those who bears earring."Therefore the term Naga is very much associated to the Burmese word "Naka."However, which they agreed upon is that the Nagas belonging to the Mongolian (Tibeto-Chinese) race; that they are of the Tibeto-Burman families; and that they have been for centuries dwelling in the lands they inhabit today. "Scholars are of the opinion that the Naga tribes migrated to the present place between 11th and 13th century A.D."²

Status of Women in the Past

¹ The states of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh

² The ruling military junta changed its name from Burma to Myanmar in 1989. Myanmar became the official name.

Traditionally, women were considered inferior to men. Although there has been no class distinction in the Naga society but women do not enjoy the same status as the men do. As the Nagas have patriarchal culture and so the society and everything is under male domination. They abstain from active participation in both religious and social activities. As a result, the Status of women was a dishonoured one. Even in family they don't have any authority to do anything liberally. Women confine themselves mainly to household duties because traditionally, the people consider women were born only to be workers. In the family, the property, which women had, is her ornaments or whatever she is wearing. Apart from that they were not entitled to get any share or inherit anything.³

Women and Education in the Past

In the educational arena, Naga women were discriminated because of its common idea that women were just fit for family work. After the coming of the missionaries' women's education were encouraged. Progressively, the significance of education for women was implicit, with girls started going to school. Sooner or later, only some girls began to join colleges outside the region. The Government of Nagaland has taken pace to amenities meant for the education of women. Female students are provided particular allowance and a variety of training opportunity. In the present day, amount of well educated women hold accountable positions in decision-making and administrative field.⁴

Women and Politics

In customary Naga culture, the maximum administrative power was held simply by the village board and women were not given any function. This Patriarchal society do not offer any position for the communal work out of leadership in favour of women, or still membership in any decision making bodies. Essential decision making was not the suitable role of women, who in this respect were definitely regarded as superior to men. The male conquered society thus imposed restrictions on the position including their prohibiting from political responsibility. At the grassroots level this practice is still persistent and women are deprived of the right to participate a political role into those bodies. Therefore, women are concentrated to the status of

³ A. WatiLongchar, "Christianity Among the Nagas," in Christianity in India: Search for Liberation and Identity, edited by F. Hrangkhuma (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), 248.

⁴ EzamoEzung, The History of the Nagas, Wokha: Merapani Press, 1990, 11-12

the second rate citizens inferior than man. These have suggestion for the role and they are allowed to play in the common and sacred institutions as well as in the village politics.⁵

Women's position in politics is still exceptionally restricted. K Meru comments that "the small influence of women in the state leadership is in large measure due to women's own inactivity. Political equality between women and men has long been admitted theoretically, but how it is done in the practical world is yet to be seen". Politics is viewed as region where only men can use power, authority and control. Modern politics into assumption gives people freedom to choose their own candidates, and take part in an election for anybody irrespective of sex. The votes of women are appreciated similarly with those of men. However when it comes to the assortment of candidates community are unwilling to select women. People still find it complicated to allow women to implement political power. For this reason, the male-dominated traditions still keep women in a second-class status.⁶

STATUS OF WOMEN AT PRESENT

Beasts of Burden

Women of North East India are socially free but their freedom sanctions their burden. Women inclusive of girls and adults in the family take care of the entire domestic job's which include pounding rice, drawing water from a distant place etc. The burden of women especially in rural areas knows no bounds. Their burden remains "the heaviest millstone around the neck of female emancipation". This becomes one of the basic hindrances for women's development as they prevent them from getting education and also in the political field.

Even today though women are the central figure in the society, they have been either neglected or denied their due place in the society. Health, education and their economic potential have to be taken care of in order that the rich resources of women's power are available for the overall

⁵ The Naga inhabited districts are Tuensang, Mokokchung, Kohima, Dimapur, Mon, Wokha, Zunheboto and Phek.

⁶ Politically it now consists of the seven states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. See, Freferick S. Downs, History of Christianity in India Vol., V, Part 5 (Bangalore: The Church History Association, 1992), 1.

development of society. Employment emancipates women from domination by their husbands secondarily raises their daughter from inferiority to their brothers⁷

Gender Issues

Gender inequality refers to health, education and economic and political inequalities between women and men in India. In the traditional usage, the term, “gender” is used to differentiate whether a person is male or female or anything that is either male or female. However, in modern usage because of the patriarchal mindset “gender issues” has become a main problem in the society as well. Women have been discriminated or in other sense, it is a bias against women by men which leads to oppression and exploitation of women⁸. As Nyanchumi Kithan, a well known woman among the Nagas stated, “Naga women in general are suffering from social injustice because of the direct or indirect practices of gender discrimination. Due to the patriarchal mindset, women have been dominated and do not give equal privilege with men in the society.” She also further goes on to say that, Naga women are more progressive in term of intellect and educational qualifications and are more successful in life through their perseverance and commitment. However because of the superiority mindset of men, women have been considered as weak and incompetent. Therefore, today the Naga community needs to seriously ponder upon this issue. The mind of oneness and equality between different sexes is still lacking in the social and cultural lives of the Nagas. One inner heart and mindset needs to be change. One should realize that we are not created to discriminate or rule over one another.⁹

Leadership Role for Women

In the society, women are expelled from all the decision-making bodies. The male-dominated structure does not provide room for women membership and decision making. In the political sphere women had never played any important role. But in the other activities women appear in the forefront and play very important roles and they take their responsibilities more serious and reliable. However, in the Society the role and participation of women is limited and marginalized in all its ministerial functions including decision-making and other leadership roles.

⁷ K.Meru, *The Role of Women Before and Now* (Kohima: Highlander Publishing, 1978), 20.

⁸ Jonathan H. Thumra, *Social and Religious Issues: An Analytical Study* (Ukurul: Tangkhul Theological Association, 2008), 62.

⁹ Solomon Rongpi, *Principles of Effective Administration: A Study of the KarbiAnglong* (Assam: Tribal Study Centre, 2005)61.

If women are not allowed to do all this, we are legitimizing injustice within the society. It is also very important to have women in political field because women understand the burdens better and that is where we need the work most. A.S. Khathingla, states that it is the traditional mindset of men who consider women as inferior, submissive and passive in decision making.” Therefore, it is the high time for the Naga women to contribute in the decision making and also engage in the full participation in the society. The quality of leadership must be highly relevant as a leadership that is holistic for the improvement of the Naga society.¹⁰

Women in Decision Making

Many intellectual women have a feeling that women are discriminated in the churches as well as in the society. Lalrinawmi Ralte states that, “if one observes women’s life in society, it appears to be surrounded by boundaries and restrictions. Women are encouraged to attend or do any other activities, but not to share in decision making.” However, the Nagas should create a job opportunities for women, equal participation must be given to the one who is well qualified without any gender bias. Therefore, any force that refuses to make equality, love and justice must be seriously critique. Women must also give chance to participate in the decision making process without making any distinct on the basis of sex.¹¹

Problems that hinder women from participating in the politics:

Women’s Issues in the Society

Women’s problems arise out of the combat between patriarchal tradition and modernism that rejects the one way traffic patriarchal system of administration from family to society and church. Men continue to have exclusive claim to perform God’s ministry debarring women till today. Some of the agendas and problems that confront women to enter into full time ministry are:

Traditional Values and Practices

¹⁰ Kithan, Women in Church and in Society, 365.

¹¹ R. L. Hnuni, Vision for Women in India (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2009), 83.

The patriarchal tradition that continues to uphold male superiority and female inferiority and subordination of women to men, hinder women to involve in politics and in decision making process. Moreover, men think women and men roles are entirely different. Women should take up only the household work. In other countries, even women are allowed to involve in politics and can take part in the decision making in the society. So, it is about time even for the State of Nagaland to discuss more on this issue because participation of women in the society will also help for the betterment of the society.¹²

Women and Education: Unequal Privilege

It is true and encouraging that Naga women are giving high educational studies but they do not receive the same aim with men. It is ironic that while both men and women students study the same course and are subjected to an equal evaluation of their academic performance, yet once they enter their respective place of work, the issue of women being subordinate to men surfaces. Male biased mindset and patriarchal structure together push out women from the society especially in the political field. However, in today's context the ability of women and concentration towards human well-being is better than that of man. As American Suffragist Alice Paul's (1885-1977) states that, "there will be never a new world order until women are a part of it." Therefore, empowerment of women in education and participation will greatly enhance human development in the society. So, this attitude needs to be challenged¹³

Integrate Gender Equality and Women Empowerment,

Gender equality and the empowerment of women cannot be achieved without understanding the socio- cultural in which women and men live. Every person, especially men should recognize the importance and worth of women in the society or any other areas. One should understand that there is no difference between women and men, as everyone is equal. The society will be benefited when the barriers of Gender inequality will be break down. Therefore, the society should maintain the equality between men and women without any bias and give women a chance to take part in the full participation in the political area.¹⁴

¹² Hnuni, Vision for Women in India, 84.

¹³ LimatulaLongkumer, Women and Education (Bangalore: BTESSC, 2012), 169

¹⁴ Sakhi M Athyal, India Women in Political Filed (Lalgarh: Mission Educational Books, 1995), 107.

Gender equality and women empowerment are important for achieving our development goals. Until and unless both women and men are able to attain their religion, social and economic aspirations and learn to accept one another as one, empowering women in every possible ways, the Naga society will never achieved better future. Therefore, equality between male and female and empowering women is very important for building up a better community.

Women Full Participation in Political and in Decision Making

In this present time, the society should need to re-examine the position of women in the political field in Naga society. The society really needs to know attentively regarding the full participation of women. As things are changing so fast, while more women are involving in public and professional life and occupying high positions of leadership. Likewise, the result for the growth of the society and other areas is due to the active involvement of women in the society. The contribution that women made should be taken in to consideration and nurture at all levels. This cannot be done if the church is not involving women in decision making.¹⁵

¹⁵ Solomon Rongpi, Principles of Effective Administration: A Study of the KarbiAnglong (Assam: Tribal Study Centre, 2005)61.

CONCLUSION

Women empowerment is a part of strategic development. Women should be educated and should be given the opportunity to participate in the political process alongside with the male domain. Women empowerment is very much necessary to make a better future in the family, society and the states. Women need a better environment so that they can take their own decision making for themselves as well the society and states.

The role of women outside the family has become an important feature in the social, political and economic life in the state of Nagaland. Women should be educated well enough so that she can highlight not only in the political justice but also in the political transformation in a state. Women empowerment is a burning issue that has been there from the age long and deeply rooted in the society. In order to have a better society the mindset of the man and the customary law should be change so that the women should be given equal opportunity in every sphere of the society whether it is socio, economic or politics aspect.

Women are less involved and societies witness less and less number of promising future leaders. Male-dominated cultural and traditional values lay boundaries and refuse entry to women from full participating in the election or any other political field. It is true that women are given roles to play in the political lives but the only thing is that there is no equal treatment; the idea of superiority still prevails. There is imperative need to undo the traditional structure that is deeply ingrained even in the mentality of the intellectuals.

Traditional factors that inhibit the enhancement of the leadership skills in women have to be erased through unified efforts of both genders to actualize God's intention for humankind. Women should also empower themselves to be willing to serve the people and society to the fullest, broaden their own mindset and think globally. Whether women or men, if they are capable and has the ability to involve in political field or in decision making process, that person should be encouraged and support by the society so that our community will be a better place to live in.

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