

**ROLE OF MAN TAI WOMEN IN TRANSITION:  
A STUDY OF AITONIAN VILLAGES IN KARBI  
ANGLONG DISTRICT OF ASSAM**

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## Conclusion

The status of women in any society is determined by its level of education, health-nutrition, standard of living and the employment status as well as the decision making power in household and social level. The roles play by the women in different sphere of life depicts their status in the society. In India, the tribal women play a crucial role in their society and in matrilineal society women play a greater role. Patrilineal family system is prevalent in Man Tai society. The study proven that the women in Man Tai society posses equal status in their male counterparts. Their traditional role changing and the contemporary social setting they are more privileged. The literacy rate is raising and they are engaged in various kinds of economic activities. Simultaneously they are more aware about their rights and duties and enhancing decision making power in all sphere of their life.

The education is a fundamental right that provides opportunities for socio-economic uplift. In Man Tai society, women education is getting priority in contemporary time. Due to lack of provision of educational institutions, poor economic status of parents, not giving importance of girl's education by the parents, the number of illiteracy is higher among the elderly women covered by the study. Government introducing lots of schemes like *Sarva Shiksha* and education for girl's child, scholarship for tribal girl's and the literacy rate is increasing gradually.

Women occupation is also a determinant of the progress of the society. The Man Tai women earlier confined at home and they were helping in agricultural activities but now this concept has been changing and the women are working in offices, educational institutions, health sector and some of them are taking the entrepreneurship and business, at the same time they are managing their household duties. Role of women is

not only important in economic activities but their participation in non economic activities is also equally important.

Marriage system of a particular society is also a determinant of, to prove whether the women enjoy freedom in society or not. In Man Tai society, monogamy is prevalent and the women can marry according to her choice and the divorce and re marriage is permitted.

Role play by the women in religious activities is a part of socio-cultural life of the Man Tai women. In some religious activities the Man Tai women take equal part and some religious activities are exclusively for women and some activities restricted the women entry. Study revealed that the Man Tai women possess equal status in the socio religious sphere of their life.

Man Tai women have a great contribution to the socio economic sphere of life. Major portion of agriculture is done by the women. They participated in weeding, planting, harvesting, post harvesting, thrashing etc except ploughing. The other activities of women include looking after the house, children and livestock. Food processing and cooking is entirely women's job. The Man Tai women are expert weaver and selling their weaving products they contribute to the family budget.

Decision making process of their daily life the women take equal part. In their religious sphere, the women take decision equally with men in household matters but in outside the home. The Buddhist monk takes the major decisions.

Women's roles in politics are also visible among Man Tai community. Most of them involve in different political parties and they enjoy their voting right. The study area under the administrative system of Autonomous Council, they are not following three tier Panchayati Raj system. But in village level they have their own administrative system where *Gauburah* is the head but women never are head of religious or

administrative system. The government has launched many development schemes to develop the tribal people of India. The SHG movement is success in the study area and most of the women are beneficiary of the SHG and availing micro finance from the fund giving agency.

The health care and other services to the Man Tai women are also available and they are assessing the mobile health care services in their area. They have government hospital facility to deliver their baby in nearby study area. ICDS have networking in the study area to develop the existing condition. Some of the women , those are in below poverty line (BPL) getting financial assistance to construct their house and old age pension are also getting by old women. *Mahila Samity* functioning well in study area and they discuss about their rights, duties as well health care and house care.

Educational level of the women are core issue of the discussion and the interpretation can be summarised that the women groups of that particular society leading toward the light of education. The women's becoming more educated compare to the older generation and the same time the growth rate of educational institutions are also increasing.

Married women's are considered as the respondents of the study to maintain the homogeneity among the sample has chosen.

Age at marriage of the respondents also discussed and it can be concluded that the early marriage is prevalent among the Man Tai women but the transformation has been seen in between the older and younger generation.

Type of marriage in a particular society is a social norm also to maintain the kingship system. Interpretation of data can be summarised that the most accepted type of marriage is a caste marriage, but there is a case of inter caste marriage which are also

accepted by the society but the cases are minimum, traditionally they are following marriage within the caste.

The summary on family background is discussed in two heading viz. size of the family and nature of the family. Data reveals that transition is happening in size of the family between elderly and younger women. Earlier the expectant numbers of children were in between 4-6 and the numbers of expectations are gradually going down. It was found that most of the elderly women had their children in between 4-6 numbers but the younger and middle aged women had 2-4 numbers of children. Change has been seen in type of family, between the age groups of elder and middle age groups. The analysis of data shows that younger generation was slow in adopting the nuclear family system.

Housing pattern discussed by gathering field data from the selected respondents mainly in two areas viz. nature of housing and type of housing. The findings stated that in Man Tai community the *Kutcha*, *Semi-pucca* and *Pucca* houses are preferred by the people but transition are happening in their preference. Some of them getting fund to build their houses under Indira Awaas Yojana. Analysis of data proving that traditional type of housing is not accepted by the younger generation but it has been seen in middle age and elder group of women.

Occupational background also considered as a parameter to find out the women's economic role in Man Tai society. The data analysis proven that the women participation in economic activities is increasing in Man Tai community to meet the demand of the family budget and also inclination toward the standard of living. The technological development and globalisation introduce them the new style of living for instance the use of mobile phone, television etc. The inclusion of new technology is a craving to taking up the various types of jobs. For instance in teaching sector, health sector, government schemes, business and entrepreneurs. Majority of women had their

income level within Rs. 1000-2000/-. Though the income level is lesser amount, but they are not under the category of below poverty line (per capita monthly income of about Rs. 447 per month in the rural areas).

Interpretations of data in table “Participation Religious Activities at Household Level” reveals that transition has been seen in respect of participation in religious functions. Majority of elderly and middle aged women took decision performing religious activities in community level. But younger women participation was less. Transition was also seen in cooking in religious functions where cent percent of elderly women, more than 70 percent younger women and more than 50 percent middle aged women participated. Due to participating in multitasking like engagement in economic activities, field works, household works, child rearing the middle aged women participation were less.

Data reveals in table “Participations in Family and Social Functions” was the tradition of Man Tai women that they did not dance and sing in the marriage ceremony. Majority of elderly women (91.1 percent) cooked in the marriage ceremony but the participation of younger and middle aged women were less.

It was also traditional practice that no women can dance while celebrating birth ceremony, but new generation adopting this practice.

In analysis of data table “Participation in Religious Activities in Community Level” reveals that due to the high social status of Man Tai women in the society, all the women dance and sing in the festival celebrating in the community level.

The analysis of data in the table “Participation in Decision Making Process” can be summarised as - it was also found that all the women taking part in joint decisions with their husband in all the aspects of their day-to-day life. It proved that the Man Tai women possess high status in their family life. But the women did not take any family

planning measures to restrict their family. It seems it was due to low literacy rate and lack of awareness about the scientific measures.

The interpretation of data in table “Tribal Women Participation in Agricultural Activities” reveals that the majority of Man Tai women actively participating in agricultural activities, but it were the transition that elderly women participation was higher in comparison to middle aged and followed by younger women. Due to the lack of knowledge of technology, the Man Tai women never employed any kind of technology in their field.

None of the Man Tai women reared silk worm due to their religious taboos.

It was found that majority of women engaged in weaving process and they generally sold their weaving products and gave economic support to the family.

Transition has also seen in the area of firewood collection. Majority of elderly women collected the firewood from the forest but the younger women collected from their own orchard because the forest department restricted the use of forest products for the local people.

It was also found that Man Tai women, in their earlier days used the river water and ring well water for their use but the younger women using tube well for fetching water.

Data proved that traditional *chulla* was used by majority of elderly women but the younger women using gas stove to cook their foods. For stitching clothes, they practice hand stitching.

Data analysis in table “Child Care and Health Care Practices” reveals that in case of child rearing, data stated that younger women were more concerned about their children’s development including their study. Earlier it was more prevalent that elderly women taught their children by singing lullabies but the younger women have been teaching their children’s by scientific ways. The transition was also seen in case of

vaccination. Majority of younger women vaccinated their children but elderly women did not give much importance to their children's vaccination.

It was also found that the younger women taking care of their health by consulting with the doctor followed by middle aged and elderly women less concerned about it. Majority of younger women consulted with doctor while they were pregnant, followed by middle aged and elderly women were less concerned. The transition was seen in taking nutritious foods whereas the younger women concerned much than middle aged and elderly women.

In analysis of data in the table "Participation in Socio-Economic Development Programmes" stated that it has been seen that majority of younger women were members of *Mahila Samiti*, followed by middle aged women and elderly participation was less. Middle aged political participation was more than younger women and elderly women. Younger women awareness about voting behaviour was more than elderly and middle aged women.



## Case Studies

### **Case Study-1**

*Dibyadhar Shyam*

*Age: 49 years*

*Profession: Officer in Forest Department*

The person inhabited in a Man Tai village of Karbi Anglong district of Assam. He belongs to Man Tai community. The researcher discussed with him the changes happening in Man Tai society, during her field visits the researcher stay with his family and they give an immense knowledge about their society. They offer the traditional food to the researcher and researcher got an opportunity to taste the traditional Man Tai food.

Mr. Dibadhyar Shyam, having two sons and one daughter and they are well educated. The eldest son, Disen Phalung, he is an academician with engineering degree in central university, Tezpur. The daughter, Aisen also a post graduate and working in a private sector. The youngest son, Nisen Phalung is an MBBS student. The researcher quarry about the surname the children use. He replied that the sure name they use is their Gotra name. His wife, Bidhyani Phalung is also an educated wife who working as a teacher in local school.

The researcher enquire about his experience in his own society regarding the changes happening in the area of education, health sector, infrastructure facilities, women entrepreneurship and the participation in agriculture actives etc. According to his view point's changing is happening in the area slowly and gradually. The women involvement in agriculture sector diminishing because the Man Tai community, people are emphasising on white colour jobs. Women are taking entrepreneurship and they are contributing to family budget. The status of women in the society is high because in

religious matters also they take important part. Every morning the first and foremost duty of a Man Tai women to offer food stuff to their Buddhist monk. The women are equal partner of their male counterpart. According to him, the educational institutes are growing in the area in last few years. High schools are now in a distance of 2.3 kilometers and before it was 8-10 kilometers. Health care center is not sufficient in that area but the mobile health care services are there.

## **Case Study –2**

***Bhante Bicitra***

***Religious Monk***

***Silonijan***

***Age: 85 years***

According to the religious monk of Buddhist temple of Silonijan, the women status and the position in the society in religious sphere is high. They take equal participation in the religious activities. According to his knowledge, in that temple there is a woman monk or bhikun, whose age is above eighty. In Man Tai society, there are another four, five bhikunis are there as per his knowledge is concern. The women, in the society take important part in religious activities. Their duty is to provide food to the monk in the morning. The village women do it in a turn wise. During *bharsabas*, the women do prayer and keep fast and they stay in the temple. In the other religious festival also the women takes equal part along with the men.