

A comparative study of status of Mara tribal women of Mizoram in social context in past and present and attitude of society towards their empowerment

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Abstract

The modern state of Mizoram is situated in extreme eastern corner of India, bounded by Assam & Manipur in North, Burma in the East & South and Bangladesh & Tripura in the West. People belong to Mongolian stock of Tibetan burman family. 95% of the population is tribal with patriarchal social system. Division of labor based on gender relations is clearly seen in Mara society. Mara tribal society like other tribal societies, works on their own rules and regulations. Birth of a girl child is welcomed in the family due to help provided by her as a domestic labor and later on after marriage, for getting bride price by her parents from groom's side. Women empowerment is a critical issue in society where their own laws do not permit women to inherit any property from parents or in-law's side. Decision making is done by male members. Women earn money by selling vegetables and weaving but economic independence is still not evident. They are considered as an object for domestic help. Society is bounded by taboos and only the seeds of education can uplift their social status as well as bring empowerment in tribal women.

Keywords: status, tribe, attitude, empowerment

Introduction

Women empowerment is a burning issue since independence. Lots of policies and plans have been made by government to empower women but still due to patriarchal structure of society goal of achieving women empowerment are far apart. Female feticide, domestic violence, sexual harassment etc are the resultant products of patriarchy. Conditions are worst in case of tribes. Mara is one of the major tribe of Mizoram inhabiting in a land known as Mara-land. Women of Mara tribe are laborious and act as secondary workers whereas in society major decisions are taken by men.

Material and Methods

For the present research work, sample of 509 tribal people of Mara tribe (300 males and 209 females) belonging to different age groups and education levels were selected by using Stratified Random Sampling Technique Both qualitative as well as quantitative methods of data analysis have been used for analyzing the data. To ascertain the comparative status of Mara tribal women, historical method and survey method were used. Interviews of different people of society were also conducted to clarify the status. Questionnaires were administered to know the present status. Data has been analyzed on percentage basis.

Objectives

1. To study the changing status of Mara tribal women of Mizoram in social field.
2. To study the attitude of Mara tribal men towards the social empowerment of Mara tribal women.
3. To study the attitude of Mara tribal women towards their own social empowerment.

Hypothesis

There exist changes in the status of Mara tribal women in social field in past and at present.

Results and discussion

Status of women in past

1. Status of Mara women as reflected in folktales reflects the dominance of men. Women were judged through various methods to check her chastity. Stories reflect the courage of a lady to obey her husband's order which in turn reflects her subordinate status.
2. Study of folkdances of Mara tribal women reveals that in past, hunting reflected the valour of men and women were considered as weaker sex in dances except 'Dawla Dance' where women participated equally. Women were considered as object of entertainment.
3. Strict dress code for women in past reflected their subordinate status.
4. Bride price paid to the parents of bride by the bridegroom side reflected their status as a buying and selling object.
5. The rules and regulations formed by men for their society gave ownership and inheritance rights to the male members of the family while women were given only maintenance rights.

Status of Women at Present

1. Regarding decision making at society level, out of total 509 respondents (209 female and 300 male respondents), 89 (42.58%) female and 145 (48.33%) male responded that important decisions in society are taken by male, whereas 37 (17.79%) female and 43 (14.34%) male responded that important decisions in society are taken by

- female while 83 (39.71%) female and 112 (37.33%) male responded that important decisions in society are taken jointly.
2. Regarding happiness and smooth functioning of family, out of total 509 respondents, 91 (43.39%) females out of 209 female respondents and 102 (34.04%) males out of 300 male respondents, expressed that smooth functioning of a family depends on wife, whereas 42 (20.75%) females and 52 (17.02%) males expressed that relatives too are responsible for the happiness and smooth functioning of a family. 24 (11.32%) females and 76 (25.53%) of the males expressed that both husband and wife are responsible for the happiness and smooth functioning of a family. 32 (15.09%) females and 57 (19.14%) males expressed that husband is responsible for the happiness of the family. 20 (9.43%) of the females and 13 (4.26%) of the males expressed that grandparents are responsible for the happiness and smooth functioning of a family.
 3. Regarding perception on domestic work, out of total 509 respondents (209 female and 300 male respondents), 99 (47.16%) female and 140 (46.80%) male responded that domestic work is the primary duty of women. 91 (43.39%) female and 115 (38.29%) male responded that domestic work is the duty of both male and female. 19 (9%) female and 45 (15%) male responded that it is the duty of the domestic helper.
 4. Further to know the reasons for Men's disinterest in domestic work, out of total 509 respondents (209 female and 300 male respondents), 63 (30%) female and 109 (36%) male said that due to the laziness of men they have no interest in the common work of domestic chores. 67 (32%) female 89 (30%) male said that they have no knowledge of domestic work. 43 (21%) female and 38 (15%) male said that man considered that domestic work is inferior to his status and 32 (15%) female and 51 (17%) male said that domestic work is none of a man's business. Finally, 4 (2%) female and 13 (4%) male said that men do not have time to do the household chores.
 5. Regarding marriage customs, research work reveals that in past polygamy was prevalent and after marriage women were compelled to repeatedly deliver child till she delivers a baby boy. Thus patriarchal institution of motherhood is the fundamental process in reproducing male dominance. Presently monogamy is practiced.
 6. Regarding expected qualities of 'would-be-bride' in Mara tribal society, out of total 509 respondents (209 female and 300 male respondents), 51 (24.52%) female and 77 (25.53%) male expressed that obedience to elders should be the prime quality expected of the 'would-be-bride'. 32 (15.09%) female and 83 (27.65%) male responded that beauty is the main quality of a 'would-be-bride'. 59 (28.30%) female and 32 (10.63%) male expressed that main quality is chastity. 35 (16.98%) female and 38 (12.76%) male responded that simplicity is the main quality expected of the 'would-be-bride'. Further, it reveals that 24 (11.32%) female and 51 (17.02%) male expressed that courage is the prime quality expected of the 'would-be-bride'. 8 (3.82%) female and 19 (6.33%) of the male responded that high fashion is also the expected quality of 'would-be-bride'. Analysis of data reveals that majority of people still consider obedience to the elders to

be good quality expected from 'would-be-wife'. This reflects the status of women in society which states that she needs to follow the norms of society which would tag her good or bad.

Conclusion

Every society whether primitive or modern has a social organization framed by men, women and children. Mara society is characterized by deeply communitarian nature where men and women mix together freely. Thus, it is difficult to make rigid distinction between male and female in work areas which usually let the outside observer feels that there is no distinction between male and female and status of women is no longer inferior to men. But in reality, it is different. It is high time to reveal that depression which haunts many women who have great intellectual ability, much physical strength or the capacity to administer well, but whose God given abilities are sub judged and suppressed by the rules and the customs of society and church. Education being a main factor for women empowerment can not only means mastering the three R's but should enable us to be masters of our lives. Education is providing special analytical skills which are changing the status of tribal women in India. This study clearly indicates how education is changing the attitude of society and positively affecting the status of women.

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