

**WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:
A CASE STUDY OF SÜMI WOMEN IN NAGALAND**

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C H A P T E R - 6

S U M M A R Y A N D F I N D I N G S

CHAPTER – 6

SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

6.1 Summary:

The final chapter is a summary of the study, as the very objective is to examine the empowerment of women. A careful survey and observation has been taken to understand the problems that encompass in their ways to attain empowerment. An effort has also been made to explain the opinion of different groups of people to understand the perceptions about women empowerment. The chapter is an attempt to summarize the main findings of the study for better understanding of the concept. The study is designed in six chapters.

Chapter- 1: Women Empowerment: An Introduction:

This chapter includes introduction with definitions and explanation of different terms and concepts relevant to the subject matter of this research. In a nutshell, empowerment is a person's ability to define, challenge and overcome barriers so as to increase one's ability to shape his or her life and environment. It also means strengthening or building positive outlook, confidence and values in an individual. Empowerment also means the power or authority invested in a person to change their condition. This chapter emphasises the statement of the problem, the hypothesis, the review of literature, objective of study, and the research methodology that has been adopted.

Chapter- 2: Women Empowerment: Historical background, a Global, National and Regional Perspective:

In this chapter, the historical background shows that women in Ancient India relatively enjoyed equal status in some areas of life which can be defined as a feminine

glory. But as argued, women in the post-Vedic period began to suffer a setback. Education which was accessible for women began to decline. The practice of sati, child marriage and practice of purdah were imposed during this period. In British India some reformers like, Raja Ram Mohan Roy whose persistent crusade against Sati led to its abolition. It was under the initiative of Ishwar Vidyasagar that The Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 was passed so as to improve the condition of the widows. The post independent India witnessed the improvement in the status of women. The Constitution of India guarantees gender equality and rights of women in India. The national policy for women empowerment came in 2001 to focus on the policy changes so as to secure the rights of women. Coming to the Global context there are many reasons why women need to be empowered. In this context four International Conferences on women have been held since 1975 that includes Mexico City 1975, Copenhagen 1980, Nairobi 1985 and Beijing 1995 to eliminate discrimination against women in all forms. The UN Millennium Declaration took a shape with the consent of 147 Government heads of 191 countries in September 2000. It consists of 8 goals defined by 18 targets, 48 indicators and 12 critical areas of concern, with the aim to end global inequality by 2015. In the National context, there is a wide gender disparity, and so the issue of women empowerment has become a pressing concern feeling the need to reduce the gender gap. In the political sphere the 73rd and 74th amendments are viewed as a landmark since the creation of the Panchayati Raj at the grass root and Municipal Council. So far it is considered as one of the most distinguished acts ever introduced by the law makers. The act and women empowerment are directly related, which aims at providing 33 per cent women reservation. Coming to the North East scenario, though Meghalaya state follows the pattern of matrilineal system yet it is the male relative of a woman who takes important decision regarding handling and management of property, sale and purchase

of land, etc. The North East India comprising 8 states could send only 3 women MPs for the 17th Lok Sabha election. The women representatives from NE states to the upper house is just a meagre number of 3 women from Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura.

Chapter-3: Determinants of Women Empowerment: Social, Economic and Cultural Aspect in Nagaland:

This chapter highlights the determinants of women empowerment in the context of social, economic and cultural aspects in Nagaland. Nagaland is inhabited by 16 major tribes. Each tribe has its own culture and traditions. In Nagaland women occupy an important place in the society, but where customary law is concerned, rights of women are always under threat. Girls were taught to believe and trained that they are solely responsible for housework. In Naga society top leadership positions in public life always go to men undisputedly. It penetrates even in religious institutions like association and Church setup. The top most positions are held by men only. When it comes to educational context, the early practices enable the male child to go to towns and continue their studies as much as he desires, where as the female child in the family was allowed to go to school up to primary school level only to enable her to read and write her own script. But there has been a breakthrough in the educational field that girls are given the opportunity to pursue higher studies and even literacy rate has grown up to 76.11 per cent according to 2011 census, which was previously 33.11 per cent as per 1981 census. There are growing numbers of women who have climbed up the ladder of success purely on merit and proved that they are empowered enough to take leadership roles. In Nagaland the rural women are privileged to experience economic empowerment under various central schemes through state government. Some of the major activities and programmes under Women Resource Development in the state are

also mentioned here. The Naga tribes of Nagaland celebrate different festivals throughout the year with feasting, dancing and folk song. Naga tribes have their own traditional dresses, each having its own significance. Sümi women have 24 shawls and mekhelas depicting different meanings and significance. The economy is also boosted by selling these handicrafts woven by women. Some of the Naga women who first took job outside the domestic work are also listed in this chapter.

Chapter- 4: Women Empowerment in Perspective of Sümi Women

This chapter traces brief account of historical background, customary practices and the present habitate of the Sümi tribe today. The chapter deals with the issue of women empowerment in the context of the Sümi Naga women.

Sümi like any other Nagas is a patriarchal society and by virtue of which women have little or no say in the ancestral property. It is always men who are regarded as the head of the family and the protector. The structural and functional Sümi society is the village that is under the firm control of the village chief. Sümi women are first trained and groomed in '*Iliko*' (girls' dormitory), from where they learn folksong, traditional dance, spinning, weaving, dyeing different designs and patterns of embroidery work. With regard to Sümi women and matrimonial practices, it is the groom and his parents who usually make the first move. The dowry is paid to the bride's parents by the groom's family which may be in cash or in kind or both and can be inclusive of movable and immovable property. Another important practice is the *aphi-atho me* (price of physical being) which is traditionally given to the bride's family. The different types of marriage practised in Sümi tradition are *Amini Kimiji-Xe*, *Ashoghi-Xe*, *Latha-Xe* and *Topunasho-Xe*.

In the divorce settlement of Sümi marriage, since bride price or in other words, dowry system is practised, the dissolution of marriage is not permitted. But if the relationship between the couple is strained to the extent that it cannot be reconciled, dissolution of marriage may be allowed which is difficult and treated very seriously. If divorce takes place purely in the interest of husband there is no need to return *aphi atho me* which is the price of her physical being. In this case *achiku* (cornelian bead) which is gifted by girl's parents is taken out from the wife's neck. The authorized member takes out the necklace '*achiku*' from the woman's neck and the string is cut into two halves. The string on his right hand side is given to the husband, and the other half on the left side is given to the wife. But if the divorce is due to the fault of the wife, *aphi atho me* which was given to the bride's family during the marriage is returned to the groom's family. The uniqueness of Sümi women is that, they are faithful to their husbands and so the divorce cases are very rare. Field survey report and tables are shown and discussed about the empowerment of women among the Sümi society.

Chapter-5: Women Empowerment: An Analysis of Political Empowerment of Women in the Context of Electoral process in Nagaland:

This chapter deals with empowerment of women and political participation in the context of electoral process in Nagaland. Every Naga, including the urban dwellers, traced their ancestral roots back to their respective villages. Hence, for every single Naga the village played an integral role in their life, regardless of the modern facade of the towns. Within every village, the Village Council is the authorised administrative body and is regarded as the village's highest decision-making forum since time immemorial. It is the Village Council that decides any major decision concerning the administration of the villages. Any disputes within the village jurisdiction are settled by

the Village Council. They are in every way the legally recognised custodians of customary laws and usages. The most striking aspect of the Village Council in this modern era is the absence of women members.

The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 gave Constitutional recognition to the Municipalities. The administration in the urban sectors was exercised through town council which paved the way for Municipal Councils through the Nagaland Municipal Act 2001. The Act was implemented by conducting election in 2004 in the entire State of Nagaland except for Mokokchung, and the elections were conducted without 33 per cent Women Reservation. Since the provision was not inserted in the 2001 Municipal Act, it was passed without the provision of the Part IXA in Nagaland Legislative Assembly. The High Court in 2005 directed the State Government to include Part IXA amended by Municipal Act 2006 by inserting section 23A and 23B that the Governor gave his assent on 30.08.2006. The state assembly passed the Nagaland Municipal (First Amendment) Act in 2006 that provided for 33 per cent women reservation. However, the state government did not hold elections due to opposition from male dominated tribal Hohos. The Naga Mothers' Association then filed a writ petition in the Kohima Bench of the Guwahati High Court on June 26, 2011, putting a stiff challenge on the state government's indecision to hold municipal elections. In October 2011, presided by a single Judge, the high court upheld the petition and directed Nagaland government to initiate the process of election in municipal councils and town councils before 20 January 2012. However, the state government filed an appeal before a division bench of the Guwahati High Court. The previous ruling was stayed. The petitioners (JACWR) then moved a special leave petition in the Supreme Court in September 2012 and finally got a ruling on April 20,

2016. The Supreme Court upheld the single Judge ruling of the Guwahati High Court of October 2011.

The state cabinet ministers on 3rd October, 2016 decided to conduct polls to ULB with women reservation. This move paved the way for holding the election to towns and municipals in Nagaland. The notification for conducting the election was issued on December 21, 2016. Altogether 188 women filed their nominations which were accepted as valid. Amidst the ongoing call to withdraw nominations by various tribe organisations, the Central Tribes Council (CNTC) demanded immediate postponement of the ULB election asking all the candidates to withdraw their nominations. Accordingly, tripartite agreement was signed between Joint Coordination Committee (JCC) and the state government through the involvement and goodwill of the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC) and agreed upon to defer ULB election for 2 months to have dialogue and seek the goodwill of all the tribal bodies with reference to holding of ULB election in Nagaland. However, the government did not keep its commitment as per the agreement and went ahead in ordering polls in several district headquarters and towns. Public resentment over the government doublespeak in ordering poll in those towns resulted in imposition of lightening bandh at Dimapur and subsequently throughout the state. Ultimately, on the pressure of the protesting public, T.R. Zeliang was made to resign as Chief Minister of Nagaland on 19.02.2017 and ULB election was declared null and void. Ever since the first general election that was conducted in 1964 till the 13th general election of the state legislative assembly held in February 2018, twenty women candidates have contested. But, so far, not a single woman could make it through to the state legislature. In Nagaland, till today Mrs. Rano M. Shaiza, was the first woman to have become United Democratic Front (UDF) Party

President (1973-1975), and also the first and only woman to have won the Lok Sabha election in 1977.

6.2 Findings:

This chapter gives the researcher's findings that are arrived at through various interviews, field survey, datas collected from government reports, newspaper and census report. The secondary source, both published and unpublished works, were used wherever necessary. Sources of data were also collected from structured and unstructured questionnaire and case study were also applied.

The size of the sample for the study is drawn from 90 male and 90 female respondents to derive an unbiased response from both the gender. Hence the gender distribution out of 180 respondents is 90 male and 90 female. The research was carried out from different social, economic and political background from three blocks in Zünheboto district in which Sümi tribe is the sole inhabitant. The selection of blocks is made in such a way that the district in question is fairly covered for the purpose of carrying out quality survey. Each block consists of 1 urban and 2 villages. Akuluto Block representing north of the district, Zünheboto Block and Pughoboto Block as central and southern part of the district. The areas surveyed under urban are Akuluto town, Zünheboto town and Pughoboto town. Under each urban station 2 rural areas have been identified for field work: they are Phishumi Village, Lumami Village, Asükhomi Village, Lizümi Village, Chishilimi Village and Lazami Village respectively.

The major findings are as follows:

1. The response to having knowledge about constitutional provision for empowerment of women received a positive reply of more than 97 per cent for both men and

women. This shows that the term empowerment is familiar to almost all the persons surveyed.

2. The finding shows that both gender share equal responsibility in the areas of profession and economic engagement, but where women empowerment is concerned the rigidity of the customary law is the main hindrance in empowering women in Sümi society.
3. On the issue of customary law which is the main obstacle for women empowerment, majority of 70 per cent of the respondents opined that customary law needs rectification which is a positive way to move forward to accommodate and maintain gender equality.
4. In the matter pertaining to women candidature in the election, out of 180 respondents, only 18.89 per cent male and 14.44 per cent female respondents are willing to support women candidate if they contest in the election. 50 per cent of the respondents give reasons on the basis of capability, winnability of the candidate and their affinity with the candidate. So, majority of the respondents are not committed to vote for women candidates.
5. The findings that women are empowered at the grassroot level like Village Development Board (VDB) and Village Council (VC) was responded by 180 people surveyed, of which more than 57 per cent said that women are empowered at the grass root level. It is to be understood that the receipt of money through different schemes like MNREGS which enables payment to every member in the villages irrespective of gender seems to have satisfactory effect as discussed with Village Development Board. But the findings indicate that women are not allowed to be members of Village Council and so it may be assumed that the question of empowerment at the grass-roots does not arise.

6. When asked whether education is a tool to empower women, the response out of 180 people surveyed indicates that more than 90 per cent believe that education is a tool to empower Sümi women. According to the findings there is no hesitation on the part of the parents to give same privileges to their sons and daughters with regard to education.
7. Regarding the contribution of Self-Help Group (SHG) in the household and society, the finding shows that 100 per cent out of 180 respondents in the survey affirmed that they have SHG which is one of the contributing factors towards economic empowerment. It clearly shows that women are more akin to set up SHG and hence they feel that economic contribution is felt more in the women group but not overall growth of the community.
8. The question was asked to the respondent as to whether they would prefer traditional bride price marriage or modern type of marriage. The answer from this survey depicts that 19.45 per cent of both genders prefers traditional way of marriage and, 34.45 per cent of women and men and supports modern type of marriage. However, a majority of respondents comprising 46 per cent out of 180 individuals opined that it should be left to the individual's choice. In these manner Sümi women are at liberty to choose their personal pattern of marriage. Unlike the early days, the dowry system/ bride price practices in the Sümi community is slowly decreasing.
9. When asked about different types of jobs which cannot be handled by women, more than 38 per cent of men and women believe that there are certain types of jobs which cannot be handled by women, but 37 per cent of respondents felt that there is no job which cannot be handled by women. The difference between the two is because of biological and not mental capacity. Therefore, according to the survey

the physical ability cannot be compared to men, it could not be because of mental capacity but of biological reasons.

10. On the issue of Church Administration, although women are not given top position in the church set-up, 58 per cent of the respondents felt that there is equal participation of women at par with men, and 32 per cent of the respondents felt that women also should be given opportunity to hold important position in the church organisational set-up.
11. On the issue of inheritance, 37 per cent respondents agree that daughters inherit their share when it comes to parents' property but major share goes to the sons. Still majority of 60 per cent of the respondents are of the view that women do not have equal inheritance with men. It may be true that traditionally women are not entitled to inherit forefathers' property especially immovable ones.
12. Regarding the 33 per cent women reservation in the ULB, it may be stated that despite the Governor giving his assent Act on 30th August 2006, the Naga people opposed women reservation in the ULB election in 2017 leading to cancellation of ULB election on the pretext that it will dilute Article 371(A) whereas the main intention was not willing to give reservation to women in any elective post. In October 2016 when the election to the ULB was announced, there was a vehement opposition from the men folks leading to the loss of life during the exercise of election process and leading to the stepping down of the Chief Minister of Nagaland.

Naga society is still basking on Article 371(A) and on this ground, they do not want to give reservation to women in any elected post. Nagas have to decide whether Article 371(A) accommodates socio-cultural, political and economic empowerment

which is the first pillar of empowerment for capacity building for women. If so empowerment will be hollow and narratives only. So far, more than 100 amendments have taken place in the Indian Constitution, which means Indian Constitution is vibrant. Any document that is not dynamic and do not change with time becomes a ‘dead letter’. It must be understood that the changing of mindset begins at home, as patriarchy exists in the mindset; the reality is that the mind is not ready to change.

Therefore, the hypothesis of the study posed by the researcher has come to the relevance of the findings that the reservation of seats will improve the women’s political participation and status in Nagaland which is still remaining a distant dream. As per the research carried out it is found that the rigidity of the customary law appears to be the primary hurdle to make women empowerment a reality in Nagaland. Thus the above analysis shows that the Naga women enjoy freedom superficially in appearance but in reality they do not enjoy political freedom. The Naga women can enjoy political freedom only when menfolk change their attitude towards women and willing to acknowledge their contribution and treat them as equal partner. Also womenfolk themselves should be bold enough to come forward in one voice and convince the menfolk that through their participation in the political field our society can move forward and progress in every field.