

**ROLE OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:  
A PERSPECTIVE OF THREE MAJOR TRIBES,  
APATANI, MONPA AND IDU-MISHMI  
WOMEN OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH**

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## **CHAPTER VI**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

The concept of sustainable development began prominently with the initiation in 1998 by the World commission on environment and development, headed by the Norwegian Prime Minister Go-Halen Brunt land. The significance of sustainable development was highlighted for the first time in the report titled “Our common future.” The report aptly highlighted the environmental crisis as the most influencing link process for development through it. Hence it was evident that the cause, effect and purpose of sustainable development had to be addressed critically for any planning process. The report became pivotal revealing a new dimension of development that needed to be looked into for broader social wellbeing in future. The concept and implication were more necessary for the developing nations, where mostly the occurrence of development process are evident in the form of rapid urbanization and population growth through imbalance migration, there by taking toll on the natural environment, like forest, grassland and even agricultural lands.

In India sustainable development had its origin in the form of an attempt to engage and involve the people in the planning process particularly after the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> five-year plan. This was particularly aimed at regional imbalances that surfaced with enormous threat of poverty and unemployment. The entire scenario therefore made it obvious that earlier arm chair planning had not succeeded and that the grassroots approach was a necessity. This demanded active participation and involvement of people at large with their indigenous knowledge system. The intricate linkage with the

natural environment used and preserved for generations for their survival. The pattern of land use and its product therefore had to be in harmony and integration.

Sustainability from a social viewpoint is generally recognized as requiring equity in distribution, income wealth, access to power, inter and intra generational equity, a sociologically compatible style of production and consumption and community consultation.

However, given all the condition, it becomes evident that Sustainable development cannot be achieved by the policies alone rather it needs the participation of the society at large as a principle guiding factor between individual and communities which in turn can either promote or constrain to sustainable development. Thus, social security, equality and economic freedom are the necessary prerequisite for promoting sustainable development. In this context the role of women in any social context becomes extremely important as they constitute half or even at places more than half of the population in question for planning the development process.

Both the Rio earth summit and the Beijing women identified the role of women as a major factor which is critically important towards achieving sustainable development. This role was identified as crucial by academicals and as well world leaders as they recognized that women worldwide are fundamental to the management of local resources and are the key for sustaining of local communities.

It was however focused that women despite being so crucial in the society and environmental link, the position of women in general are relegated to a lower stratum. Women who form ½ of humanity are the poorest in terms of resources and are mostly under represented at all level of society and often restricted without having the freedom

even to decide their own way of living. Such a situation may which might vary in relative degree but are common across the social, economic and political boundaries of nations.

Within this framework one can say that role of women is very important not merely because it would mean efficient use of resources but their status and opportunities are closely related to demographic changes and overall standard of living and economic development variables. This becomes more adoptable in case of India where there is a contrasting situation that mirrors a long history of women empowerment in various levels at one hand, while differential picture of deprivation and exploitation on the other hand. Despite the fact that the Indian women have shown remarkable progress in almost all arenas of economic development a majority of them still continue to relegate at the background in social status at large. In rural India more than 50 % of the agriculture labour input is given by the women though they remain marginally recognized under paid and often ignored this labour being formed as gender-based duties and part of their daily chores, be it collection of fuel, fodder or water from long distance. However, within background what becomes clear is the intricate link that women have with nature as she remains solely responsible for collection of fuel fodder and water simultaneously. Women also manage the extra resource which they generate in the form of gathering from the forest growing vegetables in the kitchen garden to substantiate the nutrition needs and at the same time keep the hearths burning. This entire process of delicate balance leads to a more comprehensive relationship between women and nature which enables her to understand and manage better in comparison to the male members in the society.

This knowledge which perhaps form the indigenous knowledge therefore needs to be understood and efforts needs to be made to involve women as an active participant of the development process that is accepted and recognized in all fronts particularly in societal norms.

The present study throughout has been an attempt towards understanding the role of women in a tribal social set up, which is supposedly different in terms of race, ethnicity, societal and cultural practices values economy and so on.

In India according to 2011 census about 8.6% of the total population are recognized as ST or schedule tribe. It is important to state that majority of these tribal population inhabit geographically heterogeneous topography, often inaccessible and unsupportive of better agricultural practices.

Thus, with a primordial economic system strong tendency of clustering and concentration, the tribal people depend more on nature have a intricate relationship with the nature surroundings and survive with a reciprocal relationship. The process therefore creates a different interaction between surrounding nature and their daily survival needs.

This relationship is best portrayed and carried on by the tribal women, who spend a considerable amount of time and thus become more conscious of the surrounding environment. Their daily knowledge of dealing nature thus needs to be harness for achieving this goal.

The tribal women like her counterpart in any other part of the country constitute more than half of the rural workforce, contributing largely to the economic sphere for

the sustenance of their families. However, their social status fluctuates among various tribal groups in terms of their sphere of social acceptance.

As already stated, tribal women have a special relationship to natural resources. Their culture and practice promote a balanced, respectful use and preservation of natural resources so that future generation can meet their needs. It is unfortunate that most modern developmental scheme today ignores the needs and practice of people attached with the land and impose blanket plan ignoring the impact of such schemes and nature of end users there off. As consumers and producer caretaker of their families and educator women play important role in promoting sustainable development through their concern for the quality and sustainability of life for present and future generation.

The present study comprises of three tribes namely Apatani, Monpa and Idu-Mishmi who occupy different Geographical location with varied geo- environmental background as well as cultural and social set up. The entire study was in the following section an attempt has been made to understand this different location and their impacts.

The Ziro valley in the lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh lies approximately between the latitude 27° 32' N to 27° 37'N and longitude 93°48'E to 93° 52'E , Situated at an altitude of about 1,504 mt above sea level. The study area is dominantly inhabited by the Apatanis one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The valley has an area of 1058 km sq. of which 43 km sq. is under forest plantation, agriculture and settlement.

West Kameng district is located in the western part of Arunachal Pradesh covering an area of 74422 sq km. Its mainland extends between 91° 30' to 92° 40' E longitude and 26° 54' to 28° 01' N latitude. The name of the district is delivered from

Kameng River. The inhabitant of the district comprises mainly of Monpa. They belong to Tibeto-mongoloid stock and are the largest tribe of the district inhabiting mainly in Dirang and Kalaktang circle.

Lower Dibang valley on the eastern part of Arunachal Pradesh with an area of 3900sq.km. The valley extends between  $27^{\circ} 30'$  N to  $28^{\circ} 33'$  and longitude between  $95^{\circ} 15'$  to  $96^{\circ} 30'$  E. It is named after the Dibang river one of the tributaries of mighty Brahmaputra River. Roing is the districtHeadquater of the lower Dibang valley. The main inhabitants of the Roing circle are Idu-Mishmi and Padam. The town located at the foothill of Mishmi hill is lively with friendly people. Unlike other rough terrain of Arunachal Pradesh Roing is quite plain with a lot of land for farming and cultivation.

## **6.2 Findings of the study**

Any Society is a reflection of multiple components drawn from diverse social origin that gets reflected through distinct processes. Women in any society play s a very important role and they are one who can bring change in the society because they are the architect of our whole society and also the architect of humanity's destiny, she built the home and establishes the institution of the family life.

The role of women is very important not merely because it would mean efficient use of resources but their status and opportunities are closely related to demographic variables. In Traditional society the role of women was substantial and crucial; their social status was also satisfactory since tribal women enjoyed more freedom than their non-tribal counterpart. Their interaction with forest and Traditional ways in which they manage natural resources makes their role in sustainable development more prominent

then that of tribal men folk. In the given contexts the study marks out the following broad findings.

1. Through the study it becomes evident that despite varied location and physical heterogeneity and harsh climatic condition, women are the main workers, as the basic mode of sustenance happens to be primordial agricultural practice. Across all the selected sample study it was found that despite located in varied climatic and Geo environmental conditions, women have been active in promoting and preserving environmental ethics, reducing misuse of resources and re using and recycling resources to minimize wastes and check excessive consumption. All these are carried on by their indigenous knowledge system that acts as a guiding factor. In other words, through their IKS these women are actually active in the forefront of sustainable development initiatives by performing their daily chores along with community based environmental activities. They contribute immensely with long work cycle (Table 4.3) in general exhibit this fact more strongly and further establishes the need to harness the IKS for wholesome development of the future generation.
2. In the study it was observed that literacy/ basic education remains an essential area of concern, particularly among the middle-aged group who actually form the backbone of the agriculture-based economy by almost single handedly contributing to the process. Basic education is therefore a precondition for sustainable development. According to the level of education the literacy level of the women folk was found rather unsatisfactory, nevertheless the scenario appeared better among the Apatani tribe 50.24% and Monpa tribe 25.12% as compared to Idu-Mishmi women in the study area

surveyed. Thus, low literacy among the respondent could be reason for them to not avail the basic facilities as they are not aware of or they felt not necessary.

However, there is an attitude change among the newer generation and consequently a shift in the model of functioning becomes clearly visible. This can be attributed to the modern education system and exposure to other culture.

3. Awareness and availability of Health facilities is another prime sector where the women have minimum access. Women's health involves their emotional, social and physical wellbeing and is determined by the social, political and economic context of their lives, as well as by biology. A major barrier for women to the achievement of standard of health is inequality, both between men and women and among women in different geographical region, social classes and indigenous and ethnic group. There are many social realities which have impact on the health of the women such as poverty, economic dependence, negative attitudes in their function and decision making. However off late there is change in the scenario and though less but some women have started to know and understand about these facilities and have accepted to use them as well. The shift can be attributed to the new generation and modern education system and exposure through audio-video and even personal interaction across culture.
4. In the study areas it was found that many of the women are unaware of the medical facilities available in their villages, this was predominantly because of illiteracy and lack of awareness, as well as superstition and

practices. Another significant factor that could be observed was of dependency upon the male members of the family. Most of the women respondent in the study area surveyed fall under the married category and depends upon their husband for any economic decision despite contributing in the family purse for sustaining and sharing the economic burden. While a considerable number of women who were found to be widow were mostly directed by the other male members of the family for spending their earnings.

5. The divorcee and single women do exercise certain degree of freedom but are not very well accepted in the society for participation in decision making or social activities.

Another factor was lack of awareness among these working women regarding government run schemes bank loans etc. that attempts enabling the poor to access these benefits offered by development initiatives and market opportunities. While on the other hand there few women who are aware of the facility but they don't avail it is because they are too busy in their house hold activities and busy working in the agriculture and doing other activities.

It was important to note that despite contributing in the economic sustenance of the family, through her labour and even selling of collected material from the forest and kitchen garden, most of the women do not have the freedom to decide about expenditure or any other financial matters. Even they hesitate for medical treatment or other requirement that may involve expenditure. It was observed that as most of the women

depend on their husbands and most often, they feel hesitant to ask money for the treatment as most often they are not given interest.

Further the burden of their household work binds them to move out to any clinic or hospital as often these are very far off and require transport arrangement as well. It was found that in the study area among the Idu-Mishmi and among Monpa women they opt for local medicine or local doctor which is kind of traditional belief to cure the sickness. Though Apatanis do go for local treatment their percentage is comparatively lower. The interaction of tourist and better exposure can be cited as factor for this change, while the other two tribes are being located in geographically difficult area and with less exposure and interaction continues to thrive on the given dikats of their social system.

6. It was observed among the three tribes of the sample study area that social significance of the women both within the family and beyond was much low in comparison to the male. It was evident from the data collected which reflected almost nil or very minimal participation of women in the decision-making process, either in the matters of home like parenting, education of children or community related matters. In the study area it was evident that most of the decision regarding the immovable property was solely taken by the male members and even in case women are allowed to participate in any discussion the final say had to or mostly comes from the male member of the household. In case of using the income for education of children, marriage religious activity joint decisions were made in all the three tribes. Therefore, it is observed that women in all the three tribes have same

situation and condition were despite their contribution their status seems to be marginal.

7. The most significant factor that can go a long way is the IKS or indigenous knowledge system among the tribal women of the study area. Indigenous knowledge system and practices are local knowledge developed over centuries of experimentation and are passed orally from generation to generation. Such knowledge system today is focused upon across the nations for formulating policy planning as they are found to be an important catalyst to sustainable development due to their direct connection to resource management and conservation, connecting to past, the present and the future. Tribal women's Traditional knowledge and practices have been found to be effective in securing food, conserving their culture and Tradition and contributing to sustainable natural resources management in their community. women have developed a sustained interaction with nature through their daily household tasks, they depend on land and water for food and nutritional security, medicine, fuel, wood and other product that are used for household subsistence. Such sustained interaction with ecological system has enabled the women to acquire knowledge both about the environment and the natural resources and their uses. However, there is still lot of lacunas in usage of this knowledge system to be utilized at the fullest.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

Thus, it can be said that Tribal women play a crucial role in development due to their direct and greater participation in tribal economy. Their interaction with forest and Traditional ways in which they manage resources, harvesting significant amount

without depleting the resources makes their role in sustainable development more prominent than that of tribal man folk. As function or role of women is important in economic, social status and domestic activities any change therefore gets largely reflected in the social perspective.

Even today at the periphery of large modern cities/town the tribal population particularly the tribal women rely on the collection of forest product and also play a part in protecting forest despite the inroads of modern facilities and exposure to the market economy, the tribal house hold depends almost entirely on forest product for their livelihood. Tribal forest economy is primarily a women's economy and it is women who are most directly affected by the corporate exploitation of their Traditional lands. But they remain largely absent in all level of policy formulation and decision making in natural resources and environmental management. Although progress has been made incorporating local women in the planning and design of various developments project there still lie wide gap.

The society being rooted with a patriarchal mind set, the women though play a very important role in the development of the society, their contribution in household activities is neglected and men as the household head are seen as the major bread earners. However in their own world women have a freedom and a self-expression. Social norms, gender stereotypes, unequal and limited access to resources, health and education service limits women's ability to participate as full and equal participants in all aspects of life. In spite of making progress on the normative framework for gender equality and women's empowerment over recent decades there is a long way to go to ensure women's right within the family, community and society.

Thus, Sustainable development can be made possible by making women as equally important partners in the development process. It is clear that women are neither the sole victim of environmental degradation nor the salvation of the planet. They are simply half of the population without whose equal participation in decision at all level sustainable development will remain an enigma.