

## **GENDER TINCTURE : WOMEN AND THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE ASHTA LAKSHMI'S OF INDIA AT PRESENT TIMES**

**Augusty Kashyap**

M.A.(Political Science), B.Ed, SLET, [augustykashyap@gmail.com](mailto:augustykashyap@gmail.com)

**Nilutpal Hazarika**

M.A.(Economics), NET, [nilutpalhazarika069@gmail.com](mailto:nilutpalhazarika069@gmail.com)

**Rahul Handique**

M.A.(Sociology), NET, [roonsang@gmail.com](mailto:roonsang@gmail.com)

### **ABSTRACT-**

The division between man and women was created by nature for sustaining the human race, civilization and culture. But, it is the society which placed man and women in dominant and dependent position. Women in earlier times treated as subordinates of man in India. Although, the seven sisters or at present the Ashta Lakshmi's are not much different from the rest of the country, but there are some exceptions in this regard. In Meghalaya, the society is primarily a matriarchal society, where emphasis is mainly given to women folks based on matri-local status. Moreover, Mangri Oraon, Aideu Handique, Bhogeswari Phukanani, Kanaklata Barua, Rani Gaidinliu, Pushpalata Das, Dil Kumari Bhandari, Madhumati Debbarma have made immense contributions to solve the gender issues and bring gender equality in this land of Ashta-Lakshmi's of India. Nevertheless, there exists lots of disparities and discriminations on the basis of gender in this North-Eastern part of India. Proper implementation of policies and programmes is the need of the hour to bring gender justice in this land of rising sun. This paper intends to study the present status of gender stereotypes and their solutions through active participation of women in the democratic process of India.

**KEYWORDS** - Gender Problems in North-East India and their solutions, Gender Justice, Gender Budgeting , Policy and Planning for Women in North- East India.

### **INTRODUCTION -**

Although, women constitute nearly half of the total human population, but their share in fruits of development is comparatively low. Boys and girls are brought up to believe that the main responsibility of women is bringing up children and to do day- to-day household works. This is reflected in a Sexual Division of Labour in most of the societies. Women do all work insides the home such as cleaning, cooking, looking after children, washing clothes, and so on; and men do almost all the work other than the household stuffs. It is not that men cannot do housework, they simply think it is for women to attend such things. In villages of India, women fetch water, do household works and works in agricultural fields. In urban areas of our country, poor and vulnerable sections of women works as domestic helper in upper class homes, while middle class women work in various governmental and corporate offices. In fact ,

majority of women do some sort of salaried work besides their domestic labour.

The result of this division of labour is that although women constitute half of the humanity, their role in general life, specially in politics, in most of the societies is extremely low. Earlier, solely men were allowed to participate in affairs of the public, vote and contest for public offices. With the passage of time, the gender issue was raised in almost every societies of the human civilization. Women in different parts of the world unionized and agitated for equal rights. There were agitations in different parts of the world for protection and preservation of women rights. These agitations demanded enhancing the political and socio-legal status of submissive sections of society and enhancing their academic and career opportunities. Moreover, radical women's movement aimed towards equality in personal and family life also. These movements are popularly known as "Feminist movements". In Scandinavian countries like Finland, Sweden and Norway, the participation of womenfolk's in general life is extremely high. For this political expression of gender division and political mobilisation, we now see women working as, engineers, doctors, lawyers, scientists, managers and college and university professors which were earlier not considered as appropriate for women.

Despite of many initiatives and improvements since independence, women are still lagging much behind in comparison with men in our country. Except some tribes of North-East, Kerala and Karnataka, most of the states of Indian Union is still a male dominated, Patriarchal society. In this paper we will discuss briefly about the gender issues and solutions along with their participation in the North- Easter parts of India.

## **METHODOLOGY-**

This study is descriptive in nature and purely based on secondary sources of data such as Government Documents, Books, Journals, Articles and other related works. With the aim of addressing various objectives of my topic, I have used secondary sources of data. Secondary sources of data includes Books, Magazines, Newspaper Articles, Government Documents and other related sources. My method of collecting data has been more qualitative in nature.

## **OBJECTIVES -**

- Gender Problems of North- East India and their solutions.
- Policy and Planning for women in North East India.

## **WOMEN AND THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION -**

Our Indian Constitution provides for many positive efforts to eliminate gender inequality and to establish gender justice in the Indian society, the Preamble to the Constitution talks about goals of achieving social, political and economic justice to everyone and to provide equality of status and opportunities to all its citizens.

The principles related to gender role has been presumed by the Indian state are

embodied in the Indian Constitution. The primary objective for women's equality is rooted in Part III (Chapter on Fundamental Rights) of our Constitution. Article 15 of our Constitution dealing with the right to equality lays down, " The state shall not discriminate against any citizen on the ground of race, religion, sex, caste, place of birth, or any of them". Further, the Constitution in the same article (15) at sub-article (3) lays down that, "Nothing in this article shall prevent the state from making any special provision for women and children". Again, Articles 29, 42 and 46 included in Part IV (Directive Principles of State Policy) of the Constitution contain certain principles which provide guidance to the state treating women as equal citizens , although these may not be enforceable in the courts of law. However, the economic assumption, embodied in the Constitution, as formulated in Articles 23 and 24 , dealing with right to exploitation, does not consider the day to day incessant appropriation of surplus labour of women, as exploitation. In other words, the state's permission to personal religious laws has led to the religious prescriptions of varied discriminatory norms, and practices towards women.

Further, other than these Constitutional safeguards, various protective legislations have also been passed by the Indian Parliament to eliminate exploitation of women and to give them equal status in the society. For instance, the Sati (Prevention Act),1987; The Dowry Prohibition Act,1961; Pre-Natural Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Bill, 1994, National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) , Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA),etc.

## **GENDER PROBLEMS OF NORTH EAST INDIA AND THEIR SOLUTIONS-**

Although Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) proclaimed that all human beings are entitled to all the rights and freedom mentioned in the Universal Declaration, but in actual practice in the sphere of North - East women have been treated as inferiors (except some tribal groups) on the basis of gender. Some of the Gender issues in North East India and their solutions are discussed as under--

### **• Political Participation -**

Even though North- Eastern states of India witness equal electoral participation by women in terms of voters, the same does not translate into either rich candidature of women or elected representatives. That's why the 73rd amendment of our Constitution has decided to reserve 33 (in some states 50 percent) percentage of seats in the Panchayati Raj institutions of the country. Moreover, Mizoram has never elected a female member to the Parliament, perhaps the crisp example of the lack of female representation in public affairs comes from Nagaland. Despite of having 55 years of its statehood, Nagaland has failed to elect a single female MLA into its Legislative Assembly. Rano Shaiza, from United Democratic Party of Nagaland, was the first and only woman from the state to be elected to the popular house of Indian Parliament, Lok Sabha in 1977. In recent years there have been widespread violence in Nagaland over decision of state government to introduce 33% reservation for women in civic body polls. But, in the recent times this trend has change a little bit. Now more women folks are showing

interests in this aspect. However, due to inefficacy in this field benefits are enjoyed by the male members of her family. Moreover, highest-ever number of women have been elected in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. Queen Ozha, Agatha Sangma, Pratima Bhoumik are some important names in this regard.

- **Literacy -**

Again, there exists the problem of literacy of women in entire North-East, only 54 percent of women (excluding Mizoram) are literate in this part of rising sun. Similarly, only a smaller proportion of girl students go for higher studies. Although, this trend has been changed in the recent times, and various governments have also introduced women education, scholarship and other reservations for women to empower the women folks. Sukanya Samridhi Scheme, Indira Gandhi Single Girl Child Scholarship, Establishing Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas, Reservation of Women in various educational institutions, etc. are some of the important aspects in this regard. However, proper and fruitful implementation of these policies and programmes is the need of the hour to empower the women and make them literate in true sense. And we can also suggest some measures like gender friendly educational curriculum, empowerment of women physically through yoga, taekwondo, and other self help techniques, can break the notions of gender stereotypes.

- **Involvement of women in Jobs-**

Although, the percentage of women in the highly paid and most valued jobs is still very small in North-East, yet, on an average a North-Eastern women works one hour more than an average man every day. Still, much of their work is not paid and often not valued in most of the cases. Although, “The Equal Remuneration Act”, 1976 urge for equal pay for equal work. Yet, in almost all areas from household to office, from fields to factories, cinema to sports, women are paid less as compared to men, even when both men and women performs exactly the same work. This parochial view of gender biasness must be changed and women should be treated as equal to their counterparts.

- **Involvement of women in Local Self Help groups in North-East-**

The primary objective of women's involvement in Self-Help groups under National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and State Rural Livelihood Mission (SRLM's) is to extend financial assistance in the form of grants to women self-help groups. This has to be utilized for taking up income generation activities towards enhancement of their family incomes and livelihoods. Nevertheless, financial inclusion is an important policy lever that has shown the ability to translate into tremendous socio- economic impact.

- **Health Issues of Women in North-East -**

It is noteworthy that most states of the North-eastern part of India have largely vanquished the battle of malnutrition among its women. In particular, only 6.4 per cent of Sikkim's women, 10 percent of women in Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur have low

Body Mass Index(BMI). Even Meghalaya and Nagaland have a lower malnutrition rate among women as compared to most of the Indian states, only 12 per cent of women in these two states are malnourished. Surprisingly, many North-eastern states are also tribal, such as Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Meghalaya. Yet, females in most of India's tribal-dominated states, like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Orissa, don't have the identical levels of nourishment. In these North-eastern states, women have more access to improved sanitation facilities at the household level, are better educated and are either self-employed or working. Moreover, Mizoram(84%) and Sikkim(88%) are the states of North-East having highest percentages of households having access to proper sanitization facilities, and in Nagaland 75% of it's people have access to proper sanitization. Again, in Mizoram, 93.5 %, in Sikkim 87 % and in Manipur, 85 % of its women are literate.

Moreover, it has been stated that women forms a larger part of the working force in the North-eastern states as compared to other states of India, which results in reduced malnutrition among women of this land. The North-eastern states have also been vigilant in the past decade in increasing access to maternal health services. The consumption of iron and folic acid has also been increased tremendously from 18 to 54% and the percentage of women receiving antenatal care visits has also been increased from 46 to 62 per cent in Mizoram from 2005 to 2015. Huge increases can be seen in Meghalaya, where iron and folic acid consumption among pregnant women increased from 6 % to 36 % of women, and in Manipur from 7% to 39 percent. In the state of Meghalaya, the ante-natal care coverage has increased from 42.8 to 50, while in the state of Manipur, antenatal care coverage has increased from 54 to 69 per cent. It may be the case that the practice of eating meat, such as pork, contributes to low malnutrition in the North-eastern region. Although, according to NFHS-4 80 % of women of Assam report consuming fish, chicken or meat, still, 25.7 per cent women are with low BMI in Assam, which is one of the highest rate of malnutrition among women in the country. Nevertheless, the affordability of vegetables, diary products, pulses, nutritious fruits and meat have improved dietary habits and increased nutrition levels of women folks of this region. Yet, the rises in prices of these goods lead to a decline in dietary diversity.

Furthermore, Assam is the most populous State, with early 70% population of the entire region of 8 States or Ashta Lakshmi's. The State, with over 3.5 crore population as per the Census 2021 data of Directorate of Economics and Statistics, has nearly 86% population residing in rural areas and only around 14% population in urban areas. According to National Family Health Survey IV, the health profile of Assam shows that about 29.8% children below the age of 5 years are underweight. Besides, 35.7% children between the age group of 6-59 months are anemic and about 25.7 % of women have body mass index(BMI) below normal. As per the National Sample Survey(NSSO), Assam has the highest cost of hospitalization in Urban India from out of pocket expenses.

#### • **Development of government Institutions-**

Again, ten percent (10%) of all developmental spending's of central ministries was

designated for the development of the North-Eastern region of India. The Ministry of Development of North-eastern Region (DONER) and the North East Council (NEC) should look at each state in North-East as a separate entities in order to implement developmental plans tailored to the state's individual needs. Again, Meghalaya, Assam, Tripura and Mizoram are governed under Schedule 6 of the Indian Constitution. The tribal areas of these states have been rechristened as autonomous districts under 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the Constitution. The slow pace of development of the North-Eastern part of the country and inadequate female representation in district councils is not a good trend at all. Therefore, how to harmonise a gender sensitized and gender responsive village level and district level councils that allow for the all round developmental of Gram Panchayats through Gram Sabha's is the need of the hour. Moreover, with the establishment of Women's commissions namely National Commission For Women (NCW) and State Women Commissions (SWC's) have helped tremendously in solving gender issues and challenges.

#### • Crimes -

Incidence of crimes against women (CAW) in the Northeast has closely followed the all-India rate of incidence of Crimes Against Women (CAW). Here, the registered cases of rape, kidnapping and abduction, dowry deaths, cruelty by husband and his relatives, assault with intent to outrage modesty and insult to the modesty of women are considered. Further, we have calculated the incidences by using mid-year population estimates of state-wise female population provided by the Registrar General of India and National Crime Records Bureau, We can clearly see that Assam has a very high incidence of crimes per 1 lakh women. However, combined incidence of Crime Against Women in North East closely map the all-India incidence, thus after thorough analysis we find that women are no longer safe in these tribal or matriarchal settings. There is a utter need for improving the law and order situation in this land.

#### GENDER STEREOTYPES-

A man might say women aren't meant for combat, while a women might say men do nothing in household activities. Such expression represent gender stereotypes, which are over generalizations about the characteristics of an entire group based on gender. Until the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, most of the Western nations have not allowed women to provide services in military combat affairs, but in recent times they have served in combat roles competently as men. Again, many men may watch sports events, but they might not engage in them. Gender stereotypes can have both positive and negative connotations. Above mentioned are some negative connotations of gender stereotypes, but they can also have positive connotations, even though they are often over-generalized. For example, the general assumption that women are better caregivers than men is a positive connotation, but it is not necessarily true in all cases. This is similar to the notion that men are better providers than women, which while positive, can be disproved by looking at cases where men have abandoned their families and defaulted on child support. Moreover, various agents like Parental attitude, School, Teacher's attitude, Peer Groups, Mass Media and several different NGO's also play an important role in gender

socialization of our country.

## **GENDER EXCLUSION AND GENDER JUSTICE**

Gender injustice generally reflects the patterns, rules, customs or traditions that deprive women from having equal access to all opportunities and rights. It includes discrimination in all aspects of society that includes, social, political, economic, health issues, education, personal liberties and freedom, civic rights and rights of personal choice. The pattern in which a particular gender is denied access in any particular organization or institution, while favouring or welcoming the opposite gender is known as "Gender Exclusion". This kind of gender discrimination has already demanded change in the attitudes and beliefs of the people regarding their view on gender role. Thus, some people demanded a thorough going change in this arrangement and try to liberate women from the undue dominance of men and seek justice which is known as "Gender Justice".

According to the supporters of gender justice, the division between man and women was created by nature for sustaining the human race and to enable the human beings to build up civilization and culture, but it is the society which placed man and women in dominant and dependent position. Gender Justice refers to synchronization of rights and exigency of women into mainstream society. Justice in this sense means a more balanced department, an end to violence and equal distribution of societal prerequisites. The supporters of gender justice demand a quick change of gender role in the sense that the women should be liberated from undue exploitation of man.

## **GENDER BUDGETING -**

One of the tools which can be used to promote women's equality and empowerment is gender responsive budgeting or gender budgeting. Gender budgeting is based on the modern idea that budgeting is not simply an accounting or book-keeping exercise. Instead, budgeting is a key part of the designing and execution process. Thus, budgets should follow policies rather than policies being determined by budgets. Among the policies which budgets should follow is to promote gender equality. Gender budgeting can help to improve cost-effective governance and fiscal management. It can provide assessment to government on whether it is meeting the needs of different categories of men and women, girls and boys.

Gender budgeting serves varied purposes. These include (a) identifying the felt needs of women and increasing expenditure to meet these needs, (b) supporting gender mainstreaming in macro-economics, (c) strengthening civil society participation in economic policy-making, (d) enhancing the linkages between economic and social policy outcomes, (e) tracking public expenditure against gender and development policy commitments, and (f) contributing to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's). Gender budgeting scrutinize every part of the government budget to assess how it'll address the different requirements of men and women, girls and boys. For example, in the area of health and well-being, male and female population will have similar necessity in respect to malaria and influenza. But, females will

have greater requirements than men in terms of reproductive health. Gender budgeting initiatives do not seek to create separate budgets to address women's concerns. Its overall aim is to ensure that every part of the government budget takes gender differences into account. However, special allocations can be regarded as a form of affirmative action which might be necessary to 'kickstart' change when gender gaps are very high.

## **POLICY AND PLANNING FOR WOMEN IN NORTH EAST INDIA-**

Every development planning in India identified social welfare services as the only category which tackled the problems of women along with those of other vulnerable groups. But, a review of policy formulation and planning for women's development in India reflects the lack of effort in planning and policy formulation for women in India. There is very little conceptualization regarding women's needs and the necessary formulations required to give them a larger shape of development. Only a few states of North -East India have the proper policies for women's development. In fact, the efforts are not adequate enough and do not meet the requirements. In this respect, initiatives have come mostly from the central government as well as central govt.s. Some of the important policies of Assam Government in this regard are- Arunodoi Scheme, Loan Mercy of Women of Self- Help Groups, Scooter for Girls after having Higher Secondary , etc are important.

## **CONCLUSION-**

In conclusion, for a federal state like India, the success of any development process is a far cry unless the state governments fully realize their responsibility to raise the status of women. Greater involvement of grass-root organizations through the political process would be one of the mechanisms for the achievement of women's development. Again, if states in India improve women's access to sanitation, maternal health, education and employment, they will see multiplied positive effects on the nutrition of women. Women are the backbone of the health and well-being of the society. Political parties must focus on women's health and accreditation in their upcoming manifestos and government's also must focus on health and empowerment of women, so that they can achieve better health for the entire population of the country and subsequently an improved economy.

Further, in order to make gender equality, it has to be integrated in all developmental programs of the country. Moreover, Women empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace in the society.

## **\*REFERENCES\***

- Deka Parag , " Contemporary Political Issues and Ideologies, Kalyani Publications.
- NCERT , Social and Political Life -I, NCERT



- NCERT , Democratic Politics - II
- Mridula Devi, Violation of Women's Human Rights in Assam, EBH Publishers.
- S.L. Baruah, "Status of Women in Assam", Omsons Publications.
- <https://hfw.assam.gov.in/frontimpotentdata/health-indicators-of-assam>
- <https://mdoner.gov.in/>
- "Workplace, Safety and Dignity for women" , A Research Report, North East Network, Dept. Of Women Studies, Gauhati University.
- <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/gender-issues-in-india-an-amalgamation-of-research/>
- <https://www.unicef.org/india/what-we-do/gender-equality>
- <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/03/15/in-india-and-many-other-countries-there-is-little-gap-between-men-and-women-in-attitudes-on-gender-issues/>
- <https://www.careindia.org/blog/gender-in-inequality/>
- <https://hindrise.org/resources/gender-equality-in-india-empowering-women-empowering-india/>
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender\\_inequality\\_in\\_India](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_inequality_in_India)
- <https://unacademy.com/content/upsc/study-material/post-independence-india/gender-inequality-in-india/>
- <https://main.mohfw.gov.in/sites/default/files/56321456698774563.pdf>
- <https://data.unwomen.org/country/india>