

Role of Women in Economic Contributions with reference to Lotha Nagas

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Abstract: In a traditional Naga society women were usually engaged in agriculture and household activities. This paper attempts to study the role of Lotha women in economic contributions and their status. Agriculture was the main occupation in a traditional society so women were mostly engaged in those activities. Though women did not share equal status with men most of the important works could not be done without women. Presently, if we look at the economic status of women we can see Lotha women achieving high position in society and contribution to her families

Key Word: Lotha Naga, Traditional, Economic Contributions

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I. INTRODUCTION

Naga society is a patriarchal society and it is the nature of the patriarchal society that women are considered as inferior to men and so they play a secondary role in the society. Lotha community is also a part of the society. In this kind of societies father is generally the head of the family, as the head he has the supreme authority over its members. Adani (2014) the role of Lotha Naga women was limited to her home where she was legally under the domination of her husband as well as bound by restrictions and regulations which kept the family together as close unit. The traditional Naga society not only placed women in the family and assigned her little or no place in the social, political and religious institutions; women were assigned a vast role in economic activities. The economic traditional Naga society considers women as an equal partner to men in word, but the word "equal" could not be considered because women were not considered as equal with men in practice.

Naga people belong to the state of Nagaland in the North Eastern part of India. The state is bounded by Assam in the west, Myanmar in the East, Manipur in the South and Arunachal Pradesh and part of Assam on the North. It lies between 25° 6 and 27° 4 northern latitudes and between 93° 20 and 95° 15 eastern longitudes. The state has an area of 16,579 sq km with a population of 19,88,636 as per 2011 census. The population of Nagaland forms 0.16% of India in 2011. As, per the census of 2011 Nagaland is divided into 11 districts which acts as the administrative divisions. Dimapur is the largest district of Nagaland by population, while the least populated district of Nagaland is Longleng. The total literacy rate of Nagaland is 79.55% which is greater than average literacy rate 72.98% of India. (NSHDR, 2004:14).

The state of Nagaland, which is sometimes referred as the 'Switzerland of the East', is inhabited by a group of tribal's known as the Nagas. The Nagas belong to the Indo-Mongoloid stock. Nagas comprise 16 major tribes and sub-tribes, each with its own distinct dialect, customs and traditions. They are the Angami, Ao, Lotha, Sumi, Rengma, Chakhesang, Chang, Khiamniungan, Sangtam, Yimchunger, Phom, Pochury, Konyak, Zeliang, Kuki and Kachari. The Nagas belong to the Mongoloid race unlike the mainland Indians. All the tribes in Nagaland have their own dialects. However there are no written languages among the Nagas, so all the traditions, customs, and stories have been passed down orally through many generations (Sangma,2017:44).

Lothas are one of the sixteen tribes of Nagaland, the Lotha's belong to the Mongloid stock with Tibeto-Burma group of language. The Lothas are medium brown in complexion and medium structure in height. The language that the Lothas speak among themselves is known as Kyong-yi (lotha language) , the Lothas have an oral tradition and their histories are know from their stories, legends which are been passed on from one generation to another (Ovung,2012:20).There is no different dialect like the Ao's and the Rengma's nagas ,except a slight difference in the accent between the Liyo (lower range) and Nrung (upper range).(Mills, 1922:207) Wokha district is the home of the Lothas. In December 1973, it was given a separate district. Before, it was one of the sub-division under Mokokchung district. Wokha town is named after wokha village .The Wokha district is divided topographically into three ranges; the upper range which consist of Chukidong, Englan and Phiro circles. The Middle range with Sungro, Aitepyong, Sanis and Lotsu circle and the Lower range with Baghty, Bhandari, Chanpang and Ralan circles. The district is classified as rural having 111 recognized villages

except, the Wokha Town which is classified as urban because it is the districts headquarter (Ovung, 2012:20-21).

Economic contribution of women:

Like all tribal societies, Lotha women played an integral part in contributing towards their economy. Women played an important role in agriculture and other related economic activities while men were primarily active in other activities such as headhunting and hunting for games. Kikon (2016) In a Lotha society woman did not control the means of production, they were engaged in different economic activities such as agriculture, weaving and looking after the household activities. According to Mills (1922) in a traditional Lotha society “A Lotha wife is by no means a slave or a chattel, but a very real companion. Her duties are nevertheless sharply defined. She must cook for her husband, look after the children, make the clothes for the family and carry up firewood and water”. Adani (2014) Women were expected to excel themselves in house-keeping and in agricultural works. Else they were looked down by others. Agriculture was the main occupation of the Nagas and the Naga communities practiced the slash and burn method which is known as the shifting cultivation. Land is cultivated on rotation basis depending on the fertility of the soil.

Hunter (1879) account of the Naga Hills highlights that women and children do the greater portion of the out-door works. All agricultural works were done with the help of plough. When not engaged in warfare, men did their part of clearing the jungle, felling trees and preparing the ground for sowing by burning it. It was woman’s work to sow the seeds and tend to the fields. Men accompanied women to the field not to work but to vigil. Sources also reveal that there were times when a whole agricultural year had to be taken care by women themselves. In such cases women had to take the undertake the share of men’s work of slashing and burning of the jungle apart from their own, women worked continuously throughout the year. Apart from the agricultural works they also reared pigs, cattle, and poultry which directly helped women in contributing to the growth of indigenous crop production process. Adani (2014) the traditional means of production was so primitive that the able-bodied men and women have to keep themselves busy working for their bread for most of the working hours. There were certain duties which were exclusive occupation of women folk. Besides, their natural burden of child bearing and rearing, they had to additionally shoulder the collecting fuel wood, drawing water from the village well which were located at a considerable distance from the homestead. In a Lotha society women worked harder in the field than the men. Women contribution towards economy was indispensable in traditional Lotha Naga society. She earned her own livings. Traditionally, Lotha Naga women were less economically independent.

With the coming of Christianity in the Naga society it has brought a great change. Modern education as the vehicle for spreading Christianity has paved a way for the people which have connected them to the outside world. Ovung (2012) in a Lotha society even at the time of the British rule and coming of Christian missionaries women were not allowed to go to school thinking that their lives revolved around the home. With the passage of time, education was imparted to women and education is considered as the key to socio-economic accomplishment. At the present society women are found ascertaining their administrative ability in various areas. There are many outstanding women occupying important posts in different departments. Though Christianity teaches about gender equality, it has failed to eradicate the patriarchy strong hold in Naga society.

Status and role of Lotha women:

Lovely (2017) points out by saying that Naga women had not known, nor heard of any past or lost golden age for women, one that they could long to reclaim, revive or mourn for today. All that they ever knew was the one that they were born into and brought up in i.e., the world in which men mostly ruled and women mostly subject to. As, such Naga women in particular and all Nagas in general believed and accepted “Patriarchy” and its culture as the “right” way of life. In all patriarchal societies women are regarded as inferior and as such they play a secondary role in the society. Naga woman’s overall shouldering ability over the domestic affairs and chores, very often it is perceived as a reference point denoting her dominion position and role within the social context of the Nagas. All most all the household-related works and activities of a family are placed upon the shoulders of a Naga Woman, it naturally requires her to be always on the move, taking care of each and every little things. This frequently leads to the idea that they are better off than their other Indian counterparts. Naga Women is often praised and honoured on account of her ability in fulfilling her chores like cooking, weaving, fetching water, cleaning, washing etc. A women worth and value is measured by the amount of work that she performs. As a result, Naga women often find themselves trying to live up to the expectation of Naga society and culture.

Women were not allowed to inherit any ancestral property. Though women did not share equal status with men, most of the activities cannot be done or carried without them. It was women who has to perform certain rituals before the start of every agricultural activities so that whatever works were carried out will be

successful. However women performed most of the functions but it was a man who was honored. Women enjoyed freedom and status but they were deprived of certain rights and privileges. In any kind of decision making women were not allowed to participate.

II. CONCLUSION:

Education has impacted the Lotha women. Before the coming of Christianity and education women's status was an inevitable one. Man offered most of their time in hunting whereas women were busy looking after the children, doing the household chores, but now the attitude towards women status has changed. Women are seen participating in various activities they are not just confined within the four walls. Now, we see Lotha women working hard and contributing in income generation to their families. Women constitute about half of the population in our nation. The status of women is usually measured by three indicators that is education, employment status and decision-making power. In general women who have higher education tend to earn a good status in our society but education alone is not enough to achieve a status. Education has brought a transformation in every society.

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