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Edited By
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Women in Various Fields: Roles and Contributions



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Lindy L. Goodwin
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Women's Study Cell, Sonari College
Sonari, 2021

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Contents

Gendered Relations in Popular Narratives : An Analysis of Waris Shah's Hir Ranjha	17
Snigdha Bhaswati	
(Re) Considering Gender Relations and the Travellers' Accounts in Pre-Colonial Assam	34
Kakoli Gogoi	
The Idea of Purity and Pollution Concerning Menstruation	46
Swastika Dutta	
State, Gender and Health Care : A Retrospect to the Imperial Health Policy Towards Woman and Its Impact on Colonial Assam	57
Trikha Rani Das	
The Lady of the 'Midnight Generation': Kamla Bhasin	64
Prof. Jyoti Prasad Saikia	
Surabhi Baruah	
The COVID 19 Crisis and Reflections on Gender Inequality (SDGs)	77
Dr Pinky Baruah	
Votes for Indian Women – History of a Silent Spring	88
Lipika Mahanta	

Contributors

Development of Women's Studies Centres and Cells in India in General and the North East in Particular Urmismita Deka	98	Snigdha Bhaswati	: Senior Research Associate Project National Virtual Library of India IIT-Bombay snigdha7.sb@gmail.com
Economic Empowerment of Women through Entrepreneurship in Karbi Hills Dr. Kakali Borah	114	Kakoli Gogoi	: Assistant Professor, Dept. of History Dibrugarh University kakoligogoi@gmail.com
Women as Warriors : The Women of the Ahom Period in War Jinti Tamuly	126	Swastika Dutta	: Research Scholar, Dept. of Sociology Dibrugarh University swastika.duttaja@gmail.com
Social Context of Development & the Role of Gender Stereotyping Dr. Pronita Kalita	135	Trikha Rani Das	: Assistant Professor at Dept. of History Suren Das College-Hajo das.trisha906@gmail.com
Serving God in Gendered Spaces : The American Baptist Women Missionaries in Assam Lindy Goodwin	147	Jyoti Prasad Saikia	: Professor of Sociology Dibrugarh University
Role of Women in the Conservation of Environment in India Parishmita Konwar	161	Surabhi Baruah	: PhD Research Scholar, Dept. of Sociology Dibrugarh University surabhibaruah@gmail.com
Women in the Tea Gardens of Assam : Issues and Development Pallavi Phukon	168	Dr Pinky Baruah	: Assistant Professor, Dept. of Zoology Guwahati College, Guwahati pinky.baruah@gmail.com
Tea Garden Women's Role in Decision Making : A Study of the Korangani Tea Estate, Dibrugarh District Abhita Gogoi	179	Lipika Mahanta	: M. Phil. Scholar, Dept. of History Dibrugarh University mahantalipika92@gmail.com

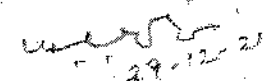
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Principal's Note

Since the inception of human civilization women have played a vital role towards the formation and development of the society as a whole. It is difficult to account for the contribution of women in various fields of human life. We observe tremendous contributions from women to social, political, economic, cultural, religious, literal, educational, health and hygiene sectors to mention a few.

The Women's Study Cell of Sonari College has been publishing a journal named 'Uttaran' where articles on issues related to women are published thus inspiring study and research in this field. On the occasion of the Celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the institution, the Cell has decided to publish a book compiling papers/articles relating to various issues which are significant from the perspective of gender differentiation and position of women in society. This is a good step from the Cell.

I convey my best wishes to the editors of the book named "*Women in Various Fields: Roles and Contributions*" which will surely reflect our expectations.


(Dr. Bimal Chandra Gogoi)

Principal
Sonari College,

Editor's Note

This book is a compilation of articles relating to various issues and subjects which are significant from the perspective of gender differentiation and the position of women in society. The papers included have captured the essence of the theme and title of the book in a comprehensive manner and relate to the distinctive role of women in diverse fields.

The present position of women in society and the general attitude towards her is largely a reflection of the ideas circulating in society for ages. This image is portrayed in writings of the past and such literature can be used as a window to view and gain a better understanding of the evolution of bias towards women. SnigdhaBhaswati's paper on representation of women and interpretations of gender in popular narratives illuminates this very aspect of how literature of different genres project nuanced views relating to women in the past. Her analysis of the narrative of Heer-Ranjha demonstrates how the strength of the women characters complement and often overshadow the male protagonist. She also describes social structure, clan rivalries and other societal mechanisms of medieval North India and how they were used to control women. The author provides us with a beautiful representation of the indomitable spirit of women in the face of all adversities.

In historical accounts of the past women have seldom been given the space and importance they deserve. The accounts of foreign travellers are usually considered important sources for gaining a well-

balanced perspective of the past. In her paper Kakoli Gogoi has analysed about gender relations and depiction of the women of Assam in the accounts of travellers who visited the land. The tendency of these writers to incorporate and exaggerate the elements of strangeness and exoticism in their descriptions caused their views towards women to be colored by such notions. The author has provided a lucid explanation of how and why foreign travellers often described women as overtly sexual beings, putting much importance on their physical description. Moreover, they denounced societal norms as well as superstitious practices regarding women in Assam by measuring these against their own ideals of morality and in the course condemning the former. However, the author also shows how the accounts make up for the total absence of records on women in vernacular sources by describing events of society, economy and polity where women played significant roles. The paper provides us an insightful analysis of the importance and shortcomings of accounts of foreign travellers in regard to rediscovering the position of women specifically in context of medieval Assam.

In Jinti Tamuly's paper we are given a concise outlook on the martial role of women. War has been primarily a domain occupied by men and the role of women has seldom been glorified. The author has studied the role of women as warriors in the Ahom period and the paper may be insightful for scholars interested in this topic which has not been adequately studied in the past.

Women's education has been one of the most potent means of elevating her position in society. Institutional education for women was undoubtedly a result of the efforts of Indian reformers and educated women. The contribution of the colonial government and the Christian missionaries however also must be taken into account albeit their actual

objectives. In my paper I have made an attempt at understanding the position of women missionaries in India and the gendered environment in which they worked in order to make a positive difference in the position of the indigenous women. The paper attempts to dispel the myth about the liberal western attitude towards women and to show how western society and Christianity are to a large extent controlled by patriarchal ideas.

Despite the development of education and scientific knowledge, women continue to be burdened with the stigma of social taboos in India irrespective of caste, educational or financial status. The social attitude toward natural bodily processes of women such as menstruation and pregnancy etc. is still archaic and is used as a primary means to control women. In Assam too, where it is believed that social rules are lenient towards women, it is seen that restrictions are imposed on women during menstruation. This represents a paradox of social norms in a region where on one hand fertility has been worshipped since ancient times while on the other a menstruating woman is shunned because she is considered impure or polluted. The prevalent ideas of purity and pollution in case of menstruation and their implications on the status of women has been explored by Swastika Dutta in her paper. The author examines how the issue of women being treated as contaminants has always had a gendered symbolism. Moreover, these ideas are not specific to India or Assam alone and exist worldwide in different forms. The author has based her paper on the case study of the Nepali women of Nepalikhuri of Sivasagar district. The paper reiterates how patriarchal restrictions are imposed on women during specific periods and how these practices have a tangible impact on the social status of women.

Traditional beliefs and customs are often unscientific and illogical in nature and this cannot be more evident than in the case of treatment of disease. It cannot be denied that the colonial health policy and the system of western medicine introduced by the British in Assam, had a significant impact on improving of health services in the state, specifically in the case of women. The subject has been well explained by Trikha Rani Das in her paper. The author has described the prevalent ideas of health and traditional treatment methods in the colonial times as stated in contemporary sources. Issues regarding women's health particularly in case of mothers and infants during that time was quite concerning. Lack of awareness about and reluctance to use medical treatment due to superstitious beliefs caused the mortality rate of women and children to increase at a great rate. The manner in which government initiatives were implemented and the efforts of the educated Assamese people to improve women's health care system has been described in detail by the author and shows how in case of women some of the most important issues have been the most neglected.

The progress of the feminist movement in India is wholly a result of the dedication and contribution of a few enlightened individuals. Amongst these individuals, Kamla Bhasin was one of the most loved. Her contributions towards the development of feminist ideals and her efforts to dispel gender stereotypes in society by nipping them in the bud is commendable. Prof. Jyoti Prasad Saikia and Surabhi Baruah have highlighted the ideas and contributions of this feminist thinker and social worker in their paper. It is necessary that the ideas of feminism and issues of gender are understood in a proper manner. Only then will it be possible to work towards the upliftment of women in an impartial manner. Kamla Bhasin's life and works are symbolic of these very

ideas and have been well described by the authors of the paper.

The impact of any kind of unprecedented situation is seen to impact women more severely. Political upheavals, social movements and natural disasters always claim women victims and have a direct and indirect effect on the condition of women. The world is currently under the threat of the Covid 19 pandemic. The virus is continuing to mutate and has severe effects on women and children. Apart from health-related impacts, the pandemic has led to women losing their livelihood and once again becoming victims of domestic violence and psychological problems. Dr. Pinky Baruah has explored this topic and the issue of gender inequality in her paper. The subject has immense relevance in the present and the author has concisely put forward the different aspects of it.

One of the most effective ways of empowering women is by granting her equal political rights. Securing these rights has been a long struggle for women and yet she continues to be deprived of equal rights and representation. The feminist movement bears testimony to the efforts of women for making a place for themselves in politics throughout the world. Ms. Lipika Mahanta has traced the journey of women in India to secure voting rights and refers to the movement as a 'silent spring'. This is because the movement is largely linked to the freedom struggle and hardly viewed as an individual effort of the women. This paper takes up a subject which is often overlooked in the history of India and must be given its due importance.

Economic empowerment is another important medium through which women can occupy their rightful position in society. Women are now striving towards economic independence by taking up work in areas which was formerly completely occupied by men. The initiative of women

to establish new industries and establishments in the present times is commendable. The paper by Kakoli Borah on economic empowerment of women through entrepreneurship provides an introduction to the subject and also makes valuable suggestions. The paper is based on the condition of the women in the Karbi hills prior to and after taking up entrepreneurship. The study demonstrates the substantial changes in the condition of women as a result of such innovative initiatives.

Women nowadays comprise a large portion of the workforce in the economy. But they are rarely given their due and have to struggle to secure their rights. One of the largest industries in Assam is the tea industry. Women are an important and indispensable part of the labour force in tea-gardens. Unfortunately, however it is seen that women from the tea garden communities are the acutely backward and exploited. Despite their contribution to the income as well as taking care of homely duties, women have to experience drudgery in various forms. This issue has been explored in two papers included in the book, authored by Pallavi Phukon and Abhita Gogoi.

Dr. Pronita Kalita in her paper has explored the very relevant topic of the social context of development and the role of gender stereotyping in this regard. She has put forward in a comprehensive manner the impact of gender stereotyping on children and students in each of the social contexts responsible for development. A lucid explanation of how gender stereotyping can be very debilitating for the society as a whole has been provided. Moreover, the author has put forward valuable strategies for creating a gender bias-free environment to achieve holistic social development. The paper has immense significance in educational and other institutions and makes for a wholesome read. Presently, research and study on women is being

Women in Various Fields: Roles and Contributions

encouraged in educational institutions throughout the world. These initiatives and their success themselves bear testimony to the fact that women have been largely deprived of their proper right in society and other spheres.

Urmismita Deka has studied about Development of Women's Studies Centres and Cells in India in General and the North-East in particular. She has shown how these centres have encouraged and improved studies relating to women and contributed to the betterment of their position to a large extent.

Last and not the least women have shared a close relationship with the environment since ancient times. In fact, women has often been regarded as manifestations of the various forms of nature. The struggles of women to preserve the environment and nature are also well known in the Indian context. Women have an imperative role to play in the conservation of nature and must be involved in the process as an active agent. The subject has been studied about by Parishmita Konwar in her paper.

This book is an initiative of the Women's Study and Research Cell of Sonari College. We are thankful to all the contributors for their papers and articles. We extend our gratitude to the Principal of Sonari College Dr. Bimal Chandra Gogoi for providing support towards publication of the book. We thank the members of the Women's Cell and the entire college family for their guidance and whole hearted supported. The book is a humble effort of the Cell to encourage research and develop knowledge relating to women and gender. It is our sincere hope that the content will be of help to researchers and teachers interested in the subject

Gendered Relations in Popular Narratives : An Analysis of Waris Shah's Hir-Ranjha

Snigdha Bhaswati

Introduction

Epics are compiled over generations taking verses from bardic folklore, which makes them a part of oral traditions committed to writing only much later. Epic literature, thus, documents a period prior to that of early recorded history and can be seen as a representation of an ideal. Thapar talks about the narrative and didactic sections of the Mahabharata. The first deals with the main narrative and the storyline, and the second includes discussions on ethical norms, religious duties etc. that adds an element of sacredness to the text. The narrative section portrays the changes in the political organisations, the transition from tribal polities to monarchies, questions of lineage, rules of inheritance, forms of marriage etc. The epic, thus, becomes a historical source to the extent that it presents a picture of the past and are not to be considered as a factual account of events and people (Thapar 2004, 613-628).

By understanding oral epics as popular narratives, we will attempt to examine the gendered relations depicted in one of the most popular narratives of North India - Hir-Ranjha. Examining how certain ideas and stories are remembered through ages is a fascinating area of study. The alliterations, rhyme schemes, pauses and performances constitute memory devices that help people collectively remember

stories from the past. Hir-Ranjha, one of the most retold epics of India, depicts societal organisations of the past and provides critical clues for comprehending the present.

Composed in the Qissa genre, Hir-Ranjha is a tale of two lovers in medieval Punjab. Jeevan Deol traces the first known written version of the narrative to the 1580s, written in Persian by Hayat Jan Baqi Kolabi. The earliest Punjabi version is attributed to Damodar Gulati, claimed (by self) to be a contemporary of Akbar; these were followed by many, but few prominent, renditions including the Qissas of Ahmed Gujjar and Muqbil, known to be contemporaries of Aurangzeb and Muhammad Shah respectively (Deol 2002, 143). Qissa, meaning story, was used in Persian for biographical works of religious figures and what Farina Mir understands as 'pseudo-biographical' works of fictional characters. However, eventually, we see an increasing association of the genre with romantic tales of both Arabic and Persian origins. The Persian romances then entered South Asian literary and oral traditions in the medieval era with the coming in of the traders, merchants, poets and others. The Qissas, thus, began to be rendered both as texts and oral narratives and eventually began to be understood as a popular genre of romances in verse of epic lengths (Mir 2006, 734-735).

These verse poems were often written in the Hindavi language and performed in places like courts, salons or Sufi Shrines. While the poets usually constituted the Persian speaking court elite, their usage of Hindavi, was an attempt at popularising their spiritual message using local and relatable symbols and stories. These Hindavi Sufi love tales or Prem-Akhyans came to mark the beginning of a new literary culture from the fourteenth century onwards (Behl 2012, 1). This article

attempts to analyse Hir-Ranjha in terms of its setting, plot, characters and themes. The text studied here is an English translation of Waris Shah's Hir-Ranjha and, hence, may miss out on the nuances of the original text that may have been lost in translation. The primary idea is to look at how the story has travelled temporally and how it has been kept alive through re-enactments and retellings.

A Brief Summary of Waris Shah's Hir-Ranjha

Dhido was the son of the chief of the Ranjha clan in the village of Takht Hazara. His domestic life was strained by the hostile relationship he shared with his brothers and sisters-in-law after their father's death. Tired of the daily chaos, Dhido decided to leave his village. His journey away from home took him to the land of the Siyals where he met Hir, the daughter of the Siyal chief Chuchak. Hir and Dhido developed an intimate relationship and the latter began working for Chuchak as a cattle herder. For twelve years Dhido (known simply as Ranjha in the land of the Siyals) romanced Hir before their liaisons in the forest were discovered by Hir's impoverished uncle Kaido. Chuchak fixed Hir's marriage to Saida of the Khera clan. Refusing to accept the circumstances, Hir suggested elopement, only to be refused by the proud Ranjha. Left with no choice, she finally married Saida. However, before she left home, she asked Ranjha to become a yogi and come to meet her in the village of the Kheras. Ranjha, turned Yogi, made a long journey to reach Hir in her nuptial home.

Sahiti, Hir's sister-in-law, agreed to help them and took Hir to meet the new Yogi for treatment after a supposed snake bite. Hir and Ranjha, Sahiti and her lover Murad thereafter eloped to be chased

without success by the Khera men. As she believed it would be humiliating for her to go to Takht Hazara straight away, Hir suggested Ranjha to first go there and talk to his family, and thereafter take her to Takht Hazara from the house of the Siyals. Ranjha agreed, only to return and find a dead Hir, poisoned by her family. Succumbing to heartache, Ranjha too left the world. This brief summary of Waris Shah's *Hir-Ranjha* does not do justice to the layers and complex characters that the story deals with. Further, Waris Shah's own comments make the narrative more interesting.

Contextualising the Epic: The Changing Political and Economic Scenario of Medieval Punjab

Punjab, as depicted in the story, was that of political disorder and dynamism. There was a weakening of imperial authority especially with the campaigns of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali, the advance of the Marathas and the rise of the Sikhs in the political scene, leading to a decline of the powers of the nobles or Ashrafs. Under these circumstances, the Jatts began exerting control with the rise of numerous small chieftains. The Ranjhas, the Siyals and the Kheras are described in the story as Jatt clans inhabiting small areas, controlled by a chief. In the narrative, numerous references are made to specific political events that reflect this state of affairs (Suri 1966, 266). For example, when Ranjha and Sahiti attack each other physically at the house of the Kheras (the family Hir was married to), Sahiti's anger was compared to the fight of Abu Samad of Chumian against the Hussain Khan of Lahore. On the other hand, the victory of Fateh Khan of Lahore was used as a metaphor to describe Ranjha's counter-attack. These were references to a dispute between the Nawab Abu Samad

Khan of Punjab and the Pathans of Kasur under the leadership of Hussain Khan (most probably, the brother of Fateh Khan). The latter had revolted against the authority of Abu Samad and had taken possession of a few fertile districts of Lahore and Kasur in 1716 leading to a political dispute (Shah 1978, 186, 267).

Another important development was the gradual sedentarisation of the pastoral Jatts. It can be understood by looking at the depiction of the Jatts in the writings of medieval scholars and travellers. They were described by Al-Beruni as low-born cattle-owners, but the Jatts of *Ain-e-Akbari* were settled, agriculturalists. *Hir-Ranjha* is located in this period of transition between the two occupations, sometime in the 15th century. While there were well-developed notions of an ideal peasant, the Jatts were not completely detached from their former identities, which perhaps led to a romanticisation of the life of a pastoralist. This contradiction can be traced in the story through how Dhido is chided by his family for working too little, yet his image is that of a charming young man who played the flute, grazed the cattle and romanced the daughter of the Siyals. While from the perspective of an emerging agricultural society Dhido's behaviour was undesirable, yet there was charm and nostalgia attached to it as a remnant of a bygone life (Snehi, Lecture, April 4, 2019).

Through the narrative, we discern the emergence of hypergamy among the Jatts based on the degree of peasantisation, with clear notions of which clans could one's daughter be married into. This can be seen as the primary obstacle for the lovers. As the Ranjhas, being less sedentary, were placed lower in the hierarchy than the Siyals, the two possibly could not be united. It was in this setting of medieval Punjab that the story unfurls.

Blurry Lines of Religion and the Essence of Sufism

The story is not set in the present-day Indian Punjab. The area referred to here is towards the North of the Indus, around Chenab and Jhelum, Sindh and Multan. This can be understood by tracing the location of the shrines of the five pirs blessing the lovers - Lal Shahbaz, Jalal Bukhari, Makhdum Jahania, Baha-ud-din Zaccaria and Khwaja Khizr (Shah 1978, 243-244). Their shrines were located along the important trade routes of the Sultanate era with trade and piety complementing one another. This was also the region that was getting sedenatarised now. This sacred landscape was dotted by a number of celibate Nath Yogis, wandering away from the pulls of the material world. (Snehi, Lecture, April 4, 2019). It becomes clear from the story that the identities of a Hindu or a Muslim had not crystallised here yet. While it is a Qazi that performed Hir's nikah, the date of the ceremony was fixed by a Brahmin. The binaries between religions were not pronounced and being a follower of one did not imply strict non-observance of practices of others.

The influence of Sufism in terms of deliberation on the correct ways of following the Almighty is prominent in the story (Snehi, Lecture, April 4, 2019); This can be seen in both Ranjha's arguments with the Mullah and Hir's with the Qazi right before her marriage. While the Mullah or the Qazi represented Islam as a strict, disciplinarian way of life, Hir and Ranjha were representatives of a more personal relationship with the Almighty. Hir especially refused to agree with the Qazi, who understood sexual attraction outside of wedlock as an example of ungodly behaviour (Shah 1978, 80). The blessings of the Sufi pirs gave divine sanctity to the lovers, which was seen as being more significant than the word of the Qazi. The essence of Sufism is, hence,

the most important here, legitimising the union of the protagonists. It is in this context that we can understand why love narratives usually have the name of the female lover preceding the male, such as Hir-Ranjha, Laila-Majnu, Sohni-Mahewal etc. In Sufis, it is only the feminine form of love that is perceived as being capable of transcendence for uniting with the Almighty (Snehi, Lecture, April 4, 2019). Another way to understand the nomenclature could also be to associate the female protagonist with the aggressiveness of the unmarried female Goddess of the Shakti traditions, capable of wreaking havoc, if required, for finding love (Kothyal, Lecture, April 4, 2019). The influence of Sufism and the interaction of different religious practices need to be seen in the background of the era of the Sultanates in South East Asia. The Sufi romances demonstrated the gradual assimilation of the conquerors and the conquered, who shared their traditions, customs and stories. The rendering of these stories was also encouraged by the courts of the nobles, which ensured the numerous written retellings of the narratives (Behl 2012, 25, 47). Even while they were rendered on text, the circulation of these stories was perhaps meant to be oral, given the difficulties of making books and the largely non-literate society of the time.

The Tropes and Central Characters

The story does not share a few common tropes with other major epics such as the Mahabharata or the Ramayana; for instance, the centrality of the relationship between brothers and the struggles for justice with regards to property and inheritance. However, neither 'brothers' as characters nor the issue of property is missing from the scene. These play the essential role of pushing the narrative forward

right at the beginning. Whether the plot of the brothers' relationship with Dhido was present from the inception of the story or added later to give a background to the central love tale, can be a matter of conjecture. Nevertheless, the identity of Dhido's family has important implications in the way the story unfolds. It determines the possibility of the two lovers' union.

Like any other love narrative of this time, the trope of tragedy and struggle to find love stands out. Be it Sohni-Mahewal, Sassi-Punnu or Mirza-Sahiban, all set in almost the same spatial and temporal space as that of Hir-Ranjha, have identical stories around which different backgrounds were added to give a distinct taste to each. In all of these narratives, love is seen as a symbol of rebellion and resistance to pervasive societal norms, and the desire for union with the loved one is shown as equivalent to the desire of uniting with the divine. The idea of an emotional connection requiring a complete surrender of oneself to merge with the other was depicted through these stories of romantic love, which in a broader sense, reflected the essence of the act of becoming one with the Almighty.

While it is Ranjha who gets the maximum character space here, it may not be correct to call him the leading protagonist of the story, given how Hir's character is much more remembered in the popular imaginations of the narrative. It is Hir who becomes the central figure here, despite her late entry into the narrative. While she enters only after the first segment containing the description of Dhido's family tensions, her character is referred to before during the episodes of Dhido's arguments with his sisters-in-law, who challenge him to impress the stunning daughter of the Siyals. It is interesting how without giving the scope for the gradual build-up of Hir's character, the story is able

to instantly give a perception of Hir as the beautiful and arrogant daughter of the chief, who might not have been loved by the people around but was impossible to ignore. Deol points out that it is particularly Warish Shah's narrative that has a reduced space for Hir. Other narrators like Muqbil and Ahmad had allowed more scope for the character to develop as a social rebel. Shah had given a secondary treatment to Hir from the very beginning. Yet, she is not portrayed as a conventional female protagonist, who is meek, humble and submissive. She, like Dhido himself, is developed as a grey character that could both attract and repel the audience (Deol 2002, 152).

The character that however stands out most prominently, right from her arrival, is that of Hir's sister-in-law Sahiti. She is shown as a fearless, vocal girl who did not hesitate to challenge her adversaries when required. She is also instrumental in the union of the two lovers while paving the way for her own love to succeed. Her dialogues and arguments with Dhido were undoubtedly stretched towards the end, nevertheless very crucial for the articulation of certain ideas.

“Of the Yogi's observations:-
‘When the lord creator made this world,
He made manifest some freaks of his art:
Woman, buy, dog, hen, and goat, and camel,
Astrologer, and gin and demon,
All those were made but the cause of strife;
They superseded creation's cause.
In great disgrace was Adam expelled
from Heaven, thanks to one of these.
To prince and priest she brings much grief,

And kings turn monks because of woman,
All merit, Waris, is given to man,
And all de-merit is woman's part.'

Of Sahiti's reply :-

'It was greed that brought disgrace on man
and got him driven from Paradise.
Impurity filled his heart so much
that he was in a hopeless state.

The angels told him that he must
In no case eat the grain of wheat.

The lord's command was, 'Do not approach that tree', but he
broke it. And in this

He was helped by the peacock and the snake
and they were too expelled from Eden.

But the Devil became man's partisan,
And put on woman all the blame.

Though it was Adam who brought disgrace
On Eve, she never deserted him.

You are lying. Man commits trespass
And suffering is on woman laden.

It was when the lord inspired the Prophet
that he laid it down for man to marry.

These women are the treasure trove of grace;
such riches in their wombs they carry!" (Shah 1978, 199)

The intelligence of Sahiti's response is notable. It can be
understood today as progressive for the temporal context of the story.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Sahiti's is the strongest character, at least in Waris Shah's version of the story. It is also interesting that Murad, Sahiti's Balouch lover, is not given any character space and is mentioned only in the context of their elopement at the same time as Hir's and Ranjha's. Sahiti, hence, did not need to be supported or complemented by a lover, and the character development is achieved mostly through her dialogues with Ranjha.

Love, Lust and Rebellion

The dynamics of love and gender roles in Hir-Ranjha is a complicated terrain to study, given the risk of projections of our modern-day sensibilities onto a 15th-century narrative. To begin with, one could hesitate to call it a love story at all. It is indeed hard to find anything that resembles 'love' from Ranjha's end, at least in Waris Shah's version. First, seducing Hir was a challenge for Ranjha by his sisters-in-law that he set out to meet, and keeping Hir to him throughout the story seems like the completion of the same. His lack of concern for Hir is made apparent in many circumstances, for example when the Siyals requested him to return after they dismissed him, as the cattle would refuse to be tamed without him, they promised to let him marry Hir in return. However, he explicitly declared that he cared neither for the cattle nor for Hir. He also proudly refused to elope with Hir before her wedding, when she approached him and later blamed her for betraying and hurting his sentiments. It was Hir, who confronted everyone to make their union successful and later refused to consummate her marriage with Saida. In general, Ranja's conduct towards Hir hardly gives an essence of affection and care, attributes that we associate with romantic alliances today. While Ranjha did

take up the struggle of becoming a Yogi and travelling long distances to meet Hir, it appears more to be about winning the challenge of his sisters-in-law and restoring his pride than love for Hir.

What the narrative does not lack is the raw expression of desire. It is full of euphemisms and references of lust, not only between Hir and Ranjha, but also between him and other women like those in the village of the Kheras. Also significant are the spaces of rendezvous between Hir and Ranjha. Their physical intimacy was a continued act of rebellion against societal norms, which occurred mainly in the forest areas or the pasture lands, away from the main settlement. Similarly, the forest became the place where Ranjha built his niche when he reached the Kheras' village. These can be looked at as the non-state spaces that James Scott talks about in his seminal work, an escape for the people in order to evade state structures (Scott 2009, 6). These areas were outside the realms of regulated societies, which constricted the movements of the people with strict rules, and hence became ideal for a union like that of our protagonists'. However, the very ending of the story in Waris Shah's text can be read as a warning to all those who dared to rebel, death being their inevitable end. Nonetheless, there are various versions of the ending itself, and in Damodar Gulati's telling, the couple unites and moves to Mecca, away from the tensions of their clans. The shift in the ending that occurs gradually is demonstrative of the gradual hardening of social norms, where defiance could only be met with the ultimate punishment of death.

The Question of Gender

Like most other epics, the position of women as the trouble-creator for men, the destroyer of peace, is apparent here. Both Hir

and Sahiti are depicted as strong-willed and out-spoken. The aforementioned conversation between Ranjha and Sahiti is demonstrative of this. Hir, especially, is shown as a destructive force that had caused tensions in the societal order and hence needed to be controlled. However, as in other narratives women remain the central movers of the story, their perceived destructive actions push the story towards its predestined end. Nevertheless, not all women are depicted similarly. There is a constant binary between those women who stand up to preserve the established, societal structures, and those who dare to deviate. The former is often depicted in characters like that of a mother, such as both Hir's and Sahiti's, who are supposed to be upholders of the system. The latter type is often depicted through the young female protagonists, mostly unmarried and wild.

It is interesting to observe why these women turn fearsome and violent. Primarily, it is the denial of familial or marital agency that makes them destructive. For instance, Hir's wrath sprang from the society refusing to accept her alliance with Ranjha. She fought her way through, debated with her mother and the Qazi, and ultimately did not consummate her marriage with Saida. Yet, her struggle was ultimately to be Ranjha's wife, someone who did not necessarily harbour respect or consideration for her and her circumstances (Kothyal, Lecture, April 11, 2019). The dynamics of their relationship, as previously mentioned, seems much less like love between partners as we understand it today, but more as that of subordination on the part of Hir, and pride at the other end. This is where Sahiti's character tends to differ. Her arguments and outspokenness were not to sustain her relationship with anyone. Through her conflicts with Ranjha, Sahiti challenged the views of the hero on the position of women. She asked

basic questions on the assumption of the character of women and also on the position of males in society, while not really posing a threat to patriarchy itself. Thus, when Ranjha said that Yogis regard women as sugar plums, to be chewed and swallowed and with whom they do not care to be wise, Sahiti retorted by saying that men were of no use without women, and they could not even be born without them. Waris Shah's own commentary attempts at making clear the positions of men and women in society when he goes on to say that men without courage and women without beauty are like food without salt.

The narrative is a classic depiction of the control over the female body in order to maintain social structure. This was related to the questions of political economy, in terms of the positions of the clans in the social ladder depending upon their level of peasantisation. In the case of Dhido, it was a scenario of double disadvantage - first, he belonged to a lowly clan of the Ranjhas, and second, he earned a living as a cattle herder of Chuchak. This earned him an even lower status in terms of occupation. In such a situation, Hir could not have been married to him as it would seriously upset the hypergamous societal arrangement. Her body, thus, became the site of control, which soon had to be tied to someone acceptable. The difference in the status of the women pre and post-wedding is also hinted at through the norm of wearing a veil. Neither Sahiti nor Hir before her marriage is shown as wearing a veil. However, the married Hir is portrayed in veils and restricted to the house, unlike her former free movements in and around her village (Jhang). After marriage, the body of the woman is claimed by the husband and his family, which had to be then confined within the realms of the house. While at times these appear to be stories where women are given a voice and a space to express it, a

closer look reveals the story of the conquest of the bodies of the women by the communities (Kothyal, Lecture, April 11, 2019). The struggle is between who is allowed to claim her body, and who she wishes to be claimed by. There was no scope for these characters to break out of the patriarchal shackles, which were getting more rigid with time.

Retelling the Narrative: Concluding Remarks

Hir-Ranjha is one of the most re-invoked narratives of Punjab. It has been retold through various written forms well up to the 20th century, made into movies, performed as plays, painted on canvases and sung into songs. One noteworthy invocation would be during partition where we see Amrita Pritam asking Waris Shah to write as numerous daughters of Punjab weep like he once did when one Hir had shed her tears. Deol writes about an incident from March 1947, when at the Arifwala station an enraged Muslim mob ready to attack a train full of Hindu and Sikh refugees, came to halt upon hearing a Sikh opium addict sing verses from Hir-Ranjha. He sang the part of the narrative where the Mullah is criticised for not fulfilling his Islamic duties of providing hospitality to someone who had come to his door (Deol 2002, 141). Udham Singh was asked to take the oath in court during his trial in England in 1940 on the Hir-Waris, implying the importance of the text, more than even the range of Holy Books. Such examples abandon, only reiterating the importance of the narrative and its acceptance among the people. The narrative continues to be remembered because of its persistent relevance. While the details of it may not be deemed important, the basic story of forbidden love and policing remains true to date.

Whether or not there was a Hir who fell in love with a Ranjha is immaterial, the truth remains that this has become a tale of many Hirs and many Ranjhas, who had crossed societal barriers, a narrative depicting control of desire by regulating the body of the woman, a story of clan rivalry, of structures of hierarchy, and also a warning to those who dared to deviate. The story seems to have become pan-temporal, traversing generations, yet remaining relevant.

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(Re) Considering Gender Relations and the Travellers' Accounts in Pre-Colonial Assam

Kakoli Gogoi

Norms of patriarchy had obscured the agency of women in pre-colonial societies and masked their presence in historical events. Gender-based perspective was found missing in most of the historiography of pre-colonial India. In mainstream historical narratives women have often been relegated to the background. They have been assigned the role of mere supporting actors to their male counterparts. Kumkum Roy attributes this invisibility of perspective based on gender relations to long standing biases within the discipline, both theoretical and methodological, as well as there of individual, predominantly male practitioners. Women are viewed as possible receptacles, with their 'status' or 'position' changing to reflect the state of the world around them. As a corollary, variations in the status of women are then treated as indices of relative barbarity or civilization.¹ Travellers' portrayal of women from a different region and culture has often been stained with their own perspectives and prejudices. Exaggeration and elements of scandalous gossip were very common which tantalized the readers and in turn boosted the circulation of the texts. In the writings, of early European travelers who visited India, tantalizing tales of huge harems or seraglios of rulers and nobles and horrific images of Sati was conjured up to spice up their narratives and fired up the imagination of an exotic demonized 'Other'. Richard Francis Burton, a British scholar

and explorer who was the first European to visit the holy cities of Mecca and Medinah once commented that the very first question that was asked to a traveler to the East is 'what are the women like'.² This reflects the fact that indeed women were and still are viewed as visible markers of any given society, with their 'status' or 'position' reflecting the condition of the society they live in. Consequently, variations in the status of women are then treated as indices of how advanced or backward a society or nation is. Much of the colonial writings and Indian texts on which these colonial writings were based put forward an image of cohesive and unique female nature. These writings conveniently ignored their differences based on caste/class, regional, religious or occupational categories. Their differences were overshadowed by their biological characteristics and the subordinate supportive roles they were destined to play.³

In the general trend of history writing the women are denied the agency in historical events. Their presence only flows through the gaps of the narratives. We cannot ignore even the slightest and oblique references to women in these texts in order to understand their presence as well as participation in society. In the writings of the travelers under our study we find some scattered references about women of this part of the world. What we see in the writings of visitors is that their portrayal of women was intrinsic in their feeling of racial superiority as well as in their patriarchal mindset. Almost in all the texts undertaken in this study show a common characteristic while dealing with the women question: Women are considered as subordinate to men and mere subjects who were gazed upon by male travel writers. The common *topos* used by the European visitors to represent Indian women were practices of sati, harem, purdah etc.

The physical and moral attributes of women were often used by the travelers to bring out the strangeness of the land they visited. More often travelers institute the narrative on the society by giving a description of people and more commonly of their physical attributes. In the texts under this study also we have the description of the physical features of the inhabitants of Assam. The physical features of the women were one of the major components of these narratives. Talish writes "Being beautiful and charming and having delicate body, black complexion, long and black hair, attractive hands and legs, are some special characteristics of Aashamese women. From a distance they look beautiful and charming, but seen from close quarters they lack grace and beauty."⁴ Describing people through their physical attributes was a common feature of nineteenth-century ethnographic accounts as well. The women of Assam were in general, depicted as beautiful in contrast to their male counterparts. William Robinson writes that "the women in general form a striking contrast to the men; there is a great deal more of feminine beauty in them than is commonly met in the women of Bengal, with a form and feature somewhat approaching the European".⁵ Thus, the bodies of the women became the visual sites on the basis of which the indigenous people were described by the travellers.

As the physical attributes, the participation of women in the public sphere was also taken up by the travellers to describe the socio-cultural "status" of a given society. The visibility of women in public was a matter which was taken up by many writers. Talish mentions the absence of purdah in the Ahom kingdom. He mentions that the women, including the queens do not cover their faces in public and "move about in the bazaar with uncovered head".⁶ The fact that there

was greater mobility of women in the public sphere is also mentioned in the nineteenth-century ethnographic accounts.⁷ It is believed that due to the prevalence of tribal ethos, women of Assam possessed great freedom at work and movement than the women of mainland India, where the mobility was restricted due to the prevalence of caste-based patriarchal norms.⁸ But relative freedom of movement does not indicate the absence of patriarchal norms altogether. Talish also mentions that the society in Assam was basically polygamous in nature with the majority of men having four to five wives. The men are often free to sell, purchase and even barter their wives among each other.⁹ Chevalier also talks about this.¹⁰

It would seem a very far-fetched idea if based on these statements, we conclude that women were a marketable commodity to be bought and sold freely in the market. Though references about extra-marital sexual liaison were not unheard of, husbands buying and selling sexual favours of their wives was not found in vernacular sources. Perhaps the norms of sexuality were somewhat different and the restrictions on intimacy were not as strict as the caste Hindu society. We have various references in vernacular sources where women had married more than once, either after the death of her husband or even during their lifetime. In *buranjis*, it is mentioned that the daughter of a Chutiya goldsmith was married by king Jayaditya (Bhagaraja). The son from her previous marriage was granted several royal privileges.¹¹ The term '*changottula*' was generally referred to establish sexual relations and was used on numerous occasions. King Siba Singha married Phulmati, a dancer and made her chief queen who assumed the title Bor-rajah and played a significant role in the subsequent history of the Ahom kingdom. He also married her sister, Draupadi,

who was earlier married to Salal Borgohain and had two sons from her first marriage.¹² Sons from her previous marriage got the high positions of Borgohain and Sadiakhuwa Gohain. As mentioned earlier, the norms of marriage were quite flexible and it was noticed that the sons born from these kinds of association and sons from previous marriages often managed to get some opportunities in the administration.

It is clear that the women of the Ahom and the Koch kingdom were visible in the public sphere, having participated in political, religious, cultural and economic domains. In the political sphere, we have few instances of women taking part in political negotiation. In *buranjis*, we have some events which clearly indicate that women often had some leverage in influencing political decisions. During the inception of the Ahom state, queens were sometimes successful in obtaining high posts for their kins in the State administration. Important female figures such as BorRaja Phuleswari and Ambika made their mark in the pages of history. But, the narratives regarding the participation of women were rather sporadic in the vernacular accounts. Because of this reason, we need to look at alternative sources such as travellers' account to supplement our understanding of the issues. In their accounts, we discover certain pieces of information which were perhaps not given due attention by the official histories, or there might be descriptions of same event given from a different perspective. Talish mentions that mother of Makardhawaj, the Raja of Darrang has an important role in the dealing negotiating with the Mughals. She sought active assistance from Mir Jumla to restore the throne to her grandson after the death of Raja Makardhawaj at Mathurapur. In the interregnum, she quite capably holds the reign of Darrang for which she was

mentioned favorably in Talish's account. He writes, 'Meanwhile, Makardhawaj, the Raja of Darrang, died at Mathurapur. It was brought to the notice of Nawab that the mother of late Raja, who held reigns of the government during his absence, had helped the faujdar of Gowahati in establishing law and order there during the rainy season. Despite the uprising of the local people, she was never negligent of her duties in protecting the roads and showing due compassion towards travelers. Further, she used to send escorts of her kingdom regularly to report to the thanedar of Gowahati. Now, mother of the late Raja has formally requested the Nawab to restore kingship to the son of the late Makardhawaj. Therefore, a farman in this regard was issued to the mother of the late Raja and to Mohammad Beg, faujdar of Gowahati and Sheikh Mohammad Sadeq, a Mughal government officer posted at Kalyabor.'¹³ The Purani Assam *Buranji* mentions a queen of Darrang, who was ruling on behalf of her young son, and she entered into a secret pact with the Bar Phukan of Ahoms and lured the Mughal army under Ram Singh into a pass between two hills and cut them down getting large spoils.¹⁴ But these women, who had played such an important role do not find their due place in later works such as *A History of Mughal North-east Frontier Policy* which deal with Mughal engagements in Assam. These works either completely omit their memory from the pages of history or reduce their contribution in protecting their people and kingdoms to mere footnotes.¹⁵ At the same time, they were used as items of exchange in political negotiations. There were several instances of this kind of alliance. Talish mentioned one such event when the peace treaty was concluded between the Mughal Nawab Mir Jumla and the Ahom king Jayadhwaj Singha in 1663, a daughter of the Ahom king was sent to the Mughal harem

along with other items of the treaty. Exchanging women by forging matrimonial relations to gain political advantage was very common throughout history. He writes "After a good deal of discussions, it was agreed upon that the Raja would give immediately twenty thousand tolas of gold, one lakh and twenty thousand tolas of silver and twenty elephants along with his daughter and daughter of Betnaam's Raja to the royal government and fifteen elephants to the Nawab, above all titles, and five to Amarat Panah Delir Khan".¹⁶ Here we can see that even a princess was listed as ordinarily as other items of exchange and does not seem to have any agency of her own. This fact was supported by the *buranjis*. While the name of the princess was mentioned once as Nang-Chang Gabhoru.¹⁷ None of the women who have accompanied the princess to the Mughal harem deserved even a cursory mention in any of the accounts, both Persian and vernacular, and therefore, were perpetually lost as faceless people from the pages of history. Women were used as pawns in political negotiations on more than one occasion. The *buranjis* mentioned several such occasions when even one pregnant wife of the Ahom king was given as a gift to one Khumbao of neighbouring Naga tribe. Later, when a son was born the position of Barpatra Gohain was created for him, but his mother was never mentioned in any sources.¹⁸

On other occasions, the women were seen as instruments which can be used to manipulate and deceive people to serve their own wicked interests. In Baharistan-i-Ghayabi, Mirza Nathan talks of such an incident when rivals had used one of the wives of the Koch king Parikshit's father to falsely accuse Akram Khan, a Mughal official of theft of diamonds. But Mirza Nathan wisely solves the situation and saves the innocents from being punished.¹⁹ Mirza Nathan,

notwithstanding all his "wiseness," was a patriarch to the core. In his account, he, out of nowhere, adds one story for the "amazement" of the readers, which speaks about an adulterous woman who had murdered twenty-one persons and sought repentance by making twenty-one pilgrimages to Mecca!²⁰ In Nathan's book, we also have references of female dancers who were used as spies on various occasions. They were so efficient in infiltrating the enemy camp that the Mughal commander was especially warned against the entry of these dancers into the camp.²¹

While we talk about the participation of women in the public sphere, one important figure which appears in the writing of the travelers was the 'dancing girl' or '*nati*' attached to various temples of Assam, especially in the temples of Kamakhya, Hajo, and the Shiva temples of Biswanath Ghat, Dergaon and Dubi.²² It was mentioned in the *buranji* that the Mughal forcefully abducted three *natis* from the Biswanath Ghat temple.²³ These women were an integral part of the ritual life of the temple who was dedicated to the deity at a very young age. Elsewhere in India, especially in large temple establishments of the southern India, this practice of dedication of young girls for the deity was prevalent. They were considered servants of God, hence called Devadasis.²⁴ In Assam these women were referred to as '*nati*', the dancer who dances for the enjoyment of the deity. In the accounts prior to the eighteenth century, we rarely find any references where these dancing girls were associated with other sexual activities such as prostitution. But from the eighteenth century, there was a definite change in the attitude towards these temple dancers. The dwindling of patronage due to unstable political conditions and foreign invasions, and internal crisis might have compelled some of these women to seek

money in return for sexual favours outside their ritual activities. Though they were requited for the 'pleasure of deities', very often, these dancing girls were exploited by the mortals, especially by the priestly classes. Chevalier leaves a very poignant record when he compares them with the meat of sacrificial animals and says that 'priests make with them what they do with the meat, leaving of them only the aroma, and making a show of delicious moments that they spend in their arms.'²⁵ Interestingly, Chevalier also notes that these dancing girls has some obtained agency through these acts of sexual liaison as 'they willingly share their pleasures with those who are tempted and who have the capacity to pay them.'²⁶ Subsequently, the terms nati and natini came to be used as terms of slander, and gradually the natis disappeared from temple rituals.

The temple dancing girls increasingly come to be seen as fallen women when colonial records stigmatized them and came to refer to them as 'temple prostitutes. The British writers, often blinded by their 'Victorian Puritanism' could not fathom the fact that these women were free from the institutions of marriage and family and yet enjoyed the sexual freedom outside of these normative institutions. William Robinson in his 'Descriptive Account of Assam' writes that the dancers dedicated to the deity in the temple of Kamakhya used to participate in 'midnight orgies' and numbered no less than five hundred. Their presence with their 'filthy songs, and more 'obscene dances' was the main attraction to the visitors. He writes, "A song is scarcely tolerated which does not contain the most marked allusions to unchastity; while those which are so abominable, that no person could repeat them out of the temple, receive in general the loudest plaudits. All this is done in

the very face of the idol, nor does the thought, "Thou God seest me" ever produce the slightest pause in these midnight revels".²⁷

The colonial legislators were appalled by the stories of sexual mores associated with the institution of devadasis. Gradually the *natis* acquired a negative connotation and came under attack from both the colonial state and Indian social reformers. In 'Hem Kosha', the word 'nati' and 'rajohitiruta' was used as a synonym for *Vaisya* (prostitute).²⁸

Several bills were placed to abolish the system mainly in the large temples of South India. The debate, however, went on for several decades and finally in 1947 the Devadasi Dedication Abolition Act of 1947 was passed. But long before the ban, the system of dedicating natis to the temples was already abandoned in the temples of Assam either due to the lack of patronage or due to a negative image around this institution or both.

What we can derive from the narratives of the travellers is that though patriarchal norms still flow in the society, women folk of Assam were relatively freer than the society based on strict rules based on caste and religion. This is due to the dominance of tribal norms in society and the prevalence of an agrarian economy where women play an enormous role in productive activities. Having said that, we have to also keep in mind the representations of women in these accounts were far from complete and objective. These representations indeed carried the baggage of presumptions of the writers' minds, conditioned by their racial, cultural and political background. Only a critical observation situating these narratives in the context of their creation will enable us to see the gender relations in medieval Assam. The dichotomy of the public and the private sphere was quite common

in these writings, and the visibility of women in the public sphere was often seen by the travellers as the signs of inferior moral standards of the native women. The presumptive “differences” in moral and physical standards were, therefore, taken as the instruments for creating an image of superiority for the “Self” by denouncing the “Others”.

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The Idea of Purity and Pollution Concerning Menstruation

Swastika Dutta

Introduction :

The ideals of purity and contamination are not unique to India; and exist in various forms all across the world. Many studies in Assam have looked at ritual performances, as well as the concepts of purity and pollution, to examine how important these concepts are to the cultural survival of civilization. In this paper, menstrual culture will be studied as a bodily representation of cleanliness and pollution. The study is based on an inquiry taken in the Sivasagar district's Nepalikhuti area, which is part of the Bihubar local panchayat to find out how concepts of filth and purity are related to menstruation among women. The ideas of "purity" and "pollution" receive a lot of attention in India. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in indigenous concepts of purity and contamination, as well as their social relevance. (Dumont 1970, Marriot and Inden 1977). In this article, menstrual culture will be examined as a physical manifestation of purity and pollution, and how, when such taboos are broken, a distinctly gendered situation emerges, whether knowingly or unintentionally. 'Blood Magic', a collection of essays on the cultural constructions of comparative menstruation practices, was edited and published by Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb in 1982. There were few anthropological publications on menstruation at the time, and the ones available tended to focus on menstruation as pollution. According to De Vos, in holy

representations, cleanliness and pollution become symbolically institutionalized and linked to patterns of social acceptability and deference. Gender relationships in a variety of societies follow the same principles.

The concepts of purity and contamination are not exclusive to India; they can be found in a variety of forms all around the globe. Cole investigates the human body's link with ritual space while reconstructing the lives of ancient Greeks in terms of space and gender, emphasizing gender and rituals categorically. She emphasizes the ritual space, clearly mentioning gender and rituals. She points out that men were engaged in rituals related to battle, politics, and athletics, but women were interested in sexual reproduction rituals. Because women were more closely involved with these processes. Physical events such as death and birth also established pollution categories. (Cole, 2004).

Moore claims that one of the hallmarks of gender symbolism is the concept of contamination. She emphasizes how the idea of accounting for women's inferior status has gained traction among sophisticated people. She points out that women are thought to be polluting all over the world, whether in general or at specific times. Women are given standards of purity and pollution in the form of hygiene during menstruating, especially when the pollutant is regarded to be a disease. The concept of contamination, according to Moore, is one of the hallmarks of gender symbolism. She emphasizes that the concept of accounting for women's inferior status has gained hold among the educated. Menstrual taboos and prohibitions demonstrate how humans categorize one another and build their social world around that classification. (Moore, 1988)

In India, social anthropologists and sociologists have studied ritual performance as well as the concepts of purity and pollution to see how significant these concepts are to a society's cultural survival. There are rituals performed around the period of menarche when it comes to menstruation. Other societal issues like pollution and limits on menstruating women's life are paved over by these significant and symbolic rituals. The prevalence of taboos and menstrual pollution has been studied from a variety of angles, the most important of which are "perceptions of menstrual pollution, containment of woman's authority, and feminine inferiority" (Puri, 1999). This type of impurity is unique in that it acts as a pollutant, transporting dirt and microorganisms. Menstruation, for example, is considered a polluting agent in Hinduism since it contains dirt and germs, and this sense of impurity is distinct (Dumont, 1998).

There is a claim that the concept of menstrual impurity and contamination originated in Hinduism. According to Hindu religious mythology, Indra, one of the most powerful of all the Vedic Gods, is responsible for overseeing the entire universe, particularly natural occurrences such as rainfall and seasons. According to the narrative, the king of heaven was accused of sins such as killing a Brahmin (a high caste Hindu) and engaging in unlawful sexual practices with women while on his travels. As a result, menstruation and taboos were supposed to be used to punish all women to make them repent such sins. (U Prakash, 2017).

The study was conducted in the Nepalikhuti area of the Sivasagar district, which is part of the Bihubar local panchayat. The objective was to determine the level of the idea of filth and purity associated with menstruation in the general population. Nepalīs account for the

vast majority of the population in the area. Members of the Hindu Nepali caste are referred to as Nepalīs in this study. The researcher has looked into the meanings that women ascribed to menstruation, as well as the ideas of purity and pollution that are linked with menstruation in everyday life. To highlight thematic analysis connected with menstruation, excerpts from the accounts are presented through the lens of a sociological perspective and as a social perception.

Pollution and Purity : Through the lens of Sociological Perspective

Sociologists have always been intrigued by the themes of purity and contamination. It may be noticed that societies all around the world differentiate between clean and filthy, pure and contaminated, and so on, to varying degrees. They can range from the trivial, like personal hygiene, to the severe, like religious issues. Sociologists want to know the factors which determine how cultures perceive purity and pollution, how they affect and relate to other aspects of culture and social structure, and what accounts for cross-cultural regularities in seemingly random concepts. Many authors have written about purity, pollution, and limits in diverse societies. Any member of society can be polluted at any time, according to Eichinger Ferro- Luzzi, and the pollution can be temporary or permanent, voluntary or involuntary, and so on. Women are regularly polluted throughout their menstrual period and during childbirth. Because these sorts of pollution are unintended and temporary, women also from time to time become untouchable and possibly unusable by men (1974).

Douglas, believes that society should adhere to such rites and practises to limit the dangers that people may experience as a result of

linking pollution with their moral convictions, echoes the author's position on the need of implementing such prohibitions. So, in the study of menstruation in social anthropology, comprehending pollution and taboo, as well as rituals, is crucial. (Das 2008). From the Polynesian word tabu, Captain James Cook introduced the term taboo into the English language. Sigmund Freud created the term "taboo" to characterise debarments like "incest taboo" in his book Totem and Taboo (1950). When analysing exclusions, sociologists such as Frazer, Radcliffe Brown, Malinowski, and Durkheim have used this expression. (Das 2008).

M N Srinivas, a well-known sociologist, has produced books on such subjects as Religion and Society in the Coorgs. Srinivas' analysis of a specific set of beliefs and actions concerning pollution illustrates both the systematic and socially situated nature of a code, namely, that Coorg behavior. Belief and language associated with purity and pollution form a more or less coherent system that pervades Coorg social life. Furthermore, Srinivas' approach to analysis tacitly acknowledges a fundamental aspect of human semiotic systems. By beginning with the language of purity and pollution, he acknowledges that language holds a unique place among all the codes used in human social life: it is the only code that can be used to communicate about other codes, and it does so regularly. Coorg ladies, like most Indian women, had to live apart during their menstrual cycles in the past. As any Coorg knows, a woman's presence in a menstruation tent implies that she is infected.

Pollution & Purity and Social Perception :

In the Nepalikhuti area, when a young girl reaches puberty, she is not allowed to return to her family and is instead assigned to live in

isolation with a neighbor or relative for twenty-one days. In the native language, this practice is known as "lukuwaituwa niyom'." Menstruation is seen as an impure state in the Nepalikhuti area and is referred to as "bahir huwa," "MC," "bahire niklinchu," "bhiton humabo nuwara," and other terms. During the first seven days of her menstruation, the young girl is required to take a ritual bath usually in the river Dikhow early in the morning, before the sun rises, to complete one of the ceremonies of her first puberty. On this particular day, she is escorted by her mother and a few other older female family members. In some circumstances, the mother returns with her daughter and keeps her in their own home, but in others, she is returned to the neighbour's home for another fourteen days. However, in their first and last puberty rites, putting her in an isolated room with no sight of the sun or men for twenty-one days is required. Thus, menstruation is regarded as a polluting agent in Hinduism, as it contains dirt and germs, and this sense of impurity is distinct. (Dumont, 1998). When it comes to menstruation, some rituals are performed around the time of menarche. These important and symbolic rituals prepare the way for other social phenomena such as pollution and restrictions in the lives of menstruating women. The literature on menstruation pollution and the presence of taboos has been investigated from a variety of perspectives, the most important of which are perceptions of menstrual pollution, female power confinement, and feminine inferiority. (Puri, 1999).

Menstrual culture is associated with a variety of beliefs and rituals. Every young girl and woman is affected by pollution for the entire menstrual cycle, which lasts five to seven days each month. Milk and milk products were not allowed to be consumed by menstruating

girls for the first twenty-one days of their period. There are significant theological implications to it. Because all Nepali community members live in the Nepalikhuti area and worship the cow as Ma Lakshmi, they were not allowed to drink cow milk or any milk products during their puberty ceremonies or during menstruation. Cows are sacred and revered in Hinduism, particularly among the Nepali population, as mother goddesses, hence menstruation women are forbidden from touching them.

Whether through mythological interpretations or otherwise, the status of unclean and hence inferior is quite real, and women who have reached menarche must adhere to a slew of rules to maintain their statuses. Dube is correct in asserting that a woman's identity necessitates restrained behaviour on her side, as well as protection and attention on the part of others. Unrelenting control over a woman's sexuality begins from puberty and only ceases with menopause, which is viewed as a liberating event. Dube (2001) uses the example of menarche rites in Orissa and Maharashtra to argue that the message behind such rituals is clear: a woman is assigned the role of a sexual being. "The occasion is both auspicious and necessitates a defence against the evil eye," she adds. Diet and movement restrictions are in place to ensure future fertility, make childbearing easier, and keep a woman's sexuality under control. For socially sanctioned parenthood, restrained and controlled sexuality is required. The puberty ritual informs the kin group and the jati that the girl has reached marriageable age and that her marriage can be negotiated. These rituals, which are only performed by women, can be viewed as a powerful symbol of gender separation. Gender roles are conceptualized, enacted, and learned within a network of relationships, according to Dube, and femininity

building is a constant, complex, and sometimes contradictory process. The behavior that is explained to and expected from a girl who has begun menstruating aids in the development of her feminine consciousness.

In the area under study this entire menstrual culture is most likely to continue to exist because, first and foremost, a segment of women, particularly those from the upper caste, believe that these social practices and rituals are necessary to preserve their culture in its purest form and to balance the caste hierarchy and power dynamics. Another reason for the presence of such taboos, according to the Brahmin caste, is to preserve their cultural beliefs and practices, and to teach the next generation to preserve this culture. Other lower castes, such as Rai, Limbu, and Thapaa, see menstruation as merely a biological process that every woman goes through for a while, and it comes as a cultural shock to see other castes maintain their menstrual culture. Their beliefs and practises are limited to not participating in religious activities. For them these beliefs are limited to the upper caste people otherwise it is considered as a normal biological process which all women go through. This menstrual culture which is impacted by societal norms, religion, caste, and traditional cultural beliefs and practices, has influenced women's lives and involvement, as well as bolstered the caste hierarchy system's status in Nepali society. From the study undertaken it can be concluded that religion and culture cannot be separated in any way and are inextricably linked. The river Dikhow is extremely important to the Nepali people because every ceremony or event takes place near the river, and water is one of the essential cleansing elements. Young girls must pay prayers to the river at their first puberty rites, since "Ganga ma" must be asked for forgiveness

and to avert misfortune for polluting her water while bathing and washing menstrual clothes.

Much of the debate over purity and pollution in this area has centred on activities like women's seclusion during menstruation, the practise of bathing and sprinkling cow urine to obtain purity, as well as pollution induced by contact with bodily emissions or members of lower castes, or on material items like the relative purity of gold, silver, copper, silk, and cotton, or Dikhow water. The need for language explanation in understanding these social activities has been emphasised throughout this study. We know this because people have told us that bathing and sprinkling cow urine both signal and accomplish purification for the knowledgeable observer. As a result, deciphering the language of purity and pollution is critical to comprehend the significance of these concepts in Indian social life. This study must take into account not only the basic meanings of linguistic meta codes like the ones mentioned in this work but also their implications and figurative meanings, as well as the social environment in which they occur.

If Indra's curse is to be believed, these taboos were necessary to keep women out of society while they were impure. In Hindu society, women are usually assigned a lower rank within patriarchy, and they are confined to the domestic sphere, which they are not supposed to leave. Women are also frequently viewed through the classic whore dichotomy, in which they are praised for their goddess-like attributes and punished for any non-normative behaviours. It is believed among the Enga of Papua New Guinea that interaction with a menstruating woman will cause a man recurrent vomiting, make his blood black, slow his faculties, waste his flesh, and eventually kill him among the

Enga. (Lindenbaum, 1972). Orthodox families among the Nepali-Chetris make every attempt to marry their daughters before they reach menarche. It's because they believe pre-pubescent females are pure and virginal, to the point that they're revered as "incarnations of goddess Durga." (Bennett, 1983). Menstruation, on the other hand, causes the purity to vanish from their bodies. Menstruation is seen as a contaminated state, and the first menstruation is enveloped in rituals, after which girls and women must adhere to taboos every month during menses." They are a serious threat to initiated guys. To make matters worse, they are labeled as filthy and polluted, and the constraints and taboos surrounding menstruation further marginalise women. The establishment of these taboos had the effect of sharpening the distinction between men and women. According to Rosaldo and Lamphere, all contemporary societies are male-dominated to some extent, and while the degree and expression of female subjugation vary widely, sexual asymmetry is now a universal fact of human social existence.

Conclusion :

The debate around menstruation reveals the pervasiveness of gender ideology, which keeps women in a subordinate position. The abolition of taboos in this domain is not a likely possibility in the near future. Taboos will continue to exist in some form or another, whether it is through pollution or relaxation. It cannot be denied that taboos and prohibitions have become a part of Nepalese heritage and hence an occurrence to be honored. As a result, in a patriarchal culture, men and women accept the taboos as necessary and manage them as norm-abiding social beings.

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State, Gender and Health Care : A Retrospect to the Imperial Health Policy Towards Woman and Its Impact on Colonial Assam

Trikha Rani Das

1.1. Introduction :

Health care of women in colonial India was an issue of major concern for the British administration in late 19th century. Colonial health policies were mainly meant for the medical care of European officers serving in India. But the enquiry of the Royal Commission had revealed that to protect Europeans residing in India from contamination, they must have to provide some health care to Indian employees as well as to Indian prostitutes. Thus, this concern paved the way for some health policies for Indian women. Moreover, in colonial India the mortality rate of infants and mothers was a concern for colonial power due to the fear of drop in population. Another aspect was that, by providing health care to the vulnerable section of the society of India, the British wanted to legitimize their rule in the country. In this paper an attempt has been made to study State intervention in women's health and the question behind gender relation and state. Both primary and secondary sources have been used in preparing the paper. Data has been analyzed through analytical method.

Concern for health care was a common aspect of colonial administration throughout the world. Two factors were significant in

the health care system of colonial authority. First, to give medical protection to their own officers and employees, second to legitimize their rule by protecting the "vulnerable" members of the society, that is women and children by providing an alternative to traditional medical practice. (Hollen 2003, 86) However, medicine and gender relation were important factors of colonial politics. Indian women were considered subjects of cruel physical practices like burning of wives alive at the funeral pyres of their dead husband, female infanticide, sexual intercourse in a pre-mature state of a girl and added with these the traditional birth practices which often proved to be the life threatening for both the mother and the new born. All these practices had served to reinforce the idea of barbarism of oriental despots and became major concerns for the colonizers as well as the reformists. Moreover, the attitude of British women in India towards their Indian counterparts had also brought certain changes in terms of health policies in British India.

In the Brahmaputra Valley similar to other states of India, there was a marked lack of consciousness prevalent regarding health of a mother and child. However, there is hardly any documentary evidence available. But fortunately, various autobiographies written during 19th century and the early decades 20th century give us a somewhat clear idea about the health condition of mothers as well as the children in the valley. Benudhar Sarma in his autobiography mentioned about his health condition during his childhood. He wrote that at a very young age he suffered from disease which he referred to as "Poya Loga". This has been defined in the *Hemkosh* (the first Assamese dictionary) as "emaciated owing to unwholesomeness or want of the mother's milk." (Sharma 1985, 135) As a measure of treatment he was given

the tongue of a goat to eat and massaged with river dolphin oil and he was kept in the place where waste of the kitchen was thrown. Many superstitious beliefs influenced the health of mothers and children. Keeping the baby in a place where waste was thrown and the benefits of the practice on the child health is completely a superstitious belief. Even today in Assamese society it is seen that if a child suffers from disease frequently then the baby is symbolically sold to an outcaste lady who often performs the role of a "Dai" (midwife or nurse). Though in urban areas this is not a common practice however in rural areas this system still exists. Like Benudhar Sharma, Nirmal Prova Bordoloi also stated that she suffered from a similar disease in her childhood (Bordoloi 201, 120). Moreover, it was common for Assamese women in 19th and early 20th century to give birth to a number of children but only a few survived. Padmavati Devi Phukanani gave birth to eighteen children but only three children were alive during their father's death. Frequent deaths of children at young ages caused superstitious beliefs to abound amongst people and they considered religious institutions as the only hope which they preferred rather than taking the help of modern medical service. The father of Karmabir Nabin Chandra Bordoloi went to Borpeta Satra as the first child of Nabin Chandra Bordoloi had not survived. So, he prayed there for the healthy well-being of his future grandchild who was Nalinibala Devi. (Devi 1976, 56.) By the late 19th century, the colonialists as well as nationalists, had begun giving attention to child health care. Articles regarding child's health were published in a number of journals of that time. On the other hand, the government's initiatives also brought a thin ray of hope for health of children in Assam. In the health magazine titled 'Swasthya Prodip' published from Uzan Bozar, Guwahati in the

mid-20th century, a good number of articles were written by medical professionals regarding childhealth care. Dr. Lalit Kumar Baruah wrote an article titled 'Santanor Monubikash, where he examined child psychology.

Though lack of medical services, superstitious beliefs and lack of education were the main hurdles of a child's health, unskilled *dhais* were also a major concern. In Tamil Nadu a hereditary Hindu midwife, most commonly referred to as a "maruttuvacci" and a hereditary Muslim midwife usually called a "Nacubar" or "ampaddacci" is usually consulted for the purpose of obstetrics (Hollen 2003, 86). Both these groups belong to the "barber" caste/community and in 19th and 20th century it was seen that a number of children had lost their lives at the hands of these '*dais*'. Due to this the colonial government started giving special attention to remove the ill effects of this traditional practice of obstetrics and replace it with a modern medical system in order to prevent depopulation.

1.2 Introduction of British Health Policy :

The framing of health policies in India by British administration is an interesting subject. Prior to 1885, there was less concern about women's health. Moreover, up to the last decades of 19th century, women's involvement in western health practice was not encouraged. After, the report of the 'Royal Commission to Enquire in to the Sanitary State of Army in India' was submitted in 1863, a European Medical Committee arrived in India. This committee was comprised of solely male medical practitioners to serve in Indian Medical Service. These medical workers were concerned primarily with the health condition of Europeans in India as the Royal Commission had reported that

there was an increasing number of infected Europeans in India who were being contaminated by the native people of India. Therefore, the committee suggested providing health care facilities; sanitation and water supply to the native people who lived in close proximity to British habitation in India. Incidentally, in 19th century, India witnessed massive epidemics of cholera, small pox and plague. The mortality rate in those epidemics had revealed the area, caste, class and race differences in acquiring government supported scientific medical support. The death rate was very low among Europeans followed by high class Indians who lived in segregation. This contamination had led British Govt. to think about the health of Indian prostitutes. Thus, this medical inspection of Indian prostitutes in British cantonment was the first state intervention into Indian women's health. A Contagious Disease Act had been passed in 1868 to regulate the treatment and quarantine of prostitutes and infected soldiers in hospitals. (Lal 1994, 29-66). However, by 1860 some irregular efforts had been made by few individual surgeons and missionaries to train indigenous midwives or *dais*. Missionary women of America and Britain were the forerunners in providing western medical health facilities to India women. Among these missionary women, Clara Swain was the first fully fledged medical practitioner who graduated from Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania and came to Bareilly, India in early 1869 and thus paved the way for her fellow missionary sisters to render their service in India.

The mid 1870's and early 1880's had witnessed several changes in the health care of Indian women. Increasing number of deaths of mothers and infants made the imperial rule concerned about the fear of depopulation. Queen Victoria of England personally took the initiative on the issue of Indian women's health and she sent the new

vicereine Lady Dufferin to enquire the matter in India. As a result of this initiative a fund had been raised both in India and England for rendering medical aid to Indian woman. Queen Victoria being the supreme patron of the Dufferin Fund had started the health mission and in order to give scientific training to midwives or *dais* a *dai* training center was opened in Tamil Nadu under this Fund. In Assam too the government took initiatives for *dai* training. Under the Dufferin Fund, financial assistance or scholarships for *dai* training class was introduced in the Berry White School of Dibrugarh. In 1914 a *dai* class room was opened at the Berry White Medical School and the classes were started with two Naga Girls, a coolie girl from a tea garden and nine local *dais*. (Bhuyan 2015) Arrangements were made to send pupils from Assam for training as nurses to the Lady Dufferin Hospital at Calcutta. The All-India League for maternity and child welfare a provincial centre was opened at Shillong in 1928 and it also contributed towards the development of the scenario of maternity and child welfare at that time. By 1940's trained nurses became available at Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Nagaon and Sivasagar. (Bhuyan 2015). Though colonial Govt took a few steps for maternity and child care yet it cannot be assumed that these few steps could be able to eradicate the havoc of Assamese mothers and their children as those trained *dais* were less in number and only accessible in urban areas.

1.3 Conclusions :

From the above discussion, it can be surmised that, the issue of women's health was a matter of concern for British administration from different angles. Firstly, by rendering medical care, they wanted to prove the legitimacy of their rule by protecting Indian women from

oriental despots and civilize the 'uncivilized' people of east. However, these health policies could not able to break the social hierarchy of Indian society. The benefits of Dufferin Fund were mainly enjoyed by the higher class and higher caste section of Indian society. Another limitation of those health policies was, it could hardly break the *purdah* system of Indian society. As women were kept in seclusion and the family did not allow the male doctors to render treatment to women even if the patient was in a critical condition. Especially during child birth, male doctors were strictly prohibited. Thus, these health policies though meant for the health care of women but only a miniscule minority were able to enjoy its benefits.

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The Lady of the 'Midnight Generation': Kamla Bhasin

**Prof. Jyoti Prasad Saikia
Surabhi Baruah**

Introduction :

Over time there have been many eminent personalities who have been serving and raising their voices for the development and progress of societies. The will to bring some form of change progressively has been their prime concern. Ranging from different social causes especially for those whose voices remain unheard or those not in a state to speak for themselves have remained one of the forefront concerns for social activists. One such prominent social activist who devoted her entire life to such voiceless sections was Kamla Bhasin. She calls herself one of the 'Midnight Generation', referring to her birth around the time of India's Independence. She sacrificed a secure and comfortable job to work for her people. A lady whose every slogan was thought-provoking and insightful and empowered our minds and souls for a better tomorrow. She however sadly left us on the 25th of September 2021 at the age of 75 years after fighting a spirited battle against cancer. Introducing her as one of the most influential feminist icon, this piece of writing is a small tribute to acknowledge Kamla Bhasin's numerous contributions to the upliftment of the downtrodden. It is of utmost importance to know about the life and works of this remarkable lady. The legacy she left behind needs to be continued to improve the lives of many.

"Girls are becoming like the wind,
They delight in frolicking freely.
To be stopped for no reason,
They cannot accept.

Girls are becoming like flowers,
They delight in scattering their fragrance
To be crushed mercilessly,
They cannot accept.

Girls are becoming like birds,
They delight in soaring freely.
To have their wings clipped,
They cannot accept.

Girls are becoming like the sun,
They delight in spreading light.
To be stifled by veils,
They cannot accept.

And...

Girls are becoming like mountains,
They delight in holding their heads high
To live with their heads bowed,
They cannot accept."— *Kamla Bhasin*

Characterised by an uncluttered and aesthetical expression, Kamla Bhasin's ideology is evident in her poems, slogans and other work and carries the power to shape and mould the minds of many benighted people. Indoctrinating the masses about the existing social

situation that is easily accepted as a part of our culture and tradition is an objective of Bhasin's works. Her works guide us to recognise ideas that need to be questioned so that we have a better insight about what is rightful and rational. Revisiting Bhasin's works are not only illuminating but pleasurable as well and are a reflection of her charismatic personality. The paper is an attempt to pen down the contribution of Kamla Bhasin towards society and make everyone aware of her work which aimed to build up a sense of responsibility within us towards society.

Life of the Legend who Perceived no Boundaries

Born at the stroke of the midnight hour, a year prior to India's freedom on 25th April in 1946 in Shahidaanwali village in Punjab now in Pakistan, is the reason Kamla Bhasin considers herself belonging to "the Midnight Generation". Her father was a doctor in Rajasthan and she was the fourth child of her parents among six siblings. Her deep sense of understanding of the problems and hardships faced by Indian women was developed because of her upbringing in villages where at an early age she became a keen observer of the rigid social structure for women especially in rural areas.

After receiving a Bachelor degree and Master degree in Arts from Maharani's College in Jaipur and from Rajasthan University respectively she flew abroad to Germany and with the help of a scholarship she pursued her further studies in Sociology of Development at the University of Munster. In 1970 she started her career in Germany as a lecturer at Orientation Center, German Foundation for Developing Countries. However, a person who always had a deep sense of belonging to the people of her nation could not continue her work and comfortable life abroad and returned to implement her studies and

improve the lives of her own people. Thus, in 1972 she joined Seva Mandir as a Development Secretary in Udaipur. From 1972 to 1975 she directly worked with the rural people and mobilized them towards development in agricultural, economic and educational spheres. In 1975 she joined United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization as a Program Officer in Thailand and in 1979 in New Delhi. Till 2001 she continued her service with United Nations for United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization where she dedicated her life for the benefit of the marginalized sections especially for women in South and South East Asia. She also helped and supported NGOs to meet this virtuous cause. The turning point in her life emerged in 2002 when she resigned her job as Program Office in United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and joined Sangat. This was the beginning of her feminist ideology that spread like a strong wave across nations and among the masses. Sangat is a South Asian Feminist Network formed in April 1998 during a workshop of gender trainers in Bangladesh which was formed with the realization and the need to create a network of gender activist and trainers. Kamla Bhasin during her entire life coordinated and served Sangat and built it as a strong foundation for helping the downtrodden. Sangat means 'a gathering' or 'the feeling of belongingness' for an ideal cause of like-minded people. Sangat is presently working under Jagori. Jagori which means "awaken women" came into being in 1984 with the efforts of Kamla Bhasin, Abha Bhैया, Runu Chakravarty, Gauri Choudhury, Sheba Chhacchi, Manjari Dingwaney and Joginder Panghaal. Jagori was formed to provide a space for women to express themselves and spread feminist ideology. Apart from these many commitments, she was also a co-chair of the worldwide network, 'Peace Women across the Globe' and South

Asia Coordinator of 'One Billion Rising'. It was a campaign centered on the idea of "property for her" and also focused on the matter of violence against women and the ideas of supremacy of patriarchy. "Property for Her" was concerned with the issue of securing property and land rights of women in South Asia. In this context, Kamla Bhasin forwarded strong slogans relating to women and property rights. It goes as :

"If Women Have Property, Children Have Security"

"When Women Own Property, they are Owned By No one"

An eminent human rights activist Kamla Bhasin stated: "I have written extensively on gender, women's empowerment, participatory and sustainable development, participatory training, media and communication. Most of my books are written for activists and development workers. I have also written a large number of songs and slogans for women's movement, book for children, and have created many posters and banners for different movements. Although I do not consider myself a good singer, I insist on singing passionately and spiritedly, wherever and whenever I can."

"AZADI" the One Word Slogan

Kamla Bhasin made famous the one-word slogan "Azadi". This was not only a word to enhance a speech among the masses but was also made applicable to her own life when she felt the need too. Thus this made her a stronger influential woman. Despite various personal hardships, a broken marriage, death of her young daughter and disability of son, she survived and stood strong for herself and for the marginalized, for women's rights, peace, equality and social justice.

This one word has the immense meaning of well-being, of a healthy and prosperous life that she wants to bestow upon us and further help everyone else to become aware of their own life and make worthy of it. She was not only a popular figure in India but was also well known amongst feminists across South Asia and worldwide. She reached out boldly to the activists in Pakistan to help the people of that nation despite the gap between the two nations. She knew no boundaries, possessing a pure soul and strong will to work for peace and prosperity of humanity.

Kamla Bhasin's ideology was to build around the development of an egalitarian society protesting against inequality and discrimination that we face in our everyday life. In one of her writings on "Women's Empowerment in the Indian Context" she presents her views on the creation of an egalitarian society. She states that according to the report of the United Nation, one out of every women experience violence which means over one billion women experience violence. What is disturbing is that most of it takes place within the family considering it as the biggest war going on in the world. Here, she claims that the prevalence of patriarchal ideology is the prime cause that believes in the supremacy of one over the other. It should be understood that patriarchy does not mean only male domination. In this context, Kamla Bhasin mentions that "we do not empower women dictators, women patriarchs, women who promote caste and patriarchy, just because they are women. We recognize that women can be also patriarchal and dominating and that some men can be and are our partners in fighting patriarchy and other hierarchical system. Our struggle is for certain principles and for a society where all men and women have equal opportunities to live, to grow to participate." Further, she states

that, to create equality there is a need to empower those who are disempowered. Possessing control over resources and ideology are the ones who have a grip on power. Thus, there is a need of change over patriarchal structure and principles giving over rights to not only women but every other person who is deprived of their human rights. Incorporating these sections of people in decision-making process and control over resources will actually describe empowerment. In her words she expresses her opinion that "Women's empowerment is not and cannot be separate from the empowerment of nature, empowerment of all the marginalized people and countries. Women's struggles and movements therefore, need to be closely linked to peace movements, ecology movements, workers' movement and peasants' movements, human rights movements and movement for democratization and decentralization of society. Empowerments do not imply power over others or power to control more than one's share rather it means power to control one's own greed, avarice, violence; power to nurture, heal, care for others; power to fight for justice, ethics, morality; power to achieve inner growth leading to wisdom and compassion." Bina Agarwal in her work "A Field of Women's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia" have also focused on women's ownership of land and property and argues that because of lack of land and property land ownership there exist a gap between men and women which makes women economically and socially backward. Kamla Bhasin focused on many other matters which seems to be minor but actually adds being the cause of women subordination. She always believed in spreading feminist thinking to awaken unconscious mind. She believed in the advocacy of feminist ideology and community action as she always believed that

sloganeering is never successful without community mobilization. It is rightly said that "charity begins at home", thus our family, our home should be the first stage of improvement and empowerment for women. She stated, 'we take this up as a normal matter to not consider the service of our mothers in the household as they do not earn money'. Valuing their service is very significant because in bearing, rearing, upbringing and managing household many of the Indian women have sacrificed their dreams. Thus sharing household works and rearing children should be a responsibility irrespective of gender and if not that implies maximum subordination of women. According to Amartya Sen and Professor Jean Dreze, more the involvement of women in paid employment implies the less anti-female biasness. Further, she brought in the issue of controlling female sexuality which hampers their freedom and autonomy in the name of early marriage, purdah system etc. Adding on to this she boldly stated that media is such a platform which actually is very sexist and anti-women in nature. She argued that million dollar industries i.e., cosmetic industry and pornography have reduced the image of women to just bodies of objectification. She claimed that the capitalist form of economy serves as an agent of reinforcing patriarchy where everything is saleable. Religion, culture and society are also creators of patriarchal ideology which re-establishes patriarchal ideas in the name of rituals and traditions. Thus Kamla Bhasin rightly stated in an interview for "The Hindu" that 'we ourselves accept our own oppression in the name of culture saying "*Yeh toh hamara sanskar hai, Riwaaj hai*" means this is our culture and tradition. There is a need for Cultural Revolution because in the name of social customs and traditions Indian women are burdened and thus we embrace patriarchy, rituals being the justification of patriarchy.

During her interview in *Satyamev Jayate*, she daringly states on patriarchy and rape culture and says “*ye pitrasattatmak soch hai ki agar mere saath balaatkaar hua toh mere kom ki izzat gayi... Toh main toh aaj saare Hindustan ko kehti hoon, ki kisi bhi ladki ki yoni mein aapki kom ki izzat aapne rakhi kyun? Humne toh nahi rakhi wahaan par. Agar kisi ki izzat jaati hai, toh balaatkaari ki izzat jaati hai, humaari izzat nahi jaati.*” It implies, the injustice in placing honour and respect of a woman and her entire family or community, quite literally in her vagina. Further, she states that the process of being a man in patriarchal society is unhealthy. Educating women was her prime agenda to empower women. There should be a system of participatory and non-hierarchical education that teaches solidarity and not competition. Women should be education not just limiting themselves in acquisition of knowledge and skills rather to acquire and strengthen their values such as equality, justice, honesty etc. Education of empowerment is not to read and understand words but to understand and control one’s own world. Education of empowerment must create awareness and makes us question the realities of life with rational outcomes.

“An Ideology not just a Name”

Considering her entire life service that she has offered to human race it’s impossible to sum up her contribution. Every piece of her work in the form of poem, books, slogans and especially her interviews and her speeches addressing the crowd struck the minds and hearts of thousands. Her speech enlightened the minds of the masses creating awareness that helps in searching for answers to various questions

that arise in our minds. Acquainting oneself with her works brings a change in one’s thought process through which one can state that Kamla Bhasin is not just a name but an ideology that leads to the creation of a new self. “*When high intellect, infinite courage and a generous, beautiful heart meet, women like Kamla Bhasin come in being*” (Samantha:2021).

On 22nd February 2019, Tezpur University organized a talk show under Chandraprabha Saikiani Centre for Women Studies in which Kamla Bhasin delivered a thought provoking speech. She quoted the Upanishads and explained the meaning of education through sloka - ‘*sa vidya yavimuktaye*’ as something that liberates us and frees us from our narrow mindedness and narrow heartedness. She further added that education can bring liberation from unjust tradition, unfair practices, inner weakness etc. here she talks about her three slogans i.e.,

I am learning how to read so that I can read the world.

I am learning how to write so that I can write my own destiny.

I am learning how to count so that I can keep an account also of my rights.

She urged to reduce the power of patriarchy, casteism and narrow nationalism. She also stated that a feminist activist must be a peace activist raising voice for all by being a Dalit activist, a LGBTQ activist. She clearly mentioned about the ill nature of patriarchy which dehumanizes men. She stated that Chandraprabha Saikia was one of the greatest social activists who broke the unfair practices prevalent in society and showed us the path of enlightenment. Further she stated

how Indian society and culture celebrates men and ignores women. As for instance, father's property is passed to male child only and girl child is considered as *parayadhan*. She talked about *kanyadan* and claimed that it is against the Indian Constitution. No father can gift her daughter as *daan* to another man. The concept of touching husband's feet, the rule of putting *sindoor* and *mangalsutra* and no such rule for men etc., are against the Constitution. The term *pati* and *swami* means master, controller shows that the husband is the master and wife being the slave, have been compared to animal husbandry by Kamla Bhasin. Considering the menstrual taboos as one of the most bizarre concept in Indian societies she urged to find out one human being who has been born without the woman having menstruation. Thus, considering menstruating women as impure is illogical. Patriarchy has been internalized and ingrained in our minds that we easily accept all those customs and practices in our culture which makes women a second-class category and men as privileged one. Celebration like *rakshabandhan*, *bhai dooj*, *karwachauth* is gender biased and she claims these celebrations as ways of re-enforcing patriarchal ideas" (Tezpur University: 2019).

"Kamla Bhasin focused on children literature as an instrument for achieving equality. Even children literature are not left unaffected by gender stereotypes and hierarchies. Thus, Kamla Bhasin states that reimagining gender in children's literature is very important and one of the most effective ways to mould children's mind to a gender neutral surrounding (Yadav: 2020). In two other books of her "Satrangi Ladke" and "Satrangi Ladkiyan" she paints a colourful picture of young boys and girls, their childhood and how they are all dissimilar. In a talk

with Indian Express she states, "It is all right to be different, because that is how nature has made us. No two people are alike, she says, and that is why the difference should be celebrated. Further, she adds that patriarchy wants all the men in the world to behave in a certain way, and all the women to behave in a certain way, too... Have they lost it? Not once does the nature say that the tall man is superior or the fair woman is superior, and the dark one is useless. In fact, nature says its every creation is beautiful. We are all different, but not unequal; society makes us unequal-- with the gender rules, the caste rules, the race rules" (Indian Express: 2020).

Conclusion

Teaching us the essence of life with simplicity was the grace that Kamla Bhasin carried with her. Summing up her vision and contribution to human race in few pages is impossible. As a tribute to such a great personality we should try to follow her footsteps. However, developing such a kind of mind set will not happen all of a sudden. A gradual change in our thought process and actions will actually help us to follow her rather than just limiting ourselves to her writings. She was a person of action that was the real cause of change she brought into the society. Further, her works should not be left limited in the arena of academics and should be made available in larger sphere. She was a person of progressive thinking so with the change and dynamic nature of society, people should also widen up the range of thought process and accept the differences within us for a healthy surrounding to flourish. Differences need acceptance and not discrimination.

"Rise, Not Fall in Love" - Kamla Bhasin

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The COVID 19 Crisis and Reflections on Gender Inequality (SDGs)

Dr. Pinky Baruah

Introduction :

The global coronavirus pandemic has nearly brought our way of life to a halt, creating repercussions that will be felt for decades, both financially and psychologically. The COVID-19 virus has wreaked havoc on all sectors and strata of society around the world. It has caused an unprecedented global crisis and has compromised the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic has interrupted the progress toward gender equality and, instead, exacerbated existing gender inequalities across domains- from gendered divisions of labor to economic stability. This paper tries to document some of the most glaring gender inequalities that have arisen in the COVID-19 pandemic and discuss how during the crisis, women are more prone to risks due to the gendered nature of work. More precisely, the paper tries to analyze how the new circumstances created by the pandemic have affected the interdependencies between SDGs. This unprecedented time gives a glimpse of the deeply entrenched and unequal gendered social structure that exists inside the social and family institution.

The COVID-19 catastrophe has had a wide range of environmental, economic, and social effects, all of which have had a significant impact on long-term development. The pandemic has exposed Agenda 2030's bold aspirations to combat poverty, hunger,

gender inequality, and excellent health and well-being (United Nations, 2020). The three E's of sustainability (i.e. Energy, social Equity, and the Environment) in the framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) have been challenged. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are relevant to all countries and focus on improving equity to meet the needs of women, children and the poorest and most disadvantaged people. The Decade of Action began in 2020, with a reaffirmation of the global commitment through accelerated efforts and sustainable solutions to the world's major challenges, ranging from poverty eradication and gender inequality reduction to climate change mitigation. The COVID-19 pandemic has paused the entire agenda and has forced the member countries to think of alternate ways to meet these goals as the significant goal to ensure healthy lives have been threatened. The long-lasting impact of COVID 19 is still unclear and yet not measured. Hence literature and research are very necessary.

Objectives :

The primary objective is to analyze the impact of the pandemic on the achievement of the SDGs and to highlight the interdependencies between the goals in light of the new circumstances concerning women. The paper will try to understand how women are affected differently as individuals and communities due to gender inequalities which are exaggerated due to the global pandemic.

Methodology :

This is a descriptive and analytical paper. The paper is based on the current literature available, and on empirical and analytical

observation as well. The paper is based on the available SDG literature. The methodology involves in-depth discussion based on secondary data collected from review of literature from journals, articles, surveys undertaken at different levels.

Discussion :

COVID-19 crisis has affected everyone but women and girls have faced the worst in terms of disproportionate economic, health, and social risk factors due to deep inequalities in social norms, and unequal power relations. The socio-economic and political implications of COVID-19 on women and gender are reflected across five of the main goals viz. removing poverty, quality education, gender equality, decent work and economic growth, and reduced inequalities. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs report reveals COVID-19 threatens to reverse the progress of SDG-3, which aims to ensure healthy lives and wellbeing for all. During the crisis, 70 countries have halted childhood vaccination programs, and in many places, health services for cancer screening, family planning, or non-COVID-19 infectious diseases have been interrupted or are being neglected. Health service disruptions could reverse decades of improvement, warns the report (The Lancet 2020). Allowing people to slip through these service gaps could affect population health for years to come. Women account for 70 percent of the workers in the health and social sector globally and constitute most health facility servicestaff around the world. Women are at the frontlines of the COVID-19 response too thereby exposing them to a higher risk of the virus. Services such as sexual and reproductive health facilities which women need the most are affected as many of the resources

are reallocated to combat the COVID crisis (UNAIDS 2020). This may lead to an increase in maternal mortality and morbidity, adolescent pregnancies, and HIV and sexually transmitted diseases etc. The global maternal mortality ratio although had declined by 38 percent between 2000 and 2017, still the figure is not even half the expected annual rate needed to achieve the global target of reducing maternal deaths to fewer than 70 per 100,000 live births by 2030 (UNICEF 2020). The under-5 mortality rate had fallen by almost 50 percent between 2010 and 2018. There is evidence from reports of WHO that during earlier health crises like the Ebola virus and the Zika virus outbreaks maternal mortality ratios had increased. The rate of adolescent pregnancies also increased. Various sources have reported that even the supplies of modern contraceptives have been affected due to lockdown because of the pandemic. This may likely lead to an additional 7 million unintended pregnancies.

Access to water and sanitation (SDG-6) remains a major health issue. 2.2 billion people remain without safe drinking water (WHO, UNICEF 2015). The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the lack of access to sanitation for billions as WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) programs have been halted. In India, issues involving access to water have direct impact on women who spend hours queuing up around community water sources for portable water. This defies practicing social distancing norms leading to health hazards from heat waves and COVID 19 infections.

SDG-5, which addresses gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, has also equally been halted. SDG-5 emphasizes the need to break down barriers to gender equality. Recognized as a core aspect of the 2030 Agenda, gender equality is the basis for

achieving all the SDGs. The goal of gender equality intersects with SDG 3 in myriad ways. SDG target 3.1 focuses specifically on reducing maternal mortality, while SDG target 3.7 addresses universal access to sexual and reproductive health services. SDG target 3.3 talks about HIV/AIDS which is more prevalent among women. According to the Sustainable Development Report 2020, India has an overall improved SDG score of 61.92 (out of 100) and ranks 117 out of 193 UN member states in terms of SDGs achievement, yet major challenges remain in achieving SDG-5 targets.

The pandemic's economic impacts have left no country or population unscathed, and women are again disproportionately affected. A decline of 3% in the global economy in 2020 has been predicted by The International Monetary Fund (IMF). This threatens the achievement of SDG as although some countries were making progress in income inequality, a global recession may force an additional 71 million people to live in poverty (SDG Report 2020).

The tangled and inter-connecting nature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has been emphasized by the pandemic. Therefore, a multidisciplinary thinking approach is needed for exploring interconnections between environment, wildlife, and humans all in one health approach. The achievement of SDG-10 (reduced inequalities) is negatively impacted because the most vulnerable groups (women, youth, low-wage workers, small and medium enterprises, informal sector) have to cope with the most damaging impacts of COVID-19 and the current growing inequalities between countries. Compared to men, women have lower earnings, savings, and job security, and they are overrepresented in the informal sector. Due to the informal and unorganized nature of work, women are less likely to have protection

against dismissals, paid sick leave etc. In many countries, women are overrepresented in the hospitality and food services, real estate, administrative activities, manufacturing, more so in the garment sector), and the wholesale/retail trade sectors. These have been identified as among the sectors to be most heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (ILO 2020). Moreover, many women who own micro or small enterprises or are self-employed are now facing increased risks of bankruptcy due to gaps in financing, which leads to women having less access to capital and loans.

Widespread lockdowns around the world have forced many women to stay at home, but many households are not prepared to provide this safety to women and girls. Women's wellbeing has suffered during the COVID-19 outbreak, with incidences of domestic violence increasing by 30% in some countries and a greater demand on women for unpaid care work (Fuwa, 2004; United Nations, 2020). It is not a surprise given that women typically spend three times as much time as men on unpaid care and domestic work (UN Women, 2020). There have been important implications over food security, the division of unpaid care work, and increased risks for gender-based violence faced by women at home. At the household level, gender inequalities often rooted in gender social norms that force women to face heavily as they have no say in decision making (Carlson et al., 2020).

The pandemic is expected to double the number of people facing food crises. According to UN Report 820 million people remain hungry today of this 135 million suffer from acute hunger. The COVID-19 pandemic could now double that number, putting an additional 130 million people at risk of suffering acute hunger by the end of 2020. It

poses a risk, especially for women and girls, as in times of crisis, women tend to eat less to provide for children and other family members. With quarantine measures and lockdown, the workload in caring for children, the sick, and the elderly, as well as household tasks, have increased. With gradual reopening women are likely to pose additional challenges as it could push them out of jobs or force them into part-time jobs while increasing their responsibilities at home. This pressure intensifies for single mothers who are single handily raising their children. According to global reports, 243 million women and girls worldwide have been subjected to sexual and/or physical violence by an intimate partner. In many societies people believe it is justifiable for a man to beat his partner. These existing toxic social norms, combined with increased economic and social stress caused by isolation measures and financial difficulties in the household, have driven an increase in gender-based violence. In many instances support services, helplines are being disrupted or inaccessible because of the pandemic. Child marriage is another manifestation of gender-based violence. Many factors such as loss of household income, higher risk of violence in the household, and closure of schools and drop outs can increase child marriage. The pandemic has a greater effect on those dealing with multiple degrees of discrimination. Older women, disabled, LGBTIQI and trans gender, migrants, displaced and refugee women, indigenous women, rural women, and those living in informal settlements face even greater risks and additional obstacles in accessing essential services (Hafi&Uvais, 2020).

UNESCO estimates that some 1.25 billion students are affected due to the pandemic, posing a serious challenge to the attainment of SDGs Goal 4 of attaining Quality Education. In 2020, as the COVID-

19 pandemic spread across the globe, a majority of countries announced the temporary closure of schools, impacting more than 91 percent of students worldwide. Education is a tool for women to expand their ability to make decisions and act on them. For many girls in low-income countries, access to education was already a challenge before the outbreak. Across high, medium, and low human development countries, less than 60 percent of women use the internet while in medium and low human development countries, less than 30% of females use the internet. (UNDP 2019) The closure of schools has widened the gender digital divide due to unequal access to the internet and technologies. According to reports it is estimated that globally, as compared to men 327 million fewer women have access to a smartphone. Moreover, when multiple family members need to share technological resources such as the Internet, there are instances of inherent gender inequality which cause women and girls to be given less access to online modes. Furthermore, evidence from past crises has shown that school closures can lead to higher risks of sexual abuse and teenage pregnancies. Also, the consequences of the pandemic can constrain women's decision-making power in the economic and political spheres, leading to widening gender gaps in accessing basic services, controlling assets, and managing resources (Eagly & Wood, 1999). The lack of women's participation in decision-making processes limits the reach and impact of recovery efforts and the possibilities of representation in positions of power in the economic and political spheres. The lockdown puts at risk the gains at the household level, hinders women participating in decision making and increases the risk of job losses.

Conclusion :

Once the Covid-19 pandemic is under control, and the world economy is back on its tracks, the status and fate of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), will have to be reassessed. The "pandemic pause" can be a blessing in disguise. It gives all the stakeholders a chance to undertake a thorough review of where we stand as well as what needs to change. Reprioritizing and revamping the SDG goals is a big challenge. Recovery is a complex and non-linear process. The pandemic has exposed fundamental weaknesses in our global system. It has shown how the prevalence of poverty, weak health systems, gender inequality, subpar education, and a lack of global cooperation exacerbate a health crisis. Globally, the pandemic has exposed the widening SDG needs gap. In our effort to return to normalcy, we must not lose sight of the lessons gained from the pandemic. As the world is seized with containing the spread of the virus and addressing its negative impacts, the reality is that countries are resetting their priorities, and reallocating resources to deal with the pandemic. This certainly is the right thing to do because the priority now is to save lives, and we must do so at all costs. (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/undesavoice/more-from-undesa/2020/06/49491.html>) Policies to reduce conditions of vulnerability and strengthen capacities to tackle crises are crucial to enable girls and women to better weather and recover from these shocks. Strong policy responses will have to be built from sex-disaggregated data that allows a better understanding of the gender implications of the COVID-19 crisis. There is an urgent need for more and better collection as well as reporting of data disaggregated by sex. Also, by age, residence (urban/rural), race, ethnicity, and other intersectional

characteristics to inform policymakers, governments, decision-makers, and researchers, thus helping them better understand and respond to the pandemic. Understanding the gender-differentiated impacts of the COVID-19 crisis is fundamental to designing policy responses that will reduce vulnerable conditions and strengthen women status by keeping gender equality at their center. This would not only rectify longstanding inequalities faced by women but also for building a more rationale and resilient world.

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Votes for Indian Women – History of a Silent Spring

Lipika Mahanta

Introduction :

Indian women got the right to vote in the very year the country got independence. This fact in itself was history because at that point of time many of the so-called developed nations were yet to allow universal adult franchise. It is often assumed that the Constituent Assembly of India had adopted adult suffrage as the mode of election at the stroke of a pen. However, this was not as simple a process as it sounds. If one carefully examines the historical underpinnings for this milestone, it can easily be noticed that there is in fact much more to rejoice in this historic feat. The making of universal adult franchise was by no means a legacy of colonial rule. Very little is known about these events. As such, the series of political exercises, which led to this remarkable achievement, can now be termed as a 'silent spring.'

Many British officials, serving the colonial Indian government, had argued consistently that universal adult franchise was a 'bad fit' for a country like India with a population comprising more than 85 per cent illiterates.¹ Colonial administrators – both British and Indians – resisted the idea to expand the then qualified franchise.² The opponents of 'vote for women' opposed it simply on the ground that women are 'inferior and incompetent in public affairs.' However, the Assembly Sub-Committee on Fundamental Rights of the Constituent Assembly of India was firm that universal adult suffrage must be guaranteed by

the Constitution of India for the sake of 'political justice' and proceeded to draft provisions to that effect. Subsequently, the Constituent Assembly adopted universal franchise in April 1947 and Article 326 was incorporated into the Constitution of India.

Universal Franchise in India :

Implementing universal franchise was one of the remarkable actions of decolonization as the Indians had to imagine it and then make it a reality for themselves. It is a fact that the idea was enrooted in the nationalist movement and there was a commitment in the Nehru Report of 1928 to implement adult franchise. The Nehru Report stated that "every person of either sex, who has attained the age of 21 and is not disqualified by law, shall be entitled to vote." The Indian National Congress also echoed the same idea in its Karachi Resolution of 1931 and argued that any Constitution of India must contain 'adult suffrage.'³

In the years prior to the setting up of the Constituent Assembly, many Indian historical constitutions for example the Gandhian Constitution of Free India, 1946; the Sapru Report, 1945 and Ambedkar's States and Minorities Report, 1945 had advocated universal adult franchise.⁴ In 1946, the Cabinet Mission Plan also recognized the very principle as the ideal mode of electing members to the Constituent Assembly. But, it also realized that implementing adult suffrage would 'unacceptably' delay the setting up of the Constituent Assembly. As such, Assembly members were elected indirectly – by recently elected members of the provincial legislatures. The indirectly elected Assembly members, however, did not lose sight of universal adult franchise, because of which women voters, including veiled Muslim women, who had exclusive booths to

themselves, could cast their votes in the first parliamentary elections held between October 1951 and February 1952.⁵

It is important to note that during the colonial rule, even after the adoption of the 'policy of association' by the British, women were not allowed to vote or to hold legislative offices on the same basis as men. To raise a voice against this discrimination, several women organizations were launched which ultimately created a women suffrage movement in India. It is mentionable that some women activists of foreign origin played a crucial role in the establishment of many such organizations. As such, historian Geraldine Forbes opined that "the firm insistence for equal treatment with that of men on the franchise issue emerged as the result of the influence of certain British women, rather than the perceptions of the needs of the women in India."⁶ The Women's Indian Association (WIA), a group of prominent Indian women, organized by the Irish feminist Margaret Cousins raised the question of female suffrage first in front of Edwin Montague, the then Secretary of State for India, who was on a tour of the sub-continent for five months.⁷ The delegation that met Montague included the leading woman educator of Bengal, Lady Abala Bose.⁸ In 1919, the British resolved not to decide on woman suffrage at the national level. Rather, in the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms, the British set up provincial legislatures and made women's suffrage a provincial subject.⁹ As such, public discussion of political rights for women focused on the debates in the provincial legislative council.

In 1921, Madras became the first provincial government to allow wealthy and educated women to vote under the same terms that applied to men.¹⁰ Soon many other provinces followed the feat. It is needless to mention here that all the princely states did not have electoral

systems, and as such, women of princely states were not considered for granting of the franchise.

However, the case was different in terms of the Bengal province. In 1921, the campaign to get the legislature to pass a bill allowing women to vote was decisively defeated in the then Bengal Legislative Council.¹¹ The heated debate in the council caused much surprise because Bengal was a pioneer in women's education during the nineteenth century and it was assumed that the vote would be granted to women with little opposition.¹² Future analysis showed that the status of a woman in the traditional Bengali society of that time was to be primarily blamed for such an unexpected result.

Society of Bengal During the Early Twentieth Century :

In the traditional Bengali upper-caste family till the late nineteenth century, women were expected to veil their faces in front of outsiders and mostly were restricted to the inner compartments of the home. Rigid observance of the '*purdah* code' was considered as a status of high society. Girls married very young and they were expected to adapt to the household chores of the family of the husband and become obedient daughters-in-law.¹³ Women were expected to devote their lives in the name of 'family' and 'religion.' Women's property rights were limited and they had almost no access to education.

However, with the changing economic base of the Bengali upper castes from the traditional one to that of the urbanized profession during the advent of foreign traders, a new class emerged in Bengal. The new class advocated for girls' education as the need of the hour. During the late nineteenth century, the '*Brahmo Andolon*' also started picking up pace and the face of traditional Bengali Society gradually

changed. Many leaders of the *Brahmo* cult started imparting 'modern education' to their girl children and as a result, many highly educated Bengali women emerged during that time. Some highly educated women leaders began to play roles in public affairs.¹⁴ In the late nineteenth century, small groups of women began to work for religious, social and educational reforms.

The *Bangiya Nari Samaj*, formed in 1921, was the first women's association in Bengal to consciously campaign for the right to vote on the provincial level.¹⁵ Initially, the association was formed to support Mr. S. M. Bose's resolution in favor of women's suffrage.¹⁶ Mention may be made that Mr. S. M. Bose was a moderate nationalist and elected member of the Bengal Legislative Council, who took the initiative to introduce the women suffrage resolution. Kamini Roy, Mrinalini Sen, Kumudini Bose etc., were some of the prominent leaders of the *Bangiya Nari Samaj*.¹⁷ The *Bangiya Nari Samaj* collected support from a few British women as well as women from more conservative communities. Several prominent Muslim women braved the censure of their societies and put forward strong support in favor of female suffrage. The most famous among the Muslim women was R. S. Hussein, the founder and Superintendent of the most well-known Muslim Girls' school in Bengal, the Sakhawat Memorial Girls' school.¹⁸

Debate on women suffrage in the Bengal Legislative Council in 1921:

The discussion on the resolution in favor of women suffrage, introduced in the Bengal Legislative Council on 1 September 1921, became quite heated on several occasions. The opposing speakers

did not attempt to counter the nationalist argument that granting women the 'right to vote' would be in consonance with the democratic spirit of the times. Rather, they attacked the contention of female suffrage supporters that the vote is a natural right of both the sexes. They openly maintained that the inferiority of women made them incapable of judicious participation in public affairs.¹⁹ They also opposed the destruction of the '*purdah*' system which they argued would disappear if women began to vote.²⁰ Kumar Shib Shekhareswar Ray, a legislator and an aristocratic Hindu, argued that granting women suffrage would mean 'allowing the prostitutes to flock to the booths.'²¹ Another legislator alleged that a woman involved in 'politics and other brain-works' would be unable to breastfeed their children.²²

Such a lowly held debate was nothing but an attempt to defeat the suffragists using 'moral issues.' It was unfortunate that the conspirators against women suffrage succeeded and on the final day of the debate, the pro-suffrage resolution was finally defeated by a vote of 56 to 37.²³

The Defeat and its Aftermath :

The defeat of the pro-suffrage resolution in the Bengal Legislative Council was like an eye-opening call to the suffragists. They now realized that they could not rely on the legislators only for consideration but had to fight for the cause of women suffrage. In 1921, only approximately 10 percent of the male population and 2 percent of the female population of Bengal could read and write.²⁴ So, it was a gargantuan task on the shoulders of the suffragists to create political awareness among the targeted audience. The leaders of the *Bangiya Nari Samaj* organized camps and meetings in an attempt to make

women suffrage a collective demand of the womenfolk. The ideals of *Bangiya Nari Samaj* got expressed in a series of articles by its Secretary Kumudini Bose published in the journal 'The Servant'.²⁵ Mrs. Bose, in her writings, did not challenge the traditional concept that the woman in society differs from that of men, because women are mothers and responsible for the home. However, she did not accept the argument put forwarded by the conservative section that women are therefore less suited to public life. On the contrary, she argued that women should be given a special interest in public affairs since there is hardly any policy that does not affect the family. She also opined that differences in temperament and social role do not imply lesser spiritual ability or intellectual for women. Mrs. Bose said that the contributions of women were as equally valuable as men and should complement each other in public as well as private life.

Mounted on such high expounds and favored with the dramatic changes in the contemporary political scenario in Bengal, a resolution was introduced in favor of women suffrage in the Bengal Legislative Council for the second time in August 1925.²⁶ It was quite interesting to note that in the second debate the opponents of female suffrage were less vocal and they did not dwell on the supposedly inherent inferiority of women as was the case in the first debate. Only one legislator raised the issue that prostitutes might come out for voting if women's suffrage was allowed.²⁷ What was more noticeable was that only a few Muslim and no Hindu legislators defended 'purdah' as a desirable social norm. Nonetheless, paving the way for a new history, women's suffrage was passed by 54 votes in favor of the resolution out of the total 92 votes in the council.²⁸

Women Suffrage as a National Demand :

The demand for women suffrage in an independent India grew at the pan-Indian level alongside the national movement. Especially, it was during the period between 1927 to 1933 when a fresh demand on the issue resurfaced in the country. As a result, the Nehru Report of 1928 committed the implementation of adult franchise in an Independent India.²⁹ The Indian National Congress, in its Karachi Resolution of 1931, declared that it would grant women franchise if it would come to power.³⁰ As a result, Indian women got the right to vote in the very year their country was born.

Conclusion :

There is not much written in the modern political history of India about the movement for women suffrage. In fact, it is not even considered as a separate independent movement carried by largely a handful of women for the entire womenfolk of the new nation. The efforts of many unsung heroes have joined the long succession of many that existed for a while and faded away. However, every such unaccounted effort culminated in the form of Article 326 of the Constitution of India which proudly reminds us that 'political justice' is delivered in the 'new India.'

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Development of Women's Studies Centres and Cells in India in General and the North East in Particular

Urmismita Deka

1. Introduction

The late 60's and early 70's are considered to be the major turning points in the political and social history of post independent India. The Nehruvian model of planned development and the Congress rule of Indira Gandhi were now doubted with the rising urban unemployment, food shortages and droughts. Instances where students and housewives in state of Gujarat agitated against rising prices, corruption and hoarding and even the state government was made to resign¹. In Ahmedabad, in 1974, Gandhian inspired activism took the form of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) which is the first organization of women workers². In 1971, a Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) was set up by the Government of India, by a resolution of the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare³. The members were entrusted with the responsibility to make a comprehensive review about the rights and status of women, emphasizing mostly on education and employment, against the backdrop of the constitutional, legal and administrative provisions available. The aim was to recommend ways which in the long run would enable the women to play their role in the nation building process. The report that was published was entitled 'Towards Equality'. This study itself raised some questions among the members of the

committee. In the long run it led to the impetus for setting up women's studies in the Indian context. The generation of social scientists who were now aware of their own location within higher education contributed a lot towards the cause. The first explicit naming of women's studies that took place in 1974 in a women's university, preceded the onset of a fresh phase in the women's movement in India⁴. Therefore, it can be presumed that the thrust for the women's studies in India was initiated by the release of the Towards Equality report in 1974. The report made its way to the United Nations international meet in 1975.

The Indian Council of Social Science Research established in 1969 which is India's apex research body, began a sponsored programme on women's studies in 1975 which included the generation and analysis of data to uncover significant trends in women's position, the development of new perspectives in the social sciences and the revival of the debate on the women's question⁵. The programme of ICSSR denoted the significance of women's studies.

From 21-23 April, 1985, the Research Group on Women's Studies, department of Political Science of the University of Delhi organized a three-day national seminar at Delhi to deliberate on the guidelines for initiating women's studies units in the Indian universities⁶. The seminar was co-sponsored by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and Indian Association for Women's Studies⁷. It was decided in the seminar that independent centres for women's studies should be created in the universities and all the departments should have women's studies units. Women's Studies & Development Centre (WSDC) was established in April 1987 in the Political Science Department of Delhi University⁸.

From 1980s, institutionalization of Women's Studies began in India which also spread to the universities of North East. In Gauhati University, the first Women's Studies Centre was initiated in 1989. But in other North Eastern regions development of Women Studies Centre did not take place sooner than 2004. The presented paper intends to see at different dimensions of Women's Studies Centre in North Eastern universities, their developments and challenges. The paper also focuses on the importance of Women's Studies centres in the educational institutions.

1.1 Objectives

1. To study the background for the establishment of Women's Studies Centre in India.
2. To study about the Centres and Cells of Women's Studies in North East India.

1.2 Discussion

As many women's studies scholars acknowledged, the foundation for women's studies was laid in 1970's with the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India entitled 'Towards Equality' of 1974, which was followed by the ICSSR Advisory Committee on Women's Studies in 1977 that demanded new research on the social and economic conditions of women⁹. The Committee pointed out that the purpose of these research activities was to challenge the marginalization and misrepresentation of women in social science disciplines and scholarship by adding new knowledge about women through generating data¹⁰. If we look from the point of institutionalization, the first women's studies centre as the Research

Centre for Women's Studies was established by the SNDT Women's University in Bombay in 1974 with a focus on the systematic documentation of various aspects of women's lives¹¹. The main objective of women's studies programme was articulated by the ICSSR as research on the socio-economic condition affecting the lives of women which would produce new data adding new knowledge and provide a critical perspective to the disciplines of social science. In the 1980s the Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS) and the University Grants Commission (UGC) felt the need to integrate women's studies into existing academic disciplines as courses and as a research agenda having multidisciplinary focus. In 1985, the importance of separate women's studies centres in higher educational institution was emphasised for the first time and a seminar was organised jointly by IAWS and UGC¹². The motive behind institutionalisation of women's studies was that this would make the educational system accountable to enlarge the social apprehension against marginalization, injustice and oppression of women.

1.3. Schemes and Initiatives of UGC for Women's Studies Development

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has been playing an important role in promoting women's studies by creating Centres for Women's Studies (CWS) by enforcing "Development of Women Studies in Indian Universities and Colleges". The UGC has been supporting thirty-four centres for women's studies including thirteen centres under the scheme that were created during the IX Plan period¹³. The UGC decided to grant financial support to the scheme for different activities and programmes (covered in the X plan) and made during

Women in Various Fields: Roles and Contributions

2003-2004 made a certain budget allocation. The goals and directions that these women's studies centres have been contributing to, can be culminated in the following points-

- i. Incorporate women's studies in various courses in teaching
- ii. Promote research to certain fields in the concerned area
- iii. Create, develop and evaluate projects
- iv. Generate resource and documentation materials
- v. Active counseling in women as well socially/politically relevant issues
- vi. Networking and multidisciplinary collaborating activities; and
- vii. Supplement into the development plans of the State/Central Government etc¹⁴.

Along with the above-mentioned points, close interaction and collaboration with different centres such as Centres on Population Education, Adult, continuing education, extensions in and functions under the schemes of UGS are important¹⁵.

1.4 Approach in the Plan X

It is essential for the Centres of Women's Studies (CWS), to have a proper designated plan for the undertaking and implementing purpose of its activities, as they play significant roles in removal of poverty and discrimination. With the National Policy being laid down, approach to the X Plan for empowerment of women now stands as an action platform with definite goals, targets and a time frame. As the process of women empowerment is expected to be the same as the Ninth Plan, there is no better approach than putting the National Policy for Empowerment of Women of 2001 into action through-

Women in Various Fields: Roles and Contributions

- i. Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for the development of women to enable them to realize their full potential
- ii. Allowing the de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by women at par with men in all spheres like political, economic, social and economic life of the nation
- iii. Ensuring equal access to women health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc
- iv. Strengthening legal systems aimed at the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women
- v. Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women
- vi. Mainstreaming a gender perspective into the development process
- vii. Eliminating discrimination and all forms of discrimination against women and the girl child
- viii. Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organisations, corporate and private sector agencies¹⁶

Therefore, the strategies need to have a well-defined action plan about their activities and programmes that will help them to fulfill the objectives and national goals. Under the X plan, along with the 34 centres there was to be addition of 20-21 centres in universities.

1.5 The role of the Centres

The Centres for Women Studies may differ from each other in the sense of their strength, location, priorities etc. but they have a common goal to achieve that is to perform their functions and roles and to impart knowledge with the help of research, teaching, field studies, documentation for the purpose of strengthening national goals. Therefore, it can be culminated that the major roles of the centres include teaching and training, research, extension, documentation, publication, dissemination, advocacy, seminars and workshops, networking and coordinating with other agencies, monitoring and review¹⁷. The centres were to submit action plan for the activities and programmes with cost for the same and the centre would perform this under the X Plan.

The UGC stated that women's studies centres should be located in the Indian Universities will provide teaching programmes and training and academic services. The courses that were to be provided should include studies regarding new gender perspective. Different levels for the course like Diploma, Bachelor, Masters, MPphil, PhD and Post Doctorate should be there. As far the research programme is concerned, it should be based on solving different types of problems that women are facing in relation to social, economic, education, health, psychological, political participation etc. During the IXth Plan, the UGC guidelines stated 15 subjects as vital areas for studies. Besides those, research can also be undertaken as per the following points-

- i. The new economic policy of liberalization, globalization, privatization and its impact
- ii. National, global priority, thrust areas and various women issues and steps for solution

- iii. Women in the Panchayati Raj/District/Block system; problems, limitations and role
- iv. Women Health and child development
- v. Domestic violence against women
- vi. Trafficking in women (national and international)
- vii. Women's writing and literature
- viii. Women empowerment
- ix. Infrastructure and facilities
- x. Family and women
- xi. Electronic media for the promotion of Women's Studies
- xii. Courses in Women's studies needed with community development
- xiii. Natural disaster, calamities/flood/drought affected women and solution
- xiv. Misuses of functional autonomy by women and their possible demerits
- xv. Participation of non-conventional and non-government agencies
- xvi. Role of Women's Studies Centres in promotion of Health and Child development followed by Community development¹⁸.

The objectives and goals of the research programmes would be to support policies, planning and empowerment to women.

1.6 Women's Studies Centres in North East India

Along with the institutionalization of women's studies centres in India, developments in North East Indian states were also seen. In North East India, women's studies centre was first established in Gauhati University in 1989 and the first step towards this was taken

by the then Vice Chancellor D. P. Baruah and the first Director of the Women's Studies Research Centre was Professor Renu Debi¹. It was due to the efforts of Prof Renu Debi and her colleagues who were continuously engaged in different research programmes and were also conducting seminars that the centre of women's studies transformed to a department. WSRC of Gauhati University led the way for the establishment of women's studies centre in different universities of the North East India. Such centres emerged in Dibrugarh University in 2004, in Nagaland University in 2007, in Tezpur University in 2006 and in Mizoram University in 2016. In Mizoram University, the centre was established due to the continuous efforts of the Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhian-Core Committee. Thus, it can be said that along with the global institutionalization, north east of India also got affected.

It is true that the XI Plan of the UGC has a lot of impact over the establishment of the women's studies centres in North East India but the fact that it also emerged to address different issues faced by the women of different local communities who were subjected to socio economic changes with the rise and globalized market cannot be denied. The centres of North East India created a gender perspective and impart knowledge on women's studies by making it a part of academics.

In Tripura University, the history of establishment of women's studies centre has its roots in the long history of women's movement in Tripura. In 2007, Tripura University was centralized. Even before that research on women issues were being carried on in the university, but after the settlement of women's studies centre after the approval of the UGC, there were changes in the structure of the research programmes². In 2011, the Women's Studies Centre of Tripura was

established under the UGC scheme of Development of Women's Studies in Indian Universities and colleges. The centre has been trying to create awareness about the women's role in society by conducting workshops, seminars etc. The centre also runs a PG Diploma programme in Women's Studies. There are several programmes conducted by the centre in between 2012 and 2017. These are- a workshop on 'Capacity Building of Women's Managers in Higher Education' in 2013; that was funded by the UGC; workshop on 'Sexual Harassment of Women in Workplace, Prevention, Prohibition and redressal Act 2013 (in 2014); training on 'Self Defence' and 'Yoga for Health' in 2015 and a three-day orientation programme on 'Women's Studies as an Emerging Discipline in 2015.

In Dibrugarh University, the women's studies centre emerged due to the efforts of retired professor Aparna Mahanta, Manjula Duara and Farida Ahmed during the initial phase. During the initial period, they did not have financial supports and despite that they developed a women studies centre for which they bought books by themselves. They also set up Women's Studies cells in different colleges under Dibrugarh University in 2004. The research programmes that were being carried on by the university were more field study centric rather than book centric. The centre aimed at creating an environment for the study of women's issues to flourish. The activities of the centre include- a workshop on 'Oral History and Visual History' in collaboration with Sound and Picture Archives for Research on Women (SPARROW) in 2015; lectures and interactive sessions on 'Women and Law: Issues and Challenges' and Gender Auditing in 2015; a National Workshop on Feminist Research Methodology in 2016 etc. In Nagaland University, the women's studies centre was established

in 2007 and their purpose was to create a gender sensitive society with gender awareness.

In the year 2009, women's studies centre in Tezpur University which is also known as Chandraprabha Saikiani Centre for Women's Studies. The centre's aim as depicted by them is to provide a platform and promote women studies relating to the diverse social cultural environment of North East India. The centre had some projects which were complete success, those are- a UGC sponsored programme on 'Capacity Building of Women Managers in Higher Education', Women and Trafficking, Gender Gap Analysis of Tea Estate in Upper Assam, Women in the Economic Sector of Assam (2018-19) and Effectiveness of Sexual Harassment of the Women at Workshop (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal Act 2013): A Study in Assam (2018-19). However, the one common problem in all these Centres seems to be the financial one. The funding that they receive does not suffice the research programmes, the workshops, the academics that they ought to carry on.

1.7 Women's Cells in the North East Colleges

Under the Xth Plan of UGC, the National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001) was put in action not only in the universities, but also in the colleges. Under this plan, the girls and women were to be ultimate beneficiaries. However, despite the UGC guidelines regarding the institutionalization of Women's Studies as centres in universities and cells in the colleges, some of the colleges exist as Cells and some exist as Forums in the North east India. Some of the colleges however are looking for opportunities to upgrade their status to that of a Centre. The Narengi Anchalik Mahavidyalaya that

is located in Narengi area of Guwahati city has the women's body of organization existing as Women's Studies and Research Centre (WSRC, NAM)²¹ The Cells or Forums of the colleges include an executive body mostly of women which is headed by the President and followed by a Secretary and a Treasurer. The selection is usually made by the Principal of the college. The cells in the colleges and the centre of the university work in collaboration towards women centric issues. In Pachunga University College in Aizawl, Mizoram, the women's cell and its committee of member was constituted by the college. It is the only women' cell to exist in any college of Mizoram and interestingly it began without any prior knowledge of the UGC guidelines of extending support to the cells in the colleges. They work towards maintaining the safety of the girl students within the campus.

There are instances of publishing journals and booklets related to women issues by some of the cells and forums. For instance, Nowgong College had published two books viz. - *Yugobondita* in 2013 and *Bimrisha* in 2016. The Narengi Anchalik Mahavidyalaya Women's Studies and Research Centre published an annual bilingual journal called *Shakti: The Strength* during 2014-2018. The Women's Forum of B. Barooah College Guwahati publishes a biennial magazine called *Khuj: A Step*. The Women's Cell of Dispur College, Guwahati published an edited book in the year 2015 called *Voices: Power Within*. The Karmashree Hiteshwar Saikia College of Guwahati also published some edited volumes of their journal *The Wick: A Compilation on Women and Society*.

The financial crisis however poses some hindrance towards the smooth running of the Cells in the colleges. Many of the cells of the colleges of the North East India suffer as they do not receive enough

funding. And it is also important to note that apart from celebrating International Women's Day, many cells are inactive towards undertaking any projects, campaign. Some of the Cells conduct national seminars related to women's issues. The Cells are functioning according to their own capacity due to the interest and dedication of the members of the cells.

1.8 Conclusion

Women's studies is challenged by many forces which threaten its disciplinary matrix and political visions. Currently, the term 'gender studies' is being used instead of 'women's studies', however, it is appropriate to use the term or not is unknown and if the 'gender studies' term broadens the scope of the discipline or not. Women's studies is both a critical and a normative force as far as its location in the academy is considered. In many of the universities/colleges, the centres or cells are suffering from dearth of funding. As most of the research activities, project works, publications etc depend on the funding that they receive, the universities and colleges are now facing limitations towards achieving their goals. Women's studies centres are also affected by the university system and their perspective sometimes remains limited within the preferred topic/paper of the university. The centres also face a situation of non-permanent nature of the staff and faculty. This creates a situation of instability and a lack of proper vision for the centres.

The condition of the cells/forums of women's studies in the colleges of the North East is similar or in some cases even worse to that of the centres. The colleges also do not receive the regular funds

from the UGC and in some colleges in the name of activities and programmes, only the celebration of International Women's Day have been done. This is due to the lack of fund and instability of the faculty members in the cells/forums. The colleges may exchange students and conduct some programmes related to women's issues of gender sensitization. Although the women's cells/forums in the colleges of North East India have been functioning in their own capacity due to the interest of the faculty with some support from the college authorities, the position of the cells stand on the verge of near collapse. It is very important to have women's cells in every college to impart knowledge on women issues, to educate the students about the gender sensitization irrespective of their gender. In some of the universities also, although there are courses on women education, yet due to the lack of funding the students might not be able to complete their degree. This would impact on their academic continuity. The education on various women issues should impart through colleges and universities via different academic programmes, research and projects. The cells and centres should be able to undertake field surveys and publish their works which would help in building the importance of women in the society and would help in tackling the issues that Indian women are facing from generations.

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Economic Empowerment of Women through Entrepreneurship in Karbi Hills

Dr. Kakali Borah

The concept of women's empowerment appears to be the outcome of various debates and discussions generated by women's movement throughout the world particularly by third world feminists. In 1952, the United Nation adopted a resolution aimed at granting and protecting women's right all over the world. Women's empowerment on the other hand, means the process in which women become individually and collectively active, knowledgeable and goal oriented. It is a process generally initiated by women themselves. However external agencies are also needed at times to support this process. Women need to build their inherent capacity to gain equal access and control over resources and thereby ensure equal participation in societal decision making process. In this content The Oxford Dictionary defines empowerment as 'to invest legally or formally with power, to authorize, license, to impart power, to enable permit etc'.¹ The Indian Journal of Political Science, 2015 defines women empowerment as 'the redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and male dominance. Economic empowerment of women implies the capacity of women to participate in, contribute to and benefit from the growth process of the economy in ways that recognise the value of their contribution, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fair distribution of the benefits of growth.'² Today, entrepreneurship means to develop, own and manage a business

enterprise in a rural area by a rural inhabitant for the purpose of earning profit. A rural entrepreneurship can be defined as a business unit promoted in the rural area by a rural inhabitant on a group of such inhabitants and employing more than fifty percent of its workforce from the rural area.

Women's empowerment and entrepreneurship are interrelated with one another. Women's empowerment is highly necessary for raising the socio-economic status of women in society. Entrepreneurs are a special group of persons who enjoy a distinct status and play a crucial role in the success of any business and trade. These are the people having initiative enterprising ability, zeal and imaginative to break through the traditional barriers of commerce and industry who can translate any business proposal into prospective reality (Rao & Rao 2000)³. For this entrepreneurship development can be used as a strategy. Entrepreneurship helps women to gain economic independence and improve their social status and leads to the integration of nation-building and economic development. Entrepreneurship can be developed in the fields of goat farming and piggeries, food processing, weaving, rice and flourmills, bamboo furniture, stone crusher, etc. Such initiatives will lead to poverty alleviation, food security and employment generation. Thus, the development and recognition of women's service in these sectors are required in order to bring about change in society as a whole.

Women entrepreneurship is developing to a great extent in the Karbi Hills. Several women entrepreneurs in the region have been playing an important role in the development of various sectors including agriculture. The paper is an attempt to study emerging entrepreneurship amongst women in the Karbi Hills and its impact on the economy.

Methodology :

The study is based on explanatory-cum-analytical method and is descriptive in nature. At the same time for preparing, this paper, primary and secondary data has been utilised.

To know the economic empowerment of rural women through entrepreneurship we randomly selected 120 women members from various entrepreneurship groups in the Karbi Hills.

Objective :

The objectives of the paper are -

1. To know how entrepreneurship among women in Karbi Hills helps to contribute to economic growth.
2. To make action-oriented recommendations and suggestions to increase and strengthen the economic progress of women through entrepreneurship.

Discussion :

The Karbi Hills, politically known as Karbi Anglong, is one of the most beautiful hill districts of Assam. The district was provided with a full-fledged District Council by the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India in 1971. In 1976, the name of the District Council was upgraded to Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC). The district is bounded by the mighty Brahmaputra on the North, the Dhansiri Valley on the East and the Kapili and Jamuna Valleys on the West and the South respectively. Geographically, Karbi Anglong is the largest district in Assam covering an area of 10, 434 square k.m. The district accounts for about 13.35 percent of the state's total area. The population of the district is predominantly tribal. The major

tribal groups of the district are the Karbi, Bodo, Dimasa, Hmar, Garo, Rengmina, Naga, Tiwa etc. The Census Report of 2011 shows that the literacy rate of the district is 69.25 percent out of which male literacy rate is 76.14 percent and female literacy rate is 62.00 percent.⁴

To know the economic growth and how entrepreneurship helps towards the growth of empowerment of women a few questions were put to them which have been illustrated below. Table 1.1 focuses on the growth of registered women's entrepreneurship from 2015 to 2019 in the district.

Table 1.1

Growth of registered women entrepreneurs during 2015 to 2019

Sl. No.	Year	No of entrepreneurs
1	2014 to 2015	540
2	2015 to 2016	545
3	2016 to 2017	549
4	2017 to 2018	551
5	2018 to 2019	553

Source : Official records.

From the above table, it has been noticed that the growth of entrepreneurship has increased yearwise which is a positive sign.

Women in Various Fields: Roles and Contributions

Table 1.2 focuses on the social background of the respondents

Table 1.2

Particulars	No. of respondents	Percentage
Marital status		
Married	85	70%
Unmarried	25	20%
Widow	10	8%
Total	120	
AGE		
Below 30	25	20%
Between 30 to 50	80	66%
Above 50	15	12%
Total	120	
FAMILY		
Nuclear family	40	33%
Joint family	80	66%
Total	120	

Source: Field survey

From the above table, it can be seen that the majority of the members are married women while 66 percent are between 30 to 50 years. And 66 percent of the respondents belong to joint families.

Women in Various Fields: Roles and Contributions

Table 1.3. focusses on the educational qualifications of the respondents.

Table 1.3

S.L. No.	Academic qualification	No of respondents	Percentage
1	Matriculate	22	18%
2	Undermatric	85	70%
3	H.S passed	10	8%
4	B.A. passed	3	2%
5	Total	120	

Source : Field Survey

From the above table, it has been noticed that the majority of the members i.e 70 percent are under matriculate mainly due to their poor economic condition while only 18 percent are matriculate.

To examine how their economic status has improved as a result of entrepreneurship, Questions were put to them to gauge whether they had become financially secure and independent. They were questioned whether they were provided financial support before and after becoming entrepreneurs.

Table 1.4

Financial support provided before and after joining as entrepreneurs.

Financial support	Before		After	
	No. of respondents	Percentage	No. of respondents	Percentage
RS.500 to 1000	85	70%	40	33%
Rs. 1000 to 5000	30	25%	65	54%
Rs. 5000 to 15000	5	4%	15	12%
Above 15000	Nil			
Total	120		120	

Source : Field survey

The above table shows that as an entrepreneur, women's income became satisfactory. 54 percent of the respondents became economically independent and were able to provide financial support to their family Rs 1000 to 5000 after becoming an entrepreneur. Table 1.5 shows the monthly income of the respondents prior to becoming an entrepreneur.

Table 1.5

Income level of the respondents before and after becoming an entrepreneur.

Income of the respondents	Before		After	
	No. of respondents	Percentage	No. of respondents	Percentage
Less than Rs.1000 to 5000	80	66%	15	12%
Rs.5000 to 10000	30	25%	70	58%
Rs.10000 to 15000	10	20%	30	25%
Rs.15000 to 25000	Nil	Nil	5	4%
Total	120		120	

Source : Field Survey.

From the above table, it has been noticed that the income of women gradually developed after becoming entrepreneurs. Definitely after joining as a member of entrepreneurship 58% respondents saw an increase in their income which became satisfactory for their all-round development. Table 1.6 clearly illustrates monthly savings before and after joining as a member of entrepreneurship.

Monthly savings before and after joining as a member of entrepreneurship.

Table 1.6

Amount of savings	Before		After	
	No. of respondents	Percentage	No. of respondents	Percentage
Rs. 500 to 1000	95	79%	35	29%
Rs. 1000 to 5000	30	25%	70	58%
Rs. 5000 to 10000	5	4%	15	12%
Total	120		120	

Source : field survey

The habit of savings may help women to secure their future, insure against risk and also help them in times of financial needs and crisis. From the above table, it can be seen that the majority of the respondents i.e. 79 percent did not have satisfactory monthly savings before entrepreneurship due to their poor economic condition. 58% of respondents became capable of saving a reasonable amount which is a positive sign of their development.

Table 1.7

Types of support to women entrepreneurs

Types support	Name of promoting agencies			
	DRDA	DICC (Diphu)	Handloom steatile	NGOS
A. Financial Assistance	✓	✓	✓	✓
B. Training facilities	✓	✓	✓	✓
C. Marketing facilities	✓	✓	✓	✓
D. Other (supply of raw material, infrastructure consultancy)	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: field surveys.

Note: "✓" indicates that both government and non-governmental organizations more or less provide support for the entrepreneur to overcome their poor economic condition. Thus, training awareness and development programs make women more assertive, build confidence, motivation, upgrading, decision making etc.

From the above table, it has been noticed that to develop the economic condition of women in Karbi Hills the Government and NGOs have been providing increasing assistance to them.

In this context, further assistance may be provided in the form of marketing assistance, financial support, technical guidance, good transportations facilities, infrastructure development, information regarding different types of project, research schemes etc. Certain suggestions have been put forward in this regard.

1. Awareness programmes on the importance of entrepreneurship development may be conducted through talk shows on radio and television. Meetings and conferences should be organised to educate and encourage entrepreneurial activities among women in the Karbi Hills.
2. The Government and promoting agencies should provide training facilities on marketing, up-gradation of skills, managing enterprise etc.
3. The Karbi Hills is a region rich in natural resources. These may be utilized as excellent investment opportunities. In this regard Government as well as NGOs may come forward to provide needed infrastructural facilities and financial assistance through banks to implement such projects.
4. To empower women economically Government may take positive steps toward improving literacy rate among the women members. Along with this they should also be made aware of the importance of their position in the family as well as society which will help in empowering them economically, politically, socially and culturally. Along with Government, NGO's can also take positive steps for the sustainable development of women entrepreneurs through livelihood support, income generation, skill development, human resource development etc., to live peace and harmony with Nature.

In conclusion, it can be said that after taking on entrepreneurship women have emerged as economically empowered which greatly contributes towards overall development. Thus, women entrepreneurs should develop management programs. Encouraging competencies in areas of deficiencies by participants in management programmes, seminars, workshops organised by both Government and NGOs will make women capable of handling their problems within and outside their families. The study conducted on the women in the Karbi Hills in this regard demonstrates this very aspect quite efficiently.

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Women as Warriors : The Women of the Ahom Period in War

Jinti Tamuly

Introduction :

The roles of men and women are divided on the basis of sexual differences. Gender roles have caused variation in the tasks performed by men and women. Women are treated as physically weak in comparison to men and they are generally assigned household activities such as cooking, rearing children and taking care of her family etc. Men are considered more powerful and hence they are given the right to govern the society or states, earn money, fight in war, and control the family and other outdoor activities. These sexual divisions of labor resulted in confinement of women to a narrow space.

However, in history we have found that despite the strict gender and patriarchal norms, there are examples of exceptional women who have left their mark on history. In our society warfare is generally considered as a male domain. But a woman also possesses the capacity of becoming a warrior and this has been proved many times in the past. There are numerous instances all over the globe of women who fought war and even commanded armies. In India we have Abbakka Chowta, the Tuluva queen of Ullalin the 16th century who fought against the Portuguese, Rani of Kittur in Karnataka who opposed the British rule, Rani Lakshmi Bai and many others.

Assam, the north eastern state of India has a rich and diverse historical and cultural heritage. In the medieval period the state was

ruled by the Ahoms, Kacharis and the Koches and the medieval history of Assam is said to have begun with the coming of the Ahoms. The Ahoms were the Shan branch of people who migrated from the Chinese province of Yunan in the thirteen century and ruled in Assam for cover a period of 600 years. During the Ahom period the status of women in society was liberal. We have found that there was comparatively less social rigidity in comparison to the women of other parts of India. In the notes of foreign travellers, the self-reliant nature of Ahom women were noted. Shihabuddin Talish, who accompanied Mir Jumla in his invasion of Assam in 1662 remarked about the situation of women at that time. He said, 'The wives of the Rajas and peasants alike never veil their faces before anybody, and they move about in the market places with bare heads.' The women were not subordinate to their husbands but equal to them. They spent their time helping with cultivation and weaving. They were completely self-sufficient in terms of clothing materials as all the women be it the queens or maids practiced weaving and prepared the cloth required by the family. Women were seen to occupy prominent positions in court politics as well during the period.

The subject of participation of women in war is generally an ignored chapter. This may be because of the belief that war was a field occupied by men, and not for women. But women of the Ahom period proved that to the contrary they were very much capable of taking part in and conducting wars. In this paper an attempt has been made to study the participation of women in war during the Ahom period.

Mula Gabharu :

Mula Gabharu is a towering character of Ahom history known for her bravery and courage. She was a patriotic in nature and courageously fought against the enemy to protect her motherland. Mula Gabharu was the wife of Phrasengmung Buragohain, the Ahom court noble during the reign of Ahom king Suhungmung (1497-1539). Suhungmung had to face two invasions from the Muslim generals of Bengal. One was by Bar Ujir who was defeated by Konseng Barpatra Gohain in a battle at Kalang valley in 1527. In April 1532, another general Turbak Khan with thirty elephants and 1000 horses and a park of artillery as well as great numbers of foot soldiers invaded Assam and encamped at Singiri.² On hearing this Suhungmung sent eight of his commanders along with his son Suklen to Singiri and himself proceeded to Sala. In the first battle Ahom General Phrasengmung killed the Muslim commander Hayat Khan.³ The second battle was fought in Kapili valley opposite to the Ahom fort at Singiri. In the battlefield Suklen became impatient and made a blunder by crossing the river Brahmaputra to attack the Muslim encampment where he faced a crushing defeat. It cost the lives of eight Ahom commanders along with Phrasengmung and Suklen was severely wounded. On hearing of the death of Phrasengmung, his valiant wife, Mula Gabharu herself proceeded to the battle field on elephant back along with five other women and died fighting against Turbak.⁴ The incident was described in Padshah Buranji as follows *'In 1532, Turbak invaded Assam and the Ahom General after a war lasting for three years defeated the invader, and extended the sphere of Assam's influence upto Cooch Behar and Gaur. This is the war in which the widow of an Ahom commander displayed unprecedented bravery, and*

*guns were used for first time.*⁵ Mula Gabharu has been lauded for breaking tradition and taking to the battle field in person and for being able to exit the secure space of the home and enter a field dominated by men.

Kuranganayani :

The Moamoria uprising took place in 1769. This event paved the way for decay of the Ahom monarchy. The rebellion was a reaction to the socio-economic and religious oppression of the Ahom royalty of the Mayamora sect or the disciples of Mayamorasatra. The Mayamora sect first started the rebellion in the month of October 1679. The immediate cause of the rebellion was that Nahar Khora and Ragha Moran two disciples of the satra had been mercilessly beaten and the ears of the former were cut off at the orders of Barbarua on the alleged charge of bringing him a lean elephant.⁶ After hearing of the incident the Guru of the satra gave permission to his followers to take up arms against the Ahom government. The rebels successfully defeated the royalists and in 1769 king Lakshmi Singha left the capital and the rebels led by Ragha occupied the capital Rangpur. After occupying the capital, the Moamorias became masters of Rangpur and formed the new government by retaining the Ahom structure of administration. Deka Raja became king and Ragha was made Barbarua. Ragha forcibly took Kuranganayani, the Magalu (Manipuri) queen of Rajeshwar Singha and later Lakshmi Singha, as his wife. However the Moamorias failed to govern in an effective way and this weakness was properly utilized by the royalist, who soon organized a strong counter offensive. They got support from Queen Kuranganayani. Another lady Ram Krishnai was charged with the task of capturing

Ragha to help Kuranganayani. The feat of capturing Ragha was performed without the help of a single male.⁷ On 14th of April, 1770, while Ragha went to welcome the *Huchori* (group of Bihu dancers and singers) outside the palace with a *sarai* with betel nuts and leaves, Kuranganayani struck Ragha with a sword just below the calf. The Tungkhungia Buranji further narrated the event as follows – ‘*Ragha fell down with his face towards the ground. Then Ram Krishnai who was also there severed his head*’.⁸ Lakshmi Singh was then brought back and the Ahom monarchy was restored. Kuranganayani did not fight in the battle ground but played a significant role in reinstalling the Ahom throne. The manner in which Kuranganayani stood strong in the face of adversity, her loyalty to the Ahom crown and her valiant effort to defeat the Moamorias was laudable. Even though she did not take part in any battle but the events leading to the defeat of Ragha and the Moamorias was nothing less.

Radha and Rukmini :

Bhatuki and Bhabuli popularly known as Radha and Rukmini were the two wives of Nahar Saikia. They both played a pivotal role in the first Moamoria rebellion against the Ahom royalists. They even led the rebels in the battle field and with their martial genius; they created havoc in the royal camp.⁹ After the physical insult of Ragha and Nahar Saikia had launched a war of rebellion.¹⁰ Further it was reported that the Hatichungi Morans had recruited followers under two women Radha and Rukmini¹¹ and launched a war against the Ahom monarchy. The two female leaders were believed to have possessed supernatural powers because of which they were able to catch the bullets of the Ahoms in their *chadars* or wrappers.¹² There

were rumors that they were even immune to the strikes of cannonballs.¹³ These two ladies also held important positions under the Moran administration. These women were testimony to the influence exerted by women in society as well as in the battlefield.

Chandramala :

Another event reported from the third Moamoria revolt where womenfolk performed in the frontline of war is as follows. The third Moamoria rebellion broke out in between 1782-86, during the reign of Gaurinath Singha. During the rebellion insurgent activities were carried out by the hill tribes such as Dafalas and Bahatias mainly under the leadership of Harihar Tanti. Fighting took place and the rebels defeated the royalists. In 1786 in the month of July due to heavy rain the movement of the royalists under the command of Naobaicha Phukan was prevented. The news was reported to the king and the king then sent Rudreswar Barpatra Gohain with a large army. In November the Moamoriya menfolk were joined by their female counterparts. The female armed force was organized by Chandramala, a Brahmin lady with her fellow sisters namely Rambha, Jayanti, Bhanumati, Bhadrawati, Subhadra, Suchala, Jaya, Rohini, Sumati and many others.¹⁴ The ladies came out armed with weapons and paraded in the streets with the war cry ‘*United in one man, we are going to kill the Mulungs (the weak.) Ye youths, hold your bows and arrows tightly and row your boat carefully*’.¹⁵ Inspired by their women, the rebels then attacked the Barpatra Gohain and Phukan, where the Phukan suffered a complete defeat and the Barpatra Gohain lost some soldiers. The women not only themselves took to the battle field but inspired and rallied the men to go forward and fight

the enemy. The united front presented by the Moamaria men and women led by Chandramala served to demoralize the Ahom army and weaken them.

Conclusion :

From the events described above and a consideration of the roles played by women we can come to certain conclusions. The Ahom organization of military force during the medieval period was done mainly through the Paik system. Under the Paik system compulsory service was rendered from every male between the age group of 16 to 50. This system was primarily male-oriented and had there was no option for direct recruitment of women in the military. Despite this, women did take part in war on several occasions and her participation was quite significant.

The Ahom society, though primarily tribal in nature was a patriarchal one where male members got prominence. There were gender margins in terms of various roles. Women were deprived of any kind of formal education except for some of the royal women. In the case of warfare also women never got the chance to be formally trained as their duties comprised mainly household activities, weaving and assisting the men in the fields. There were no references of women being recruited as Paiks. War and warfare were not a subject of concern for women and they remained largely aloof from it. Only very few of the royal women had the opportunity to be involved in political matters of the kingdom. Lack of political consciousness and gender restrictions were probably one of the major cause of limited participation of women in war.

Records speak that while the women like Mula Gabharu came forward to take part in war but only five women accompanied her. Kuranganayani also had few followers consisting mainly of her maids. Radha and Rukmini were wives of officials while Chandramala was a Brahmin woman of the Moamoria sect. So it is noticeable that despite the fact that women did participate in war, this participation was restricted to women of the higher classes. It appears that apart from the ladies of royal backgrounds and higher section ordinary women generally did not participate in war. This may not have been due to lack of heroism of women of the lower classes but probably due to lack of opportunity or recognition. Moreover society may not have welcomed the idea of women participating in the open arena as such.

The reconstruction of Indian history in the nineteenth century with glorification of characters of brave women in the past inspired women to come forward and play important roles in the freedom movement. However, the study of history was mainly 'his' story and not 'her' story until the last decade of twentieth century. Study of women's role and contribution developed quite recently as an academic discipline. Examples of women like Mula Gabharu, Radha, Rukmini and others emerged and inspired served to inspire the future generations and also compels us to rethink traditional roles of women.

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Social Context of Development & the Role of Gender Stereotyping

Dr. Pronita Kalita

Introduction :

Development is an unremitting course of life. A child passes through different stages of development, both physical and mental, to attain the stage of maturity. Only a balanced development at both the aspects can lead to a strong and influential personality. Physical or biological development is constrained by a certain age and then it starts to degrade. But the Cognitive development, socio-emotional development is never static in any age. It develops continuously along with time, experience and training. There are different socio-culture contexts which have very obvious impact on the over all growth of the child. A child is born into a family and thereby it belongs to a society, a community, a social class, a racial group and a cultural circumstance and all these are responsible, directly or indirectly, for the child's inner and outer development, for the growth of its personality. These social contexts influence or affect the lifelong development process of the child. Some of the most impressive social contexts of development are- Family, Friends, Peers, School and Society. These have been discussed below.

Family :

“Home- A centre of love and affection is the best place and the first school of child.” Pestalozzi.

Family is the strongest influential social context rendered to a child in the process of its development. It provides the hereditary transmission of basic potential for its development. It also provides environmental conditions and personal relationship. In a society children grow up in diverse families and parent-child relations have various dimensions of interaction. Some parents nurture and support their children and some treat them harshly or ignore them. Some children have suffered emotionally as their parents discontinue relationship and divorce each other, or live with immense contradiction, usually engaging in frequent verbal quarrel or physical assault. Some others are blessed to have a healthy environment in the family with parents lading a co-operative and pleasant relationship. Some are step-children in the family; some children's both parents are service-holders or workers and instead of proper parental care they are kept with care-takers. Some children grow up in an ethnically uniform neighborhood, others in a neighborhood that is diverse-cultured. Some children grow-up in economically backward families while a few belongs to a well-to do family. These diverged circumstances influence the child's whole life beyond the classroom.

A leading authority on parenting, believes that parents should be neither punitive nor aloof, rather they should develop rules for children while at the same time being supportive and compassionate. She focused on four types of parenting forms on the basis of her eight-year longitudinal study of 150 nursery school children and their families. These are –

- (i) *Authoritian Parenting*: This type of parenting is punitive and restrictive and parents exhort children to follow their direction and respect them.

- (ii) *Authoritative parenting* : It is a positive parenting style where children are encouraged to be independent but still places limits and controls on their actions.
- (iii) *Neglectful parenting*: In this parenting type parents are uninvolved in their children's live and spend little time with them.
- (iv) *Indulgent parenting*: In this type of parenting parents are highly involved with their children but place few limits or restrictions on their children's action and behaviors.

In 1964 Wisely Becker divided parent's disciplinary techniques into two broad categories :

- Love oriented.
- Power assertive.

The love-oriented parenting include praising and reasoning with the child as well as temporarily withdrawing love and separating the child from the parent. Children are co-operative, responsible for their action and have appropriate feelings of guilt.

The power assertive type of parenting technique involves physical punishment. The children tend to be uncooperative and aggressive.

Children who are in divorced families, step-parent families, working mother's families, single parent families, and different SES families have different circumstance of their development.

Friends :

A true friend is a priceless asset for an individual. Friends are different from peer in the sense that peers are in same age level. Friendship is not restrained by age. Having friends can be a developmental advantage for children who are socially skilled and

supportive. But friendship is sometimes not all alike. It is sometimes a worry to the child or an adolescent to be friend or to have friends, several years older or coercive and conflict ridden. But in spite of having some drawback, warm, gratifying childhood and adolescent friendships are related to many aspects of psycho-social development of the child—

- Close friendship provides opportunities to explore the self and develops a deep understanding of another.
- Close friendship provides a foundation for future intimate relationship.
- Close friendship helps young people to deal with the stresses and problems of everyday life.
- Close friendship can improve attitude toward as well as involvement in school.
- Close friendship and supportive friends help in the context for acquiring more adaptive social behavior.

Peers :

In the context of child development, in addition to families and teachers, peers also play a powerful role in children's development. Peers are children of about the same age or maturity level. The child is introduced to the social world out side his family, mainly for play purposes. The peer groups satisfy various needs of the children like acceptance, achievement, affection, approval, belongingness, fame recognition, expression of thought and opinion etc. According to A. T. Jershid (1947) "Peer association is a meaningful process through which the child changes with his age group into youth and adulthood." One of the most important functions of the peer group is to provide different

type of information and help the child to come out from different type of social isolation, problems and disorders, delinquency, depression and even the problem of dropping out of school. A research study (High Tower, 1990) revealed that harmonious peer relations in adolescence were related to positive mental health at midlife. There are five types of peer status:-

- (i) Popular children
- (ii) Average children
- (iii) Neglected children
- (iv) Rejected children
- (v) Controversial children

The peers' roles are very vital for social competence of children. Parent and peer relations seem to complement one another. Parents provide affection and guidance which grants children the security and social skills they need to enter the world of peers. For the children peer acceptance is very important. It means the likeability or the extent to which a child is viewed by a group of age mates, such as classmates, as a worthy social partner. Peer acceptance differs from friendship in the context that it is not a mutual relationship but rather a one-sided perspective, involving the groups' view of an individual. When children play with their peers, they engage in interactions with their social equals, something that is impossible in their relationships with bigger and more powerful adults. This equality of status may have a special significance for children's development of social competence. Kelly and Hanson (1990) describe six important positive functions of the peer group :-

- Peer groups control aggressive impulses
- Peer groups obtain emotional and social support and become more independent

- Peer groups improve social skills, develops reasoning abilities and learns to express feelings in more mature ways
- Peer groups develop attitudes toward sexuality and gender role behavior
- Peer groups strengthen moral judgment and values
- Peer groups improve self-esteem

School :

School is considered a miniature society. In a school, children come from different community, cast, religion and family of varied socio-economic background. After family, school is the second home for the child. The schooling system and the teacher of different stages of school greatly influence the over-all development of a child. The role of the school has considerably changed in the rapidly changing civilization. Through curriculum, co-curriculum activities and activities, done outside from class-work the children are encouraged to adjust with cognitive, motor, social, emotional and physical development. School is the social place where different cultural characteristic, social belief, traditional norms & children's socio-economic conditions are gathered and inculcate through interaction which has a great role in shaping the child's behavior and development of cognitive, and socio-emotional aspect.

Society :

Society is the main aspect of social context for child's development. Society includes all other aspect in its vast scope. Human beings are social being and hence they are controlled and regulated by the society and social customs. When a child is born, it, at first,

finds around it a family circumstance. As the child grows up its' scope of action also spreads out. And here society plays the role of a constructor or builder of the human behaviour. Society is the invisible and unlimited structure based on Individuals' rituals, mentality and personal or group activities. Culture, tradition, religion etc. are some of the prominent aspects of determining the child's development. Children should be provided adequate scope for earning knowledge and information about the social process, livelihood and heritage.

Society provides the environment for the growth of a child's personality. Apart from spending its time in home or school, a child sees and learns from the society. Obviously the society influences the child's character directly and forcefully. It depends lots on the society how a child will shape its personality and in born qualities. The social environment is greatly responsible for the proper grooming of a child. A healthy social environment may bring out good results from even an average child of not so cultured family. In the same way there are ample examples that an unhealthy or polluted social environment spoils the promising character of very cultured and educated family.

Gender Roles and Gender Stereotypes :

Gender refers to the socio-cultural and psychological dimension of being female or male. Gender identity refers to individual's knowledge of their gender as one of their personal traits. Gender role are the social expectations that prescribe how male and females should think, feel and behave. Anthropological evidence indicates that these expectations vary considerably from culture to culture and society to society. Many parents encourage boys and girls to engage in different type of play and activities. Girls are generally given dolls and when

they are old enough, they are assigned with the task of babysitting duties. Girls are encouraged to be more nurturing than boys.

Television also has a gender socializing role portraying females and males in particular gender roles. The influence of school and teacher is also considered to be prominent one in gender socialization of boys and girls.

Gender role refers to culturally acceptable sexual behaviour. There is a difference between sex and gender. Sex generally refers to aspects of male-female differences that pertain to reproductive functions or genetically related factors. On the other hand, gender refers to social or psychological aspects of being seen as a man or a woman or regarding oneself to be so. Many theorists believe that perceiving of gender roles form the bases for the development of gender identity. Prominent psychological theories of gender role and gender identity development include (i) evolutionary theory (Buss 1995, Shields 1975), (ii) object- relations theory (Chodorow 1989), (iii) gender schema theory (Bem 1981-1993) and (iv) social role theory (Eagly 1987). Gender roles are more differentiated later when men and women become parents. Naturally women provide more direct care for and spend more time with children. Gender stereotypes and gender role affect men and women in other ways also. Specifically, men and women may be judged by how well they conform to traditional stereotypes. Joespech Pleck (1976), in his theory of *masculine gender role strain*, asserts that boys and men are pressured to fulfill a standard of masculinity. Boys and men who do not fulfill the standard of masculinity suffer from low self-worth and who successfully fulfills the standard of masculinity suffer psychologically or emotionally, from rigid constraints on acceptable parenting roles of men, while women are constrained by standards of femininity, such as the pressure to have children.

Gender Stereotypes :

Stereotypes are the most important social knowledge structures that people have. A stereo type is a schema about a group or category of persons and it is based on inadequate information. Gender stereotypes are broad categories that reflect impressions and beliefs indicating what behaviour are appropriate for females and males. All stereotypes, whether they relate to gender, ethnicity, or other categories, refer to an alike image of what the typical member of a category is. Many stereotypes are so general that they become ambiguous. The word "stereotype" comes from the Greek "stereos" meaning "solid" or "hard" and now-a-days it also refers to a metal plate used in printing. Prejudices and gender stereotypes are not same. Prejudices are more effective, concerned with feelings and they are not necessarily positive or negative. But gender stereotypes are more cognitive and concerned with thinking and they can be relatively neutral. Gender stereotypes can also affect men's and women's performance. Research indicates that stereotype threat can negatively affect performance by increasing anxiety. Hence, the idea of non-gender stereotyping has been developed.

From the time of birth of a child, children are already been assigned a gender. Children learn at a very early age what it means to be a boy or girl in our society. During childhood, children are exposed to many factors which influence their behaviour and attitudes regarding gender roles. These attitudes are learned in the home, in schools and even at the playground where children play among their peers and also learnt from common media, television, magazines, books etc, Every part of our lives has some sort of outside influence, showing the norms of behaviour and thinking styles.

Women in Various Fields: Roles and Contributions

Stereotypes affect relationship between a men and women. Stereotypes can dictate the behaviour of boys and girls. Rather than combating gender stereotypes the society frequently reinforces stereotypes by passing them to the next generation and giving levels and names to the people who do not conform to the stereotypes. To construct a social structure void of gender bias the mindset of the people should be prepared for supporting and developing the non-gender stereotyping. The parents and teachers have a great role in reducing gender bias. Some strategies are discussed below for developing a bias-free climate.

- Prepare the textbooks which include contents related to non-gender stereotyping and help the students to think critically about this important social issue.
- Organize the different activities of school which can develop a climate of gender free thoughts. Assigning students projects in which they find articles about non-stereotypical male and females. The teacher and parents should encourage the students to gather such type of photographs and pictures of men and women performing the same kind of tasks at home and at work. Discussions are to be organized among the students about the work of adults and invite people from the community to the discussion who have non-stereotypical jobs (such as a male flight attendant or a female construction worker.)
- The role of a teacher as a role model for the students should be presented in such non-stereotypical or nonsexist manner that her/his activities develop a type of attitude among the student of non-stereotyping.

Women in Various Fields: Roles and Contributions

- To develop a non gender stereotyping teachers and parents should give importance on the matter that when students/children work or play in groups then the groups are balanced by gender.
- The people of the society, parents, teachers and other concern persons should always show an attitude in front of the children that encourage gender equality.
- Developing non-gender stereotyping another important aspect is using nonbiased language of gender. In the place of using pronouns such as he/she to inanimate objects or unspecified persons, replace words such as fireman, policeman, beautician, tailor etc. Using non-gender specific language with children in day-to-day life and encouraging them to improve such verbal quality help lots in this matter.
- Teachers and other people must remain up to date on sex equity in education.
- Every individual must be aware of own rights as a female or male and stand against sexual inequity and discrimination.
- Sexual harassment is a form of applying power and dominance by one person over another. So, to develop a climate of non-gender stereotyping always be alert to sexual harassment in different social setting and don't let it happen.
- People should try to gather knowledge about different law and right to reduce gender bias of constitution and Government policy.
- Parents should develop a home environment in such a manner so that the children (girl/boy) may prepare themselves to perform activities of both men and women.

Conclusion :

From the above study it can be concluded that the developmental aspect of children has been influenced prominently by different elements. The development itself is a multidimensional phenomenon. During the life span of a child the different social contexts emerge influencing deeply the all-round personality development. Different problems arise only due to gender related complexities. If a child can cope with the various problems and complexities and adjust with the family, society, friends, peer etc. then only he/she may be labeled as individual of balanced personality.

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**Serving God in Gendered Spaces:
The American Baptist Women
Missionaries in Assam**

Lindy Goodwin

Introduction :

Women have been a part of Christian missions ever since their beginnings. They have contributed to a large extent to spreading and establishing the Christian faith in many foreign countries. Women at first were passive contributors to the missions in the roles of companions to the male missionaries. However, recruitment of single women missionaries later brought about a change in scenario and encouraged the women to participate directly in the Christianizing missions undertaken by western countries specially America and Britain. Foreign missions began formally arriving in India following the establishment of the British rule. Assam and much of the North East came under the control of the British government after the signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826. Since then, missionaries belonging to various denominations like the American Baptist Mission, the Roman Catholic mission, the Salesian mission, the Welsh Calvinist Mission and the Lutheran mission started to arrive in Assam. They undertook evangelistic and educational activities here and through this they hoped to convince the people to accept Christianity. Women played a significant role in missionary activities but were restricted due to various limitations imposed by patriarchal notions regarding their roles and positions in religion. These notions were a part of the social mindset which prevailed

in nineteenth century Britain and America. Missionary women who came to Assam had to face many problems during their stay here. In addition to bearing the burden of patriarchal restrictions of their home countries they also had to deal with the prejudice of the society towards women in Assam. This paper will attempt to examine the situation of women missionaries and the gendered environment in which they lived and worked in Colonial Assam.

Gender Bias in the Mission :

The American Baptist Mission was seen to be the most active mission in Assam. It began work in Assam in 1836 and contributed a great deal to development of society through education and other means. The pioneer American Baptist missionaries to Assam were Nathan Brown, Oliver Cutter, Miles Bronson and many others. Their names are remembered with reverence for the work they carried out in the hills and plains of erstwhile Assam.¹ However, the fact that these missionaries were often accompanied by their wives or other female members of their families who assisted greatly in their mission of spreading the religion is often forgotten. The roles of the women of the American Baptist Mission came to be acknowledged after much struggle and protest by them to be recognized in their own right for the service which they gave and not because of the men they accompanied. Since the American Baptist Mission was under the Protestant Church it was bound to be influenced by the stereotypical gender differences prevalent in it. Though their contributions are just as important as the male missionaries the women were not accorded that status of a 'missionary' till very late and were referred to simply as 'companions'. The pioneer women missionaries were not recognized as missionaries

either by Foreign Mission Boards or the churches. In fact, their roles were almost indiscernible in the foreign missions. Jocelyn Murray says that, "Missionary work itself was considered as the province of men. It had an essentially 'virile' profile rather than a soft feminine one".² Many missionary societies refused to employ women as missionaries in their own right till the late nineteenth century therefore the role of women and their engagements in missionary activities has been downplayed for many years. The major English missionary societies made formal decisions to directly recruit women at different times during the nineteenth century. The Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society appointed women as foreign missionaries in 1858, the Baptist Missionary Society in 1866, the London Missionary Society in 1875 and Church Missionary Society in 1887. In Scotland the United Presbyterian Church made the move in 1881. The first women to be sent as foreign missionaries by the Protestant American Missions were Ann Hasseltine and Harriet Atwood. They were highly educated women with a longing to devote themselves to the spread of Christianity. However, despite their education they realised that they would never be allowed as single missionaries and therefore they decide to marry men who were being deputed as missionaries (Adoniram Johnson and Samuel Newell respectively who were deputed to Burma). So accordingly, these women were deputed as 'assistant missionaries' with their husbands who were the main missionaries in 1812.³ While denominational patterns varied, most missionaries were recruited from the all-male ranks of the clergy and ministry. They generally received formal training of at least a year's duration. This was at a time when women were largely excluded from higher education and professional training.⁴ While Western men proved their bravery on the frontier,

Western women demonstrated their commitment to the Empire and faith by joining their menfolk in missionary work. The Missionary Societies clearly preferred sending married men as foreign missionaries rather than single ones. So, the wives of these missionaries had been part of the missions since the time the men themselves had been. The women were instructed that they should assist their husbands by teaching the native women and children as the men had restricted access to them in many foreign lands as it was realized that women often inhabited a sphere which was separate from the men and much protected. This sphere was totally inaccessible to the male missionaries. Although not considered missionaries, the women ministered to women in African and Asian cultures where male missionaries could not freely communicate with women. The duty of 'preaching' however was exclusively reserved for men.⁵ The attitude of the Christian missions in regard to native women was equally prejudiced. The missionary societies had hoped that the missionary wives would be able to impress upon the native woman the patriarchal ideas of feminine domesticity which were considered proper at that time. In India, the missionary women were given the responsibility to educate and uplift the "downtrodden Indian woman" who it was considered could only be saved by Christian women. In addition to conversion, their task was "to remake 'native' women into 'good wives and mothers' modeled on the norms of metropolitan and evangelical norms of femininity."⁶ In addition to assisting their husbands with teaching tasks, the primary duty of the women was to provide good homes for their husbands. Rufus Anderson who was the secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), in fact, viewed the role of women in mission as limited to 'modeling the Christian

family'.⁷ He considered the missionary wives' presence in the mission field essential as they provided a home where their husbands could relax and the presence of a wife restrained the missionary from sexual immorality.⁸ However now scholars are trying to analyze the gendered basis of missionary support and uncover the contribution of missionary wives and single women in the spheres of education and evangelization in context of foreign missions of both British and American missions.⁹ The missionary wives were therefore burdened with many duties. Not only did they serve as teachers but also helped in other literary works and tended to their families and homes. A gradual change in the mindset was discerned with the mounting importance of women's education and because of the influence of the Women's Movement which was growing in the West. The need for women missionaries who could devote their complete efforts to mission duties and were not burdened with any domestic commitment was increasingly felt. Therefore, single women associated with the women's societies in Britain and America started being sent out. Even though single women were sent, they were for a considerable period of time still under the 'control' or supervision of male missionaries which at times created tension in work assignments.¹⁰ In fact, the single women were often counselled to remain under the guidance of their male counterparts and their work and contributions were assessed on the basis of their 'femininity' rather than their worth as a competent individual. For instance, writing to the Foreign Secretary of the London Missionary Society in 1884, John Hewlett, one of the senior male missionaries in the United Provinces of North India described his female co-worker as 'a lady of much ability and intelligence'. However, his assertion was that she was sure to become a good missionary and was qualified with the caveat

provided she is under the influence of wise, devoted and spiritually minded colleagues. The designation 'lady' may have been meant as a compliment but it also relegated her to a position subordinate to that of her male colleagues. This entire mindset not only shaped the recruitment of female mission personnel but also contributed to the creation of specific mission rhetoric which was 'women's work for women'.¹¹

The American Baptist Women Missionaries in Assam and Issues of Patriarchy and Gender :

In Assam however it was seen many missionary wives and single missionary women were able to break this stereotype by teaching and preaching not only amongst women but also men. This served in breaking patriarchal traditions relating not only to the west but also those of the East as well. In this context mention must be made of the work of Ruth Lucas Bronson who provided a new model for woman's role in a strongly patriarchal society of the Nagas where she went forward to teach the sons of the Naga chiefs. This was a deviation of not only the western norm of 'women for women' but also the Eastern or more specifically the Naga patriarchal norm in which boys were traditionally taught only by men in their homes or in the morungs (bachelor dormitories).¹² In Assam the American Baptist women contributed immensely to the development of education amongst the women and girls of the higher class who were commonly kept in seclusion and allowed no male visitors. These female quarters were referred to as 'zenanas'. It was therefore impossible for the male missionaries to persuade the women and their families to come forward for education. In such cases the missionary wives and single women

missionaries were the ones allowed to enter into these private spaces, approach the women and enlighten to teach them and enlighten them about the Bible. Unfortunately, however here too the women workers were not accorded the status of missionaries. On the visits to the zenanas they were clearly demarcated from the Bible women whom they were accompanied by. It was the Bible woman who first approached the family and asked the permission of the male members to meet the women of the household. Only then the missionary wives and women were allowed to come forward. They were usually referred to as 'lady visitors' rather than missionaries by the mission boards and societies.¹³ Dana Roberts has said that opportunities for women to take part in religious benevolent activities were many but they stopped short of permitting them to preach or assume leadership roles. They were simply kept in the 'rear of the army'.¹⁴

There was also much disparity amongst men and women missionaries in terms of allowances and pay. This is clear from the following incidents. On one occasion, Rev S. A. Perrine who was posted in the Naga hills, asked the ABFM to pay his wife Rosa \$200 for some translations she had done. The Union responded that 'it did not and would not give grants to wives or because of wives'. But so that their valuable service would not be lost it was also said that 'although they could not be paid, the labor of missionary wives was recognized as essential to the mission's work'.¹⁵ Single women who were paid half as much as men however more valued as they were mobile and able to devote all their time to teaching and evangelizing.¹⁶ In 1873, Reverend Clark wrote to the ABFM secretary in Boston that since the Mission was short of funds, they should send missionary women to replace men who died in service.¹⁷

Between 1836 and 1870s, the "Pioneer Period" of the Baptist Mission in North East India, there were eighteen women missionaries, sixteen wives and two single women, Miles Bronson's sister and his daughter.¹⁸ The two single women were the exception since the Baptist Mission did not generally send unmarried women to the field. Anna K. Scott found this out when she asked her pastor in Sherburne, New York, if she could join the mission. He replied "that they were not sending single ladies and that she must 'await the openings of providence.' This meant she would have to wait until a man asked her to marry him."¹⁹ Thus, for many women inspired by the women's movement and eager to take part in a religious vocation, marriage to a missionary was the only option available.

In fact, the objective of educating native girls in Assam was also colored by gendered intentions. This gender bias is clearly reflected in the fact that many leading male missionaries of that time believed that girls needed to be provided a Christian education to provide suitable wives for the male missionaries. So, the purpose of educating girls was not to enable them to be self-reliant and contribute to making of a better society but to be prepared for performing wifely duties and be a suitable companion for her educated future husband. Miles Bronson, the pioneer of co-education wrote, 'I have felt more and more the necessity of not elevating the girls of the school above their future work and position in life, as wives of our Christian converts.'²⁰ So education was recommended for girls but only to a certain extent so as to provide no danger to the specific purpose of being a good wife.

Another important aspect to be considered is the view of the women missionaries themselves and their attitude towards the native

women whom they interacted with. The influence of the ideals of the Women's movement taking place in the West²¹, their contextualization in the context of women of India and Assam and how the idea of occidental superiority on the minds of the missionary women may have created certain limitations in understanding the position of the native women must be studied. As we know patriarchy and gender bias are not systems and beliefs imposed by men upon women alone. These are systems which dominate the entire society and influence men and women to an equal extent. Western patriarchal ideas had a strong influence on the women as well despite the radical notions which were coming to prevail as a result of Women's Movement taking place in the West. Women missionaries were often influenced by the ideas of 'civilisation' and 'racial and cultural superiority. They therefore were influenced with the idea that native women must not only be educated and converted to Christianity but they must be civilised and elevated to positions of respect and social equality as Western women. This has been well expressed by Suryashikha Pathak as follows, 'While thrilled with the ease of meeting and talking to Naga women, missionary women were horrified with their nakedness, sexuality, and "performance of femininity."²² For example, Mary Clark wrote about young women who "instigated" the men to engage in head hunting. Determined to teach Naga women to be "good Christian wives," the missionary women privileged housework over work in the fields and tried to introduce Western notions of cooking, housekeeping, and childcare. It is ironic that after marveling that Naga women were not subject to the restrictions they so abhorred in the plains, they wanted to restrict the freedom of these women and chain them to their homes.²³ Very much related to the issue of gender bias in context of missionary

women and the women they interacted with is the fact that Indian society is one of the most patriarchal societies in the world. The general views and practices prevalent towards women, their rights and education etc. since the ancient past has been quite prejudiced and concerning. So, in their mission of educating women and influencing them with Christianity the women missionaries had to deal not only with the patriarchal restrictions imposed upon them but also those of the societies they had come forward to work in. It was very difficult to influence the men and women in these societies who had been using religion as the most important tool to dominate and subjugate women. In spite of being inhabited by a number of tribes which are considered to be vastly more liberal in their religious views as compared with the caste Hindu society elsewhere in India, Assam too is influenced with patriarchal norms and practices. In Assam the missionary women noticed that native women were conditioned from an early age with the view that man is an incarnation of deity, that he is their spiritual guide, therefore adoration and obedience to their husbands and the "gohain" (priest) is all that is required of them to make them fit for this life or prepare them for the life to come. This idea is even more deeply instilled into the minds of those of the higher castes.²⁴ The Assamese felt that Christianity disturbed their religion and culture. Men especially felt threatened since their patriarchal privileges could be challenged in society as Christian women enjoyed equal status and privilege, with access to the Bible and church and religious services. In keeping with Hindu tradition, Assamese society also considered women nothing more than a necessarily evil, created to take care of a man's house, and to bear children. They had no place in religion or in the house of worship. The words of scripture were not even to be read in a woman's

presence. Women were considered devoid of a soul or a brain capable of training. Consequently, Christ and Christianity were seen as a threat to such existing social norms in Assamese society.²⁵ These ideas were prevalent not only in caste Hindu Assamese families but also amongst the tribal people. In 1840 when Mrs. Bronson expressed the purpose of their visit which was education of women to an aged Naga chief, he said, "You cannot teach our females. They were trained to bear burdens, to bring wood and water, and to make the salt by which we gain our subsistence. If they learn to read and sew, they must give up these labors and remain at home; then who will do this work; as it is our business to watch the village, hunt deer, and fight our enemies? Our young men can learn, but not our women; it is not our custom"²⁶ The same notion was seen amongst the Garos in whose society it was seen that a man may cruelly beat his wife, but if she so much as struck him once, he can cast her off. It degraded a man to have a woman sit in front of him. She was not allowed to eat before her husband except under unusual circumstances.²⁷ The freedom of the Garo woman differs from that of the Purdah-woman of the plains in kind rather than in degree. In both cases, the word of the man is the law that governs her actions. In many instances the Purdah-woman is hardly more bound to her apartments, than is a Garo woman to her work.²⁸

Conclusion :

The picture that emerges makes it quite clear that the work of women missionaries of the American Baptist mission was continually undermined by patriarchal and gender biased ideas of Western society. They had to struggle to work independently and be recognized in their individual right. Moreover, they were further restricted by the

patriarchal nature of the societies where they served. They had to deal with the gender bias of tribal and Hinduised social norms in Assam which were quite different in nature from western notions but were tinged with the basic patriarchal essence. The Western ideas of civilization and cultural superiority further limited the women missionaries in a better understanding the condition of the women of Assam. However, the immense contributions of the American Baptist women missionaries, both married and single women can never be undermined. Despite the numerous difficulties faced by them in Assam, their contributions to the development of institutional female education, zenana education, health facilities, language, literature etc., is exemplary, inspiring and can never be undermined.

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Role of Women in Conservation of Environment in India

Parishmita Konwar

Introduction :

Environment refers to the external surroundings including all the biotic factors (plants, animals, human beings, etc) and abiotic factors (sunlight, water, temperature, etc) that surround and affect the survival and development of an organism. It may also be defined as the totality of surrounding conditions and elements an individual (Aditya, 2016). Women have a vital role in conservation and management of sustainable ecosystem. Since time immemorial women have been traditionally involved in protecting and conserving their natural resources (Mukherjee, 2013). Women play a critical role in family, communities and environmental degradation as well. Women have direct contact with natural resources like water, forest, fuel, and land especially in rural areas (Islam, 2018). Women are often most vulnerable to climate change, natural disasters, and environmental degradation.

Objectives of the Study :

- The main objective of the study is to know about the role of women in conservation environment in India.
- To know the linkages between women and environment.

Methodology :

In this study, secondary data has been used. The information has been collected from secondary sources like books, journal and articles from magazines and internet sources.

Discussion :

Role of Women in Conservation of Environment

In India women are prominently visible in movements against deforestation and in conservation of water. The origin of the environmental protection movement in India dates back to Kehjrali movement (1730) and gained momentum through the Chipko movement, Appiko movement, Save Silent Valley movement and Narmada Bachao Andolan and the major trend in the environmental protection movements in India emphasises the fact that environmental movements in India reflects the trend that most participants are women. (Aditya, 2016).

Women and environment are closely bounded and the intimate relation between women and nature led to the emergence of theory of eco-feminism, which is a field relating ecology and feminism and also bringing about a connection between environmental degradation and sexist oppression. Women through their roles as farmers and collectors of fire-wood, water, food etc., have a close connection with their local environment (Kumar, 2019). Women have been involved in several government and non-government forestry and environmental programs. Some of these are-

- (a) Community forestry programs
- (b) Social forestry programs

- (c) Individual conservation programs
- (d) SHGs conservation programs
- (e) Green-Belt movement
- (f) Chipko movement
- (g) Keep our city clean programs
- (h) Green India Clean India programs

The sustainable use of the environment by women is the result of their closeness to nature (Baruah, 2015).

Environmental Movements Lead by Indian Women:

(a) Chipko movement :

Chipko movement was started in 1973 in Gharwal division of Uttar Pradesh. It was one of the first environmental movements which was led by women. The movement was an act of defiance against the government. The villagers resisted, they held on to the trees to prevent their felling in order to safeguard their lifestyle which was dependent on the forest (Karan, 1994). Though the women did not refer to their action as feminist activism, however they were fighting for their own rights and on the other hand for the cause of a social movement. This movement shows the relationship between women and environment (Ishizaka, 2013).

(b) Appiko movement :

The Appiko movement was a movement similar to the Chipko movement. It is one of the forest based environmental movements of India which started in the Uttara Kanada district of Karnataka in 1983. The aim of the movement was to conserve the trees of the Kalse forests in Karnataka. Villagers including women walked five miles to a nearby

forest and hugged trees there. They forced the cruisers and the contractors of the forest department to stop cutting trees. The protest continued for 38 days and finally it was successful (Gunwal, 2019). The members of Mahila Mandal included Adivasi women who came together for the protection of forest by writing to the government to stop tree cutting. Further, the movement created awareness among the villagers and spread to other places (Karan, 1994).

(c) Narmada Bachao Andolan :

The Narmada Andolan began in 1985 when the Narmada Valley Development Project was sanctioned. The Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) is a social movement, started by Medha Patkar. NBA is an Indian social movement led by farmers, adivasis, environmentalists, human rights activists and individuals who live along the Narmada river's bank, which runs through Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. The principal aim of this movement was "*to stop massive dams from being built or planned over the Narmada River*" (Karan, 1994). The most significant slogan of the movement was "*Nari Shakti Ka Sanman*". Now, it has been turned into the international protest, gaining support from NGO's all around the world (Borah, 2020).

(d) Silent Valley Andolan :

Silent Valley Andolan was a movement against the state to protect Silent Valley an evergreen tropical forest in Kerala. It was started in 1976 to save the Silent Valley forest from being flooded by a hydroelectric plant. This movement was led by Sughatha Kumari. The Kerala Sahitya Parishad along with other NGO's, scientists, artists and women raised their voice against the hydroelectric project. As a

result the project was cancelled by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1980 and Silent Valley was declared as National Park in 1984 (Gadgil et al 1994).

(e) Navdanya movement :

Navdanya movement is largest organic movement in India. Navdanya began in 1984. It was a non-governmental organisation, which promoted biodiversity conservation, organic farming, rights of farmers and the process of seed saving. The Navdanya is a program of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology (RFSTE). Navdanya was founded by the environmentalist Vandana Shiva to provide direction and support to environmental activism (Borah, 2020). The meaning of Navdanya is "nine crops" that represent India's collective source of food security. The aim of this movement is to save seeds from biopiracy and with this intention setup 111 community seeds banks in 17 states of India. The members of this movement are also mostly women farmers from various parts of country (Gadgil et al, 1994).

Recommendations :

- We must understand gender considerations in conservation and also improve conservation effectiveness.
- Women should be encouraged to participate in environmental protection projects and programs.
- We must promote disseminating gender relevant knowledge and also environmental education should be expanded.

Conclusion :

This article has discussed the role of women in environmental conservation, particularly in India. It is evident that India has a long history. The Chipko movement spearheaded many similar movements by women globally to save the forests like Save the Rain Forest in the Amazon, Green-Belt in Kenya and Appiko in the Western Ghats. Women always play a major role in environmental protection. In rural areas especially women have a special relationship with environment and are thus able to realize environmental issues better. They are closer to nature than men and this very close relationship makes them perfect agents for conservation.

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Women in the Tea Garden of Assam : Issues and Development

Pallavi Phukon

Introduction :

As a developing country India's economy is mostly dominated by the agricultural sector. Agriculture is the backbone of the country as most of the people of India earn their livelihood from agriculture. According to the World Bank Collection of Development Indicators, the rural population in India was reported at 65.07% in 2020. As reported by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India, 54.6% of the total workforce is engaged in agricultural and allied sector activities (Census, 2011). Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation rightly stated that, "India lives in rural areas. Therefore, to be a developed country, development of the rural sector is a must and development of the women, the most vulnerable section of the society, is important for a cultured society."

Tea occupies one of the most important places in the country's agriculture. The industry plays a vital role in the national economy. With every passing day tea has become one of the most popular drinks after water with a GI tag. Tea industry not only contributes to the GDP of the country but it also helps to earn foreign exchange. This industry requires a manpower on a large scale. It requires both men and women.

Assam is the hub of tea within the country and is also well-known globally since long back. Assam's "Manohari Gold Tea", the

famous and rare variety of tea sold at a record price of Rs. 99, 999 per kg and created history by breaking its own record in December, 2021.¹

As the tea industry requires both men and women workers, therefore many of the women are engaged in tea gardens to earn their livelihood in Assam. Apart from their regular household works they manage to work in the tea gardens. The women in the tea garden are mostly engaged in plucking tea leaves, weeding, clearing and in plantation too. More than half of the total workforce in the tea gardens of Assam are women. Despite their considerable contribution to the state economy as well as to the national economy, the condition of the women worker's is not good at all from the socio-economic perspective. There are various issues and challenges faced by the tea garden women.

Objectives :

The paper aims to study the following aspects of women in tea gardens-

- Socio-economic status of the women in the tea garden community.
- Health status of the tea garden women.
- Educational status of the tea garden women.

Methodology :

The study is mainly based on secondary sources. Relevant books, e-books, journals, articles, websites etc. have been used in this academic exercise. A descriptive cum analytical method is used in this paper to find out the objectives of the study.

History of the Tea Plantations in Assam :

Tea is the most refreshing and primary beverage in India with almost 85% of total households in the country consuming tea². Tea was first discovered by the Robert Bruce, a British officer in the upper Brahmaputra valley. It was a wild plant which grew naturally. In the year 1823, the officer found that the Singphos (a community of North East India) drank tea, which was made from boiled leaves of the tea tree. This particular drink was known as the *Fanap* or *Finap* in local language. Later on, the East Indian Company looked into this matter and formed a Tea Committee in the year 1834. The main aim of forming the Tea Committee was to examine the possibility of commercial cultivation of the crop. The first tea garden was established in Chabua in Dibrugarh District of Assam³. With the expansion of tea cultivation, The Tea Research Centre in Assam was established in the year of 1911 at Toklai, Jorhat. A Tea Auction Centre was also established in 1970 at Guwahati for the better marketing of the product. About 17 percent of the workers of Assam are engaged in tea industry. Assam alone produces more than half of India's tea and 1/6th of the world.

Assam is the capital of tea production in India as it produces about 55% of the country's total tea production and it also has marketing facility. Women are the major workforce in the various tea gardens of Assam. Their role is indispensable to the industry and can be considered as a major component of the labour force in the tea industry of Assam. Despite occupying a major place in the economy, the condition of the women in the tea garden of Assam is unfortunately not sound. If we look to the women workforce in the tea garden of Assam, we will find that there are two types of workers- permanent and seasonal or temporary. The condition of the seasonal workers is

not good compared to the permanent ones. The seasonal workers do not have job security and thus they are economically insecure and are deprived from accessing facilities available to the permanent workers. The workers mostly belong to poor families and are generally referred to as backward in terms of economic status. Working women of this group face problems like poverty, health issues, lack of education, early marriage, lack of political consciousness and ignorance etc.

Socio-economic Status of Women in the Tea Garden :

In ancient India, respect towards women was at its highest peak. Women were considered as representatives of the Goddess and worshipping of women was a religious character of Indian society. It was believed that women uphold the culture & tradition of a society. But with due course of time the position and respect towards women in the society gradually decreased.

The women in the tea gardens face discrimination on various grounds such as the unequal distribution of wages, unequal working conditions and facilities provided to them. The male counterparts of female labourers have the freedom to relax after work. But women are left to do household tasks even after working the whole day and they commonly treated as inferior to males. The condition of the tea garden women is pathetic. They are not only exploited by the employers and society but also by the family members. Their wages tend to be less than the male counterparts. Even in the family women's work is regarded as non-waged. The exploitation of working women is not a new issue. However, tea garden workers especially children and women are regarded as the most deprived, exploited and alienated section.

There is also gender bias in the opportunity provided to the garden workers by the authority. While women are expected to perform the task of plucking tea leaves on the other hand men are expected to do factory works. This is probably because of the believe that women are more skilled in plucking tea leaves.

Child labour and human trafficking are two important issues among the tea garden community of Assam. Early marriage of girls is another concerning issue among them. Girls are generally married of at a very early age. Witch- hunting is also an evil practice among the community due to which women suffer a lot. Alcoholism is also a problem which leads to financial and social backwardness of the community. In many cases women work hard to earn money but their husbands spend it all on drink. This often leads to domestic violence where women are the victims.

Health Status of the Tea Garden Women :

To live a good life human beings must be healthy. The health status of the women among the tea garden community is very poor. First of all, tea labouring itself is a difficult work. The workers have to work the whole day carrying heavy loads and, in any weather, whether hot, cold or rainy. This type of day long activity leads to the sickness of the workers. Nutritional anemia is a major problem among the tea garden women. Insufficient medicine, drinking alcohol during pregnancy etc., leads to the high rate of maternal mortality. Apart from these diseases the women of the tea garden suffer from diseases like flu, common cold, cholera, tuberculosis etc.

Educational Status of the Tea Garden Women :

Education steers a society towards development. It helps in formation of an ideal or cultured society. It improves the social and intellectual qualities of a civic society. But when it comes to the tea garden workers the scenario is quite different compared to the mainstream Assamese society. There is lack of educational awareness among the workers. The root cause to this condition can be traced back to the colonial rule. At that time the tea planters they were not interested in promoting education among the tea garden workers. Only a few primary schools were established by some of the liberal planters in their gardens. But, the situation has changed today. Nowadays the community is becoming conscious about the importance of education and most send their children to school. Although they are interested in providing education to their children but they continue to hesitate to send girls to school as they feel it is unsafe to send their daughters to school or college. As a result, the girl child is deprived of accessing education and drop-out rates have increased. The girl child of the tea garden community is expected to do household work such as cooking, cleaning and taking care of siblings. Girls are regarded as the burden of the family whereas boys are regarded as the assets, therefore importance towards educating girl child is less in general.

Findings :

1. Tea industry in Assam was initiated as a colonial venture which even after more than 70 years of independence continues to contribute to the GDP to a large extent.
2. Women occupy more than half of the total workforce in the tea garden or tea industry.

Women in Various Fields: Roles and Contributions

3. Women are the most vulnerable section in the tea garden community as they are deprived, dominated and exploited by their male counterparts in the context of wages, opportunity and facility provided to them.
4. The socio-economic status of the tea garden women is horrible. Anti-social activities and superstitions like witch hunting and early marriage of the girl child is very common among them.
5. There is lack of awareness among the tea garden community towards the education. Health issue is another major concern among them.

Suggestions :

1. First of all, equal opportunity for men and women should be given, plucking tea leaves is considered as easy work in comparison to those factory works and is thus less waged.
2. Women of the tea garden should be given equal social status with men. Education is the guiding factor for any developed society. Therefore, creating awareness amongst adults about the importance of educating girls is necessary.
3. Government should regularly organize health and hygiene campaign in the tea garden to create awareness about the sound body and mind.
4. In-human, anti-social practices should be eradicated from the gardens.
5. Mass-media should also play a critical role in covering the tea garden news. They should bring the actual reasons behind their underdevelopment to the masses.

Women in Various Fields: Roles and Contributions

6. NGO, SHG and Civil Society should also create awareness about their rights given by the constitution.
7. Political parties used the tea garden community as a vote bank. They actually don't care about the condition of the community. This type of tendency should be avoid.

Government Initiatives :

From the above discussion it is seen that the tea garden community is the most marginalized section in the Assamese society. They are usually left behind in any kind of development measures. Therefore, the development of the community as a whole and women in particular is always like a dream for them.

The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 was introduced globally where the principle "equal pay for equal work for both men and women" was the main aim. In the year of 1951, the government of India enacted the Plantation Labour Act (PLA). This act provides various facilities to the plantation workers for their welfare and it also protect the labourers from the all kind of exploitations. The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code 2020, is an Act introduced by the Ministry of Labour and Employment in the Lok-Sabha on September 19, 2020. The main aim of the Act is to provide fair wages to plantation workers.

In the context of Assam, every government has tried to lure this particular community with false promises. But, in 2016, the newly formed government came up with some schemes for the development of the community. Under the 'Sarva Siksha Abhiyan Mission', the major aim was "Education for All". Through this mission education to all children including those of the tea-gardens was aimed at. In addition,

pre- and post-matric scholarships, ANM and GNM training coaching facilities etc. were also provided to the tea garden students. Improvements in the health sector has also been aimed at. About 80 Mobile Medical Units (MMU's) across the state were introduced. A wage compensation scheme was also launched in October, 2018 with the aim of providing aid for care of children.

Constitutional Provisions :

There are provisions of the constitution which are aimed at the development of this community. For example.,

Article 15 of the Indian Constitution prohibits discrimination on the ground of sex, to reduce gender-based violence.

Article 39 of the Indian Constitution it directs towards securing equal pay for equal work for both men and women.

Article 43 of the Constitution of India deals with the topic of living wage and employment generation for workers.

Conclusion :

There are almost 765 tea estates and more than 100,00 smaller tea gardens in Assam and it is the women who carry out most of the work in the tea gardens. The status of women in the North-Eastern region is marginally better in comparison to rest of the regions. Many social evils like purda system, dowry etc., have been less influential in the state of Assam to some extent. However, women being a vulnerable section specifically in this community continue to be victims of poverty, ignorance, illiteracy etc. This article has tried to analyze major issues of tea- garden women and has attempted to put forward some suggestions for the development of the tea garden women. Awareness

towards education, basic rights and political participation will lead to the development of this community and ensure an equal, educated and cultured society.

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Tea Garden Women's Role in Decision Making : A Study of the Korangani Tea Estate, Dibrugarh District

Abhita Gogoi

Introduction :

Tea garden women play a very important role in the tea industry as around one million women are employed in the tea gardens of Assam. To understand the role and status of tea garden women in the society it is essential to analyze their role not only in the public sphere but also within the domestic domain (Mujahid, Hanid, Geo 1991). Tea garden women struggle both in public and private sphere. There are various studies on this subject that have highlighted the different roles played by women in these spheres which are undergoing changes due the development of education (Kottak 1991, Davidson and Gordon 1979). As Risman (1998) has suggested that, a household is a gender factory. The household is generally regarded as the woman's domain and the public sphere as a man's domain. In tea-tribe communities traditionally the father is the head of the household. He directs the family affairs even though woman also contribute to the household income. In addition, the mother has to raise the children and look after the house. Therefore, it is essential to consider the role of women in decision making process at the household level. (Subba 1996) Women's role in decision making at household level is an essential aspect, without the contribution of women in a family we cannot think of a complete family. In this paper an attempt is made to examine the tea garden

women's role in decision making in order to know her actual status in the family. The paper is based on a study conducted in the Korangani Tea Estate situated near Naharkatiya in the Dibrugarh District. The study was conducted in 2019-2020 where above fifty tea garden women were interviewed and their views were recorded. It is ironic that the number of women workers in the garden is around six hundred while there are only nine hundred male workers. This fact itself bears testimony to the importance of women in the tea gardens.

The objectives of the paper are :

- (a) To study and explain the participation of tea garden community women in different areas of household decisions.
- (b) To find out the problems faced by the tea garden women in their day-to-day life.

Findings and Analysis :

Let us examine the role of tea garden women's role in decision making in the study area by using indicators such as status of women in the family, gender disparity in household duties, gender equality in decision making at different levels such as education, marriage etc..

Status of women in the family

Status is defined as a relative position of individuals in a social system. Each individual while maintaining a distinct status within a society has to perform variety of roles. (Jahnu Borgohain 2020) Women in tea plantation families are treated as care givers and natural home makers. They are seen as reproducers of life. However, due to lack of education amongst themselves women position is generally subordinate. Tea garden communities are influenced by the patriarchal

system and therefore the senior male member of the family plays an important role in deciding important family issues. But during the study it is found that female members have to undertake more responsible than males in looking after the families because most of the males spend their earnings on drinking.

Gender Disparity in Household Duties

Gender disparity simply means gender inequality between both the sexes. It is the social construction of who is to perform what role in society. However, during the study area it is found that majority of women respondent had to perform all household works such as cooking, cleaning, washing clothes and utensils besides working as wage earners in the garden. This is why the women are generally overburdened and have to bear a considerable amount of mental and physical strain, particularly the married women with their small children.

Gender equality in decision making

Gender equality means when both genders have equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities in decision making. Women are usually limited to domestic duties and tend to have less say in financial decisions. They are typically the ones tasked with looking after the family. Compared to olden days now women and girls enjoy more rights and opportunities than earlier. In, this study it is found that the major household decisions are taken both by the husband and wife.

Decision making and education

Education has an important role in decision making among the tea garden women. Education provides the necessary empowerment. In the study it is found that the level of education among the respondents is not so high. There is only one primary school in the garden. After passing primary education they have to go to high schools and even

though they aspire for higher education but they are hindered because of the parent's negligent attitude towards education on one hand and financial constraints on the other. So many children are educated to only matriculation level. The living condition in the quarters of the tea garden is congested as families are generally big and the environment is noisy and disturbed which is not favourable for children studying.

Major Findings :

The major findings are as follows-

1. All the respondent said that they have to perform their household duties and at the same time they also have to work in the tea garden. Sometimes they were helped by their grownup children but most of the time they did the work themselves.
2. What makes them motivated to work in tea garden it that they get wages which will help to look after their families.
3. There were maternity benefits and remuneration for the tea garden women, sick leave for both man and woman, ration, firewood, drinking water, bonus, leave allowances. These benefits encourage women to take up work in the gardens despite their household duties.
4. 80% of the people of the tea garden community have low living standards which are largely unhygienic. Although they get satisfactory salary, they do not have the habit of saving and they cannot utilize their salary because they mostly spend it on alcohol.

Conclusion :

From the above analysis and findings, it can be stated that tea garden women though have earnings and at least provision of basic education,

they are still deprived of their opportunity to come forward and speak about her rights in decision making. The women should be given ample opportunity to utilize their creativity and they should be involved in decision making of the family. From the study it is also found that some of the major reasons of this condition of women are poverty and lack of awareness. Different organizations like NGOs and other social bodies should come forward to help the women of the tea garden. The Government should take necessary steps in different issues regarding women participation in every aspect of their life besides household activities. This will result in upliftment of tea garden women and it will change their life and contribute to the development of the community.

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Women in our country have achieved unprecedented heights in whichever field they have been involved. Yet many continue to struggle for gender equality and basic right, It is necessary to highlight the contributions of women in society in order to ensure her rightful status. This book is a collection of papers and articles on the role and contribution of women in various field in India in general and Assam in particular, It is a humble attempt to put before the readers some of the most important social issues regarding women while bringing to the forefront and acknowledging her many contributions in varied fields. The book has been published by the Women's Study Cell, Sonari College in December 2021.



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