

**EMPOWERMENT OF NAGA WOMEN THROUGH
EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MON,
KOHIMA AND MOKOKCHUNG DISTRICTS**

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CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY

AND

CONCLUSION

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Education is the most powerful instrument to change the position of a woman in a society. Education also brings a reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family. In the last decade or so the empowerment of women has been recognised as a central issue in determining the situational reality of their status. The government of India has declared the year 2001 as “Women Empowerment” and lot has been done at the National and International levels. Yet a lurking question that still remains to be answered despite all the efforts and the apparent psycho-economic and social political progress that have taken in women’s situation, why there continues to be so much of exploitation, abuse, discrimination, violence and crimes against women. Education plays a vital role in empowering women and is regarded as an important variable which is necessary for the upliftment of women in the society. Denial of education seriously curtails women’s ability to earn a decent, independent livelihood besides disadvantaging them in terms of mental growth. It shuts the door on the whole realm of ideas of thought, the world of Science and Technology. Education is the biggest asset one can have; it is the key to enlightenment which brings about a progressive all around development in an individual. Education is the most important indicator. It not only uplifts the status of women but brings about changes in the perception, the way one process and garners the environment around her. Education paves way for more opportunities. It gives confidences and a sense of sensibility and rationality. Empowerment of women means enhancing awareness of individuals that can facilitate social development, politically active, economically productive and

independent that enables to make their choices and appropriate decisions in matters at individual household and community level. This helps women to be more aware of their constitutional, legal rights, opportunities available for them to make their lives better. More importantly, the strategy of empowerment also helps women to achieve comprehensive development.⁸²

Women Empowerment essentially means educating women, making them aware of their rights, raising the right to be heard against injustice. Women Empowerment is not confined only in providing women with all the rights she deserves but also the basic idea of contributing the best she can with her conduct to the society. Empowering women is to make them independent in all aspects of intellect, thought, rights, decisions, etc leaving aside all the social and family limitations. Women empowerment is empowering the women to take their own decisions for their personal independence and to bring the necessary changes with the available resources at her disposal.

Education plays the most important role to uplift the status of women. It not only ascertains the identity of a woman in all spheres but also brings about an overall change in the personality of an individual. Education is the most crucial factor that determines to empower a woman. There is no second opinion about the pivotal role played by education in sculpturing the socio-economic landscape of any society. It gets rids of ignorance, and opens the minds of the people to get enlightened. Along with the receipt of education, the realization of one's rights and responsibilities grow in the minds of the people. It is in the midst of collective thinking and actions to

⁸² Reddy Narayana, S. Kumar Vijaya, B. Nalini, *Women and development*, New Delhi, p. 59

overcome challenges to education and through education. With regard to the role of education in empowering Naga women in every field, and on the changing perception of the Naga on participation, decision making and on the attitudinal change brought about by the impact of education in Naga society, a comparative study was undertaken keeping in mind all the factors with regard to the various important aspects the society.

Education plays an all encompassing role in bringing them to the forefront of any given issue. Education has always been an important factor in Naga society. Getting educated has been and is considered an utmost priority for the Nagas. The literacy rate is quite high and is above the national literacy rate and the leap in the literacy rate is witnessed with every passing decade. The American missionaries played a very significant role in paving way for education in the state which made an overall change in the Naga society. Basic education was introduced in the Naga society. In the educational field in spite of the fact that the literacy rate is quite high there are still sections of women who have faced discrimination. The discrimination level is not limited only to the higher education but at all levels of educational set up, traces of discrimination have been observed. Naga society with its patriarchal structure is bound to encounter such scenarios.

The fact that discrimination or gender inequality still exists cannot be completely rooted out. There are still elements of discrimination existing in Naga society. As indicated through the present study discrimination is more visible in the rural area. A comparison among the three districts shows that discrimination level is highest in Mon district that can be attributed to the lower levels of education according to 2011 census report Mon has the lowest literacy rate in the state with

only 52.39 on the other hand Mokokchung has the highest literacy rate with 91.74 percent and as found in the study that the level of discrimination. in the field of education is lowest in the said district which clearly indicates that there is correlation between the literacy rate and the level of discrimination it can be stated that the higher the literacy rate the lower the level of discrimination.

Education is a universal human right. Education plays a vital and indispensable role in empowering women to a great extent. Women in general during the last decade have become more assertive of their rights and have become more outspoken about their rights and opinions. Earlier in the past Naga women were considerably less opinionated and certain hindrances were evident and one factor could be pertaining to the ignorance to understand the importance of education. But through this study it has been observed that majority of the women were very opinionated and were able to express themselves well and cent percent of the respondents attested to the role of education in empowering women keeping the fact in mind that some of them could not receive their basic education. The ability to express their mind indicates a very positive picture of empowerment at work because one of the core concepts of empowerment is the ability to validate and articulate one's thoughts and opinions.

One of the indicators of women empowerment is the participation of women in the important family matter which is considered as the basic level of participation for women. Earlier women were confined to the traditional role of playing a mother and wife. As highlighted in the present study, majority of respondents expressed that they were consulted in the decision making of the family affairs (fig 4.14). This reflects a positive position of women because there is a correlation between decision

making capability and empowerment of women. Women empowerment in other words also implies rightful power or authority to perform a task at the household level. The more women are empowered their level of participation also increases not only at the basic level but also at the utmost front of the society.

One of the major objectives of the present study was to find out the changing perception of the Naga women relating to the different aspects of the society. Marriage is an integral part of the social-cultural aspect of Naga society. It is still very much considered one of the most important aspects of the Nagas but now with the coming of modernity the perception towards marriage seems to be changing. Earlier it was considered as a social obligation or a social necessity. Personal choice was not taken so much into consideration and there was a certain amount of stigma attached to women who were not married. But as highlighted in the earlier chapter majority of the respondents opined that marriage is a matter of personal choice (fig. 5.1). The institution of marriage is still very important but the whole attitude towards the concept of marriage is going through transition.

One of the main factors that could be attributed for this is financial independence with women becoming more aware of being educated and further attaining educational qualifications. The more educated she is the more empowered she becomes to make her own personal choices and decision thereby also willing to take the responsibilities pertaining to the consequences of her decision. So the implication of all this denotes the crux of empowerment that is gaining control over one's life and making independent decision.

The concept towards remarriage was positively viewed by majority of the respondents which clearly indicates the changing perception of Naga women. This indicates that Naga women have become more receptive towards the changing trends that are happening in the society. In spite of the fact that attitude towards marriage or remarriage is changing societal attitude towards divorce has not changed much. The present study highlights that when it comes to the factors that determines marriage or remarriage Naga women seems to be more flexible but when it comes to the issue of divorce certain reservation has been observed. Marriage being one of the most integral aspects of the Naga society and with the religious and moral implications attached to it is indeed taken very seriously by both the parties. There are certain consequences to be faced by both the spouses.

Women's education is playing an interventionist role making them economically more independent improving their status in the economic field. Education plays a liberating role in the way 100 percent of the respondents from all the three districts have approved the working women in the society which indicates that there has been a tremendous change in the way women perceive things. No longer are women bound by the conventional understanding of being confined at home.

The study highlights that Naga women have realised the importance of being financially independent and also to be in a position to contribute to the income of the family which cannot be overlooked at an age where financial security is essential to sustain the progress of any family. Further being in such a position to support oneself as well as to contribute financially to the family is another implication of women empowerment as one of the outstanding feature of women empowerment is to be

financially self sufficient in whatever way possible without being dependent on others. The present situation demands that women also contribute financially so as to fulfil various needs of the family and also to be freed from dependence.

Even in the economic scenario the perception and the contribution of Naga women has altered remarkably which has been highlighted through the study. In Naga society during the last decades male mostly contributed to the income of the family. Naga women had little say in the income and their contribution to the family income was not very prominent but times have changed. With the impact of education women are entering into all fields of service sector competing with men and in certain areas women perform better than men. In this present study one of the major positive findings was the number of women contributing to the income of the family. This indicates a very positive picture of empowerment taking place in the lives of the Naga women.

Majority of the respondents cited awareness of women's rights and the responsibility for them to participate in the economic activities. One cannot be aware unless one is educated. Directly or indirectly, education has been playing a pivotal role in creating an awareness of the rights attached with responsibilities for women and opportunity to fully enjoy the rights.

As per the present study, one notable aspect is the presence of discrimination especially at workplace. On one hand women are being empowered and the status of women has been much elevated, but on the other hand discrimination against women still exists at workplace. It may not be targeted towards the individual but discrimination is faced being a woman. This also implies that it's not just the society

but the system that's also more patriarchal oriented. However this does not hinder those facing the discrimination to cease being empowered.

Through this research one has found out that domestic violence is prevalent in the society (fig.4.6) over and above the kind of discrimination they face in the work place by Naga women. Domestic violence still persists irrespective of the fact that Naga women are being empowered through education as also evident through this study. In spite of the fact that there is so much talk on the empowerment of women there are sections of women in the society that still face social evils like domestic violence. It is in itself the lowest form of act against women. It not only subjugates the status of women but also results in physical, psychological and emotional trauma. There is no option for the Naga women to empower themselves to fight against domestic violence as they are the victims but awareness and accessibility to information regarding the consequences to be faced by male counterpart is important.

Even in the political scenario, Naga women are entitled to equal political rights as that of man to vote as well as to participate. Theoretically this prevails but in practice it is not certain as to how many women exert their voting rights too. Through this research it was also evident that though the educated ones were aware of their political rights yet did not exercise it. However keeping in mind the patriarchal nature, especially in traditional customary laws and practice especially at the village level, women are still exempted from decision making. It is a fact that customary laws still prevail in the Naga society. There is a consensus among the Naga women that one of the major drawback for low participation of Naga women is due to the existence of customary laws (fig.5.9). This affirms that Naga society being a patriarchal society, the role played by women in the decision making process

especially in the political aspect. It applies for women residing both in rural as well as in urban area. This present study further highlights the fact that male-dominated attitude still exists. This does not imply that the decisions of women are disregarded but more of a chauvinist mindset that the male should be the one to make all the final decision is evident.

The study also reveals that the traditional political institution is still very much male dominated institution. Though there are a few village councils in Kohima district that do have women as members, the same cannot be generalized for a majority of the other village councils. Interviews conducted with some village council members and town council members indicated that opinions are varied. It has been observed that the opinion of those opposed to change and who strictly adhere by traditional tenets, is that since tradition does not encourage the participation of women in political matters even at the grassroots level. The entry of women in the political field stands unhindered if they can prove themselves capable.

There are sections of Naga women feels that women reservation policy is not required. Instead they feel that more efforts should be put towards mobilising and motivating women in the grass roots level of politics and some of the respondents who did not approve the reservation policy were of the opinion that women are on par with men in every field, hence such policy is not required to enhance the status of women in the society. Those women who approved the reservation policy opined that the only way to get more women into political arena is to implement the reservation policy for women.

Among the three districts it is seen that there is a variation. Empowerment seems to be greater where the literacy rate is higher. This validates the hypothesis that the higher the literacy rate, the higher the level of empowerment. Therefore it shows that empowerment of women is closely related to the educational level of the women. Going back to the opinion on educational system majority of the respondents, from matriculate to the post graduate level seem to be satisfied with the existing system (fig 4.1). All the respondents from the three districts positively responded to the Right to Education. In terms of the constraints faced in pursuing education, Mon district appeared to face more than the other two. However a common reason cited for such constraint was financial difficulty.

In addition, discrimination between the male and the female still exist in the field of education. Mon district faced more discrimination at an average than the others. Discrimination continues to be seen even in workplace, Mokokchung had the highest number of respondents citing lesser discrimination at work.

In the economic field women from Kohima strongly viewed economic independent women as superior to that of dependent women. Whereas in Mon and Mokokchung districts preference was given to the opinion that economic independent women are equal in status to that of dependent women. In further raising the question of women participation in economic activities all the three districts suggested more for general awareness of women's rights. It can be observed that Mon district in spite of the fact that they have lower literacy rate as compared to the other two districts they seem to be more receptive on issues like divorce and their participation as voters in the electoral poll.

In the Political scenario, all the three districts agreed to the participation of women in politics with Mon district highly approving of the participation. When the question of how the respondents became politically aware the significance of mass media was magnified as in with Mokokchung district having the highest number in attributing to the role of newspapers in terms of raising political awareness. In regard to the voting exercise in the last State election Mon district had the highest numbers of women voters while Mokokchung had the lowest. In terms of the reasons cited as to what basis the candidates were voted, the candidates' personality over shadowed the decision of the village council, party loyalty and others with Mokokchung district having the highest respondents opting for this reason. In the arena of decision making, among the three districts, Kohima district had more access to such a participation followed by Mokokchung district and Mon district. In addition another significant finding was that there was much disparity between urban and rural set ups when it came to decision making, even in family matters. The urban setting seems to be more privileged than in the rural set up fig 4.14 (a).

One of the most important instrumental roles played by education is in the changing of the perception in the mind set of the Naga women. One significant observation is that in the changing perception, surprisingly Mon district stands the highest in percentage when it comes to personal choices in regard to marriage followed by Kohima district and Mokokchung district.(fig 5.1)

As in the case of divorce, Kohima district has the highest percentage of respondents who have negative on divorcees followed by Mokokchung district and Mon district. Mon district has the maximum number of respondent's women without

career or profession. They had a very low opinion on housewives. It indicates that they are without employment by compulsion not by choice.

It has been found that the attitude towards the working women was favourable. There are no variation findings among the three districts. The present trend is their strong approval towards working women as they not only contribute to the economy of the family but also enhances the social status of the family.

It has been observed that women from the three districts opined that even with the high rate of literacy and women empowerment, the existence and application of customary laws is still in existence which makes women difficult to come out of its bondage and this is clearly projected particularly in the area of decision making. Women residing in Mon district are under the strong influence of customary law as compared to the other women residing in the other two districts. However women residing in Kohima district also face the similar situation which indicates that women residing in Mokokchung district enjoy far more liberty than the other women counterparts. Further it has been found that in spite of all this patriarchy binding definitely Naga women has come a long way and significant change has been seen in the Naga society. One very important change with regard to the women residing in all the three districts is in the attitudinal change towards marriage, remarriage, education and the change oriented thought process.

It is apparent that there is difference of opinion between the women residing in rural area and urban area. This clearly indicates a significant variation. Women residing in rural areas clearly lag behind the urban women even in the matters of the family affair. It further reveals that urban women get more opportunity to be a part of

decision making in the family. Participation in decision making is an important aspect of empowerment and in that way urban women are more empowered than rural women. This further validates the hypothesis that distinction exists between women of rural and urban as far as empowerment is concerned.

Women's equal participation with men in power and decision making is part of the fundamental right. Unfortunately there is no Naga women representation either in the parliament or in the state assembly. Nobody refrain them from participation or even to contest in the election. It is purely the attitude and the mindset of both men and women putting them in this situation. Keeping inferiority mental attitude particularly with women hinders them to come to the political field. As such Naga Women cannot come up to the level of male counterparts in the political field. Exclusion of women from political participation does not only hinder economic development but also discourages the attainment of gender equality. There are number of factors attributed for the low participation women in politics (5.9). It has been found that women residing in rural area are still bound by cultural or customary laws more than the urban women. Lack of education and economic constraint are also factors faced by rural women. More than the urban women, rural women face more challenges when it comes to be politically active.

Empowerment means giving someone the ability to control over their life and claim their rights. Financial independence gives women the credibility to participate in important matters of decision making for themselves and for their families. But the growing realisation to be financially independent can be observed and has certainly become a priority for the Naga women to be financially secure as well irrespective of whether the women resides in rural urban area.

Overall urban women are found to be comparatively more empowered than rural women relating to almost all the aspects. However the problem lies in the gap between the degree in the empowerment level of those women belonging to two entirely strata of the society. More schools need to be set up in rural areas as that is the first step towards an environment for education. Mass awareness for female education should be conducted. Rural women lags behind the urban women in all the spheres starting with the perspective and attitudes towards certain social issues. The level of awareness is lower as compared to the urban women. The status of rural women is still low as compared to the women residing in urban areas especially important issues like consultation in the family affairs or being victims of domestic violence all indicate the low status of the rural women. They might not be on the same level as urban women but positive progress can be observed. The level of empowerment may be different but it is the need of the hour. The perception towards marriage or divorce or any other social issues are quite commendable.

Considering the present scenario of Naga women with still discrimination against women existing at workplace, prevalence of Domestic violence or with the issue of being under represented in the political arena and with the many underlined factors attached to a patriarchal structure. Through the study it has been evident of the intrinsic role played by education in shaping the world view of the women. Though Naga women have still a long way to go empowerment as a process is gradually taking place, Further empowerment does not mean to overpower the existing patriarchal set up but through this research it is evident that Naga women are paving an identity for themselves .identity here does not relate to the multiple roles of women be it the role of a mother, wife, daughter or other expected roles, but

through this study it has been observed that Naga women are trying to create a niche for themselves in every possible way.

Based on the above findings and conclusion there is no second opinion about the pivotal role played by education in sculpturing the socio-economic landscape of any society. It gets rid of ignorance, and opens up the mind of the people to get enlightened. Along with the receipt of education, the realization of one's rights and responsibilities grown in the minds of the people is visible.

With regard to the role of education in empowering women in the three districts, it can be noted that in the field of politics even if the respondents are highly educated they were partially aware of their rights. This implies that they preferred to remain as voters and still hesitated to be elected as representative in various political bodies. Naga society with patriarchal structure puts man first in everything. Thus women always come as second best. Even though the constitution speaks of equality between sexes, Women are not treated equal to men. The traditions and customs prevail in the society towards women sometimes stand as an obstacle for them to grow and prosper.

The age long traditional practice in the society is that children take name after the father and only the sons are allowed to inherit the ancestral property. Women are not allowed to do so putting them in a disadvantage situation. Gender discrimination can be clearly seen particularly in their area. In recent times with the coming of the modernization any property acquired by the parents i.e father/mother, the children are allowed to inherit equally by their children irrespective of gender. But it may not be relevant for all except in the cases of enlightened parents.

Basing on the findings, the present study puts forward certain suggestions to empower women in every aspect of the society. Women down the ages had to struggle to gain equal status for themselves particularly in the Naga society. In order to bring out gradual and drastic changes, one very important instrument is education. Hence education brings not only progress but also enlightenment. To empower women in all spheres in Naga society efforts have to be made to break the age old traditional attitude about women's powerlessness, lack of drive and motivation and to reach to the highest goal. There needs to be a change in the attitude of women so as to bring positive results in their role and responsibility. They should strive to change their image as weak, dependent, passive and docile persons to that of independent, active, strong and determined human beings, and this can be realised only when they become educated.

Education to girls should be given priority and awareness needs to be generated. The need of educating girls so as to train them and to contribute effectively to the socio-economic development of the society is very important. There is a strong need to eliminate all forms of prejudice in employment especially to eliminate wage differentials between men and women. In this regard in general Government should effectively secure participation of women in decision-making process at National, State and Local levels. This would imply use of special way for recruitment of women candidates. In this regard, the 33 percent reservation policy for women which has been adopted as a major policy needs to be implemented at various stages so that the objective that women are not politically sidetracked be achieved and are put at equal footing with men.

The economic empowerment of women is crucial. Therefore, women must be facilitated to gain higher education, especially technical education to obtain economic benefits from current occupations. Sensitization through mass media about the indispensability of women in creating social as well as economic equality is necessary and also to create awareness about the importance of empowerment of women.

Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential has become urgently needed if the society does not want to remain entrenched in the old traditional ambience. Women should not be deprived of the human rights and fundamental freedom that are for all the citizens, be it in social, cultural and civil spheres. The provision laid down by the constitution has to be made effective for equal participation of women in the decision making of social, political and economic life. Women should have equal access to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security, public life; etc. The strengthening of legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women also needs to be prioritised.

In addition, civic and citizenship training in schools, adult education ensuring gender responsiveness, advocacy on the issues of gender equality and empowerment of women among the general public with special emphasis on parents and teachers are the measures that can be taken up by administration, educational institutions, NGOs etc

Coming to the Naga society again, to empower women effectively in every sphere, the basic need is to impart compulsory education at the lower level by implementing the policy of RTE. Moreover special emphasis should be given to the girl education. This will be a strong foundation for girl children. Various schemes and incentives should be implemented so as to encourage girls to pursue higher education without dropping out in the high school level. Awareness program should be conducted for girls and women so that they become aware politically, socially and economically and most importantly in the field of education.

At the educational institutions various steps should be taken for the inclusion of gender-sensitive curriculum. This will go a long way in sensitising the minds of the people towards women emancipation and their empowerment. Awareness campaign, workshops and seminars even at the village level surely shall be fruitful for all concerned. Another notable aspect as far as the creation of awareness is concerned the distribution of literature and publications as widely as possible among the literate population is suggested. Arranging programmes for interaction with other empowered women in the Naga society is another important way of motivating women.

Even at the administrative level, empowerment of women is necessary for the sustainable development and better governance. Therefore, the policy of the government had to be women friendly in its various schemes. In this regard , some suggestions are forwarded as given below.

Government can ensure that each official body has sufficient number of women members. There should be an official body consisting of representatives of

the government and voluntary association, which can function as a coordinating agency.

Development of women's abilities, skills and other potentialities as well as improvement of women's education is of great importance for the development of a country. Therefore, government can take appropriate steps with the participation of masses in order to bring the girl child to the main stream of education. The parents of girl child belonging to poor families must be specially educated with proper social formula to make them understand the significance of education for their girl child.

Creation of awareness regarding rights and responsibilities relating to laws governing women's status in society. Establishment of educational institutions, specifically for the girls alone making all the basic facilities and amenities possible for them, and

Arrangement and regulation of regular programmes for interaction between enlightened and well-educated women in this area with the rest of those who are less well-placed in this respect is another important way of motivating women.

Nonetheless, unless there is a change in the overall general mental makeup of the people, the manifestation of women empowerment in reality shall remain only as a dream. Both men and women need to be made aware of the concept of women empowerment in real sense only then the empowerment of women will be an important tool for progress, advancement, development and achievement in the Naga society.