



# A Study on the Status of Sumi Women in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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## Abstract

The status of the Sumi women or the women in general in Nagaland has been discussed over a period of time with the topic concerning women empowerment as well as freedom and privileges of women. Naga women are among the few fortunate's who enjoys a certain freedom and privileges though being in the patriarchal system environment however, everything comes with its crux and perks in life and so there are certain loopholes here and there when talk about the status of Naga women. The 21<sup>st</sup> century women have different opinions and outlooks of freedom and rights as oppose to the older centuries. There is no doubt in the change of the patriarchal system in the 21<sup>st</sup> century however the struggles and unspoken desires as well thoughts of women are often overlooked but one does not forget the fact that the status of women has drastically changed by the coming of modernity. Therefore, the researcher employed 30 Sumi women to have a clearer understanding of the status of women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Keywords: Status, Women Empowerment and Freedom

## Introduction

The status of women or the empowerment of women has undergone a period of scrutiny just because the perceiving and understanding of gender equity by the society differs. Every individual have their own understanding and it is almost impossible to come into common ground when the topic is about the status of women however there has been an improvements in the status of women. Gender biasness will and always prevail in the Naga society but not as much as the times of our ancestors because with time everything changes and along with the status of both men and women. The gender biasness sprung out in the times of our ancestor when they defined the roles of both genders specifically such as women need to take care of the household chores where men are to go out hunt and provide for their family and this mindset regarding gender roles followed us till the period of modernity. To understand the status of women, it is best to understand the system in which they live or lived in and that is patriarchal system. The Naga society functions under the system of patriarchy where women were deprived or rather shunned from their rights and it is not to blame the men folks but the system in itself has a big flaw. It is also safe to say that the patriarchy still in existence women has made their way up with the support of men folks which indicates how broadminded Naga people have become. The 21<sup>st</sup> century not only improved the status of women but also broadened the minds of men folks in lifting the women up. There are however orthodox thoughts that still prevails in the society where men thinks that women only belongs in the kitchen and thoughts like this are handful among the old generations but by the coming tomorrow, this thoughts will not stop women to prosper in whichever and whatever ways they can. In October 5 at Christian Higher Secondary School in dimapur, the Western Sumi Totimi Hoho conducted a seminar on the topic concerning *gender rights and roles* and staggeringly the opinions seem to have spoken the present scenario of status of women where one of the spokesperson said that the men first should understand the rights of the women then only the fights for the equal rights would not be an issue for the women where some shared that unlike the olden, women are being obtained as pastors which shows the status of women in the present generation. Some are of the opinion that women till date has not proved themselves to be equal to men in the political sphere hence no impact has been made by the women whereas some said that the forefathers did not impose gender roles such

as men should do this and women should do that but it was men themselves who took up hard works which requires energy and physical strength and women took care of the household activities (EMN, Oct 6' 2019, 11:57 pm). The forefathers would not have imposed the gender roles however in the olden days the division of work concerning the physical strength has segregated the roles of genders which still exists today and somehow someone misinterpreted the meaning of gender roles and though reason may be unknown but it all indicates to the way Naga society works and that is patriarchal system. However, the status of women has improved gradually but drastically in the present generation alongside the support of men folks. The Sumi women in the olden days have a restrictions in some certain aspects of lives such as their work place is household areas and fields and there were no such working women during those days but today we have seen many changes in the Sumi community where women are working in the office sectors, education sector as well as every areas where men and women work alike. There is no doubt that women will always be a weaker sex when it comes to physical strength however long gone are the days where women were deprived from their moral rights. Women today has gone far from where they have been and it is even more staggering to see the support system towards women from the men folks and the societies alike. Women have reached to the point where they have realized their self worth and thus it has become a competitive world for both men and women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have evolved and are yet to create wonders by their contributions even in the days to come. Living amongst the patriarchs, women have been courageous to have achieved their a good labels as well as names in the society which indicates the status of women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Materials and Methods

The researcher employed a qualitative method to bring out the quality paper. The researcher regarding the data collection employed in-depth interview methods using non-probability sampling. The researcher sat face to face with the respondents using open ended regarding questions regarding status of Sumi Women where the respondents gave their feedback regarding the questions probed from which the researcher draws out their understanding of the status of the women then and now. The researcher then took out the important themes from the respondents response for the findings and interpretation.

## Literature Review

### *Status of Naga Women at a Glance*

In the article written by Smti. Alongla Anichari, it is seen that the Naga women had undergone change over the past years. Naga women were bound by the social taboos which greatly affect their participation in the society and family. Women suffered immensely because of the lack of acceptance of what they can contribute in the society. However, despite the laws that were made for the Naga women as to how they should maintain their life in the society as well as family. It is interesting to learn that Naga women have managed to participate in their own power that in turn impacted the society (Anichari, 2016).

### *Culture, Identity and Change: The Case of Sumi of Nagaland*

This research explored the various types of changes that Sumi of Nagaland has undergone due to modernization, Christianity and globalization. It studied the various factors that have affected the Sumi Naga due to change. The internal factors like stress and strains might have been one of the psychological factors that affected the cultural change. It is believed that the change is directly or indirectly promoted by outside agencies which led the Sumi Naga to change drastically. However, many have been raising their voices to preserve the cultural way of living which has led to the questions of identity of the Sumi Nagas. It is said that the identity of Sumi Naga is in flux: in the history of Sumi Naga, continuity is seen disturbed, cultural identity is at flux and social practices are transformed, may be due to the forces of Christianity, modernization and globalization (Avitoli Zhimo, 2011).

### *The Origin of a Sense of Self in Women*

This research focuses on the sense of self in women stating that the strong self in women can change the society's precepts and gender stereotypes where women define their value and worth instead of society defining them. This study also focuses on the influence that attributes to women gaining sense of self with the view that society has defined women for so long as in how women should behave, what women should be and how women are supposed to look hence the research work focusing on the origin of sense of self in women (Kimberly, 2012).

### *Dynamics of Warp and Weft: Contemporary Trends in Naga Textiles and the Naga Collections*

This paper attempts to see the processes of changes that Nagas in cooperation with new idea. This paper focuses on the textiles Nagas made with their own hands which contributed to the rich tradition and culture of the Naga society. The clothes used and wore by men and women differently are highlighted in this paper as well as how the woven clothes such as wraparound and shawls represent the gender. The clothes signified the race, culture, tradition and to the extent of social status of a person in the societies such as Sumi Naga wore a shawl with goats hair stitched at the corner of the shawl to signify that the man is of a high status, Ao and Rengma men painted the white paint on the median to signify the cloths as that of warriors and so the other tribes according to the events of motifs that suits well. However, by the coming of the wave of the Christianity, the declining of the practised textiles such as cloths that are worn to signify social status, cloths that are worn by the brave ones in the war, clothes that are worn by the brave person who took the head in the headhunting war were all abolished due to the coming of Modernity. The introduction of Christianity has brought about the change in the belief system of the Naga community which directly impacted the dressing styles as well as symbolic designs and patterns of the clothes.

### *Women's Work in Naga Society: Household Work, Work Force Participation and Division of Labour*

According to U.A. Shimray, women were given privileges even in the patriarchal society. Women enjoyed their freedom and also play an important role in the family and community life. This paper attempts to understand women's position in Naga society with particular reference to Tangkhul Nagas of Manipur State where he stated that women are showered with greater responsibilities considering domestic works in and outside homestead. The finding brought out the staggering sight of women where women were said to have taken over the work whilst men's responsibilities for household chore are said to have been shrinking. (Shimray, 2004).

### *Empowerment and Participation of Women in Politics: A study on Political Participation of Women in Nagaland.*

Since the time women adapted modernity and implementing it in their lifestyles, women empowerment has become a trending issue. Women's participation in the politics is on a high demand and a debate for the Naga Citizens. The Naga women when it comes to decision making are deliberated by the public opinions and

socio-political cultures. According to the researcher it is said that since 1969 till 2013, the participation of women in politics is close to none as well as not a single women is selected in the given year because the political parties in Nagaland is controlled by men and hence the participation of women is low in this area. This thesis argues that the participation of women in politics is low because of the lack of influence even to those women who stood up fighting for the equality to become the political leaders alongside men. For the longest time women are being neglected and ignored in the political areas and according to the finding it is visible that women are considered less than a man in the political field. The failure of women in the political areas trace back to the typical patriarchal system in Nagaland and therefore the researcher has made an attempt to understand the affair of the state when it comes to politics and said that the women should be supported by their counterparts since women has lot to contribute in the political system.

#### *Women Empowerment in Nagaland: A Case Study on the Assembly Election*

The 33% reservation has become a debatable issue because the participation of women as well as election of women does not cross the bar as that of men. The empowerment of women involves the political, social, legal and overall aspect of women. This research focuses on the customary laws as well as different issues faced by women in political and administration arenas. This research was done on the people of Nagaland as to why women are not being allowed to participate in the political sphere. The researcher has focused on the training, awareness, administrations, free will, and right to choice in terms of education and political arenas so as to maintain the gender discrimination so that women can find ways for empowerment or empower themselves and claim their rightful place in all the spheres of life. It is said that women empowerment will boost the society and self for achieving goals and development a better community without any bias. Women empowerment since time immemorial has been a debatable topic in Nagaland where the customary laws of the Nagas has been questioned many times. The problem that has been faced by the women in the political area has been focused in this paper. The present generation needs to re-evaluate their decision towards the women in the political field. In the olden days women were lesser in the field of education, politics, and economy as such. Women were confined at home taking care of home making and domestic chores whereas men were the head of the family and the decision making solely depends upon men. Women has been contributing and has made severe contributions in the growth of the family as well as society and thus the

contribution of women should be considered and be given an opportunity to participate in any spheres in the best interest of the women. The 33% reservation for women has made a lot of issue in the patriarchal society where in the tribal bodies were against the reservation and some of the tribal bodies still stand strong against the 33% reservation though handful women were brave enough to contest the election amidst all the issues. Women are upping their skills to work equally as men in the political sector and thus women should be well educated and those who are should be given opportunities not only in the political sectors but in overall areas. Women empowerment is an opportunity not only for women but for the society as a whole as to make the future better without injustice (E.Mhathung, 2019).

#### *Narratives of Peace: Naga Women in the Self determination Struggle*

Naga has lived in an era of political struggles that makes women to prolong struggle for self determination. Since Nagas has been going into the change and continuity, the situation has been complex and with the call towards modernity, Nagas in general has to undergo a series of complexities. On the other hand the patriarchal system has been a huge disfavour to women in every aspects of their life. However, with the change and pull towards the modernity the Naga women has managed to get themselves together and contributed much towards the society in need while maintaining their traditional space. This research is about the narratives of the Naga women who have contributed to the society with their potential self towards the peace making amidst the Naga political struggle. The researcher has also mentioned about the land that is intrinsic to the Nagas. Nagas relationship with their land is incomparable to anything else because the land represents the status of the person. Nagas has struggled and are still struggling to protect their lands due to which they have to face a numerous challenges concerning lands. The fight for the self determination started with the Indian armies but gradually the struggle shifted towards the Naga factional groups which in itself are called internal strife. The Nagas gives their life for their land since the land is the embodiment of the human being in the triune concept of God-Land People according to the word of Imkong I. Imsong (V. Meneno, 2012).

#### *From Emancipation to Representation: Women's Reservation in Nagaland, An Unending Struggle for Equality*

This paper examined the 33% reservation of women that has hit the bar in the Local Body Elections in Nagaland in the year 2017. The Supreme Court has passed the order to fully practise and bring into effect the 33% reservation of women. The former Chief Minister T.R Zeliang along with the cabinet agreed on the decision of the Supreme Court. However, the decision to put Women reservation into effect has created havoc among various tribal representative bodies were against the decision to let women take part in the election through women reservation as it was against the Article 371(A) of the constitution. The tribal bodies were against the decision to grant the 33% reservation for women and opposed the Nagaland Government to do so. Hence, women in Nagaland though we see some changes in the political sphere are being deprived of their rights to contest election. It is clear that women are being silenced in the name of tradition and customs which have manifested the practice of patriarchy even in this sphere directly. The arguments of the tribal bodies regarding the 33% reservation for women need to be scrutinized and therefore bring into explanation of their opposition towards the move. The unsaid reason of the denial of women to participate in election is maybe the fear that the sections of men have towards the growth of women (V S Dhanya, 2019).

#### *Naga Women's Perspective on Gender Roles: An Analysis of Literary Narratives*

I Watila Longkumer pinned down all the narratives that portray the gender disparity in Naga Societies. No matter what the narratives or narrations sounds and looks like, there is one thing common in every narrative and that is the gender roles where women roles are restricted in certain ways. There are many courageous women who are playing equal roles as their counterpart but the customary laws is such that there are restrictions in some areas that denies women's equality to that of men which is a total contradiction to the belief that Naga women enjoys equal status as that of men. There are areas where women exceed but there are again some areas where women's participation is said to be hampering the customary laws of the Nagas, the areas such as political and social spheres are the areas where one can witness the less participation of women. The recognition of women is lesser when compared to men in higher space. Though the status of women has shown some improvement in the modern era, there is still a loopholes regarding women's participation in the social sectors and that depicts the patriarchal system that has been rooted from the time of our ancestors. Women are to follow certain traditional code of conduct as per the customary laws which maybe the reason why women are not being accepted to participate in certain areas or why women are being

judged by their behaviors and not their skills and capabilities. There is no doubt of an improvement towards women's status in Naga societies but Nagas in general are still yet to arrive at the uniformity where women feels wanted as well as be an inclusive society where everyone can exercise their freedom (I. Watila Longkumer, 2019).

#### *The Interface between Tradition and Modernity in Naga Society: A Critique from Gender Perspective*

This paper attempts to study the interface between tradition and modernity in the Naga society. This paper brings to light that the Naga women would get the opportunities to shine in the modern era but there still exists the traditional practices that exploits women from achieving the equal bar. Modernity is a sense of assurance for equal status and women are yet to achieve that status even in the modernized world. It has been learned that the recognition of a women is lesser than a men because of the traditional practices that made a men to be the protector of the village and the bread earner of the family. However, the modernity has brought a change in the lives of women that concerns marriage, economic and political gains as such. Women now has been seen taking parts in the social activities and that is a great change in itself however the cultural traditions of the Nagas has been deeply rooted in the customary laws that has been practiced from the times of our ancestor and is still practicing. With the root that Nagas have, it will take a long time to see the changes that modernity brings along full-fledged. Though women are changing everyday in every aspect of their being, it will take a long time for the Nagas to do away with cultural practices that expects women to shine and be their independent selves (L. Purlemla and B. Humayun, 2020).

#### *Realizing Women's Rights to Land and Other Productive Resources*

Women's rights to land have been an issue for most of the male dominating societies. Excluding women from their rights to Land results to poverty. Obstacles and barriers that exists in the male dominating societies towards women largely caters to the unrecognized contribution of women. Land is the key to determine the standards of an individual and their financial independence and therefore among the Nagas, Land is an eccentric part of their life. Nagas drew attention from the land which determines their wealth and status in the society. Basically an individual with a large acres of land are automatically perceived wealthy. Land is the main sources of the Nagas since the main occupation of the Nagas are mainly agriculture.

However, the ownership and the stewardship of the land are given to the men folks according to the system that the Nagas follows which is Patriarchal system. Women were deprived from having control over the land for many traditional reasons though the Nagas just recently took shift regarding the ownership of the land. Land signifies the standard living of an individual and so regardless of whether men or women, land rights signifies the human rights of all. Therefore women should be ensured to her human rights as the rights to equality like that of equality of food, education, water, health and wealth (Newyork and Geneva, 2013).

#### *Economic Contributions of Women in Traditional Naga Society*

This paper attempts to study the contributions of women focusing mainly on the agriculture since the main occupations of the Nagas is agriculture. Women have contributed and invested their times on the field to provide for the family yet their works are unseen and untold. Most of the time unlike modern time women works in the field while men take responsibilities at hunting and warfare. Women were expected to take care of the household chores especially home making while men do other social activities. Women do all the work to feed their families, works in the field, cook so that families can stay away from hunger and basically all the domestic chores are done by women yet men are known as the bread winner. Women have also been the breadwinner in the family for so long since the main occupation of the Nagas is agriculture and women helped their counterparts equally in the field. However, since the hard work history of women is untold, the contributions of women in the economic development as well were untold. In the housework or fieldwork, women are always ahead of the men folks and their contributions are way amazing. The hard works of women are often unseen or unrecognized just because they live in the male dominating society but by the coming of Christianity, it has marked the incredible work of women in contributing not only in the fieldwork but over all sector of development. The coming of Christianity has impacted the world where women were often unheard and unseen. The contributions of women in the process of development in every sector are now coming to light due to the coming of Christianity. The globalization has paved a way for the women to speak up or has given the opportunities to individuals of every society to rethink and reconsider the contributions of the women (Y.Vitsuo and T.Khobu, 2015).

### *Women's Empowerment and Economic Development*

The word empowerment can be known as the equality of an individual to regulate their day to day life as per their own. Empowerment is the key to do away with the inequality between men and women and that empowering women may result in overall development of the society. Men alone cannot do all the works likewise women alone cannot do all the works without the help of their counterparts and so one need to support and uplift one another without gender bias in order to live in a world where there exist harmony. Women were seen only for the reproductive reasons for quite a long time rather than their skills to do something productive. However, women throughout the world are seen working in every section and earn though their income is generally low than that of a men. The Indian women as well as Naga women have come to the terms with the male dominating society and are working in every sector though untold and unheard with much liberty and dignity. Women work in the fields for their income and if given a chance to work like a men, the possibility of economic development will be at large. Women are empowered through education so that they decide what they want and achieve their dreams and desires and every society should encourage and uplift women to reach the higher heights. It is evident that if women are given the opportunities to grow and contribute than the developing countries or a state like Nagaland will see a reduction in poverty hence empowering women will play a vital role in the making of the countries or state (B.Syamala Devi, 2014).

### *Women Empowerment through SHGs-Characteristics and Levels*

Self Help Groups (SHGs) are the groups formed by the women to develop their skills and abilities and contribute in the growth of the society or the self. This paper explored the SHG and its role in making the women economically, socially and politically independent. Women have faced multiple challenges just by simply being a women and this sort of initiatives such as SHG made the women come together and discuss their strength in order to be known as the independent self in the society, family and community. Women empowerment was and still is a debatable issue and it may be considered as a process and not an event that takes place one day and gone the other day without any impact. Women empowerment is a process and so women go through this process to keep processing their strength and skills in order to know their strength and worth. Through the SHGs women has impacted their own lives as well as their fellow beings to be

independent in life. This group has made many groups of women improve their living conditions as well as overall outlook of lives socially. These SHGs are seen mainly in the rural areas where women come together and question their strength and skills and in return, women have improved in overall areas of life such as education for their children, better income, better facilities at home and such. However, political areas are yet to be achieved due to the negligence from the political powers rights among the societies. Nonetheless women have taken the advantage of SHGs in developing themselves in changing the outlooks and attitudes (M.Longkumer and K.K Jha, 2014).

*Empowerment of Women through Self Help Group: A Study of Nagaland with Special Reference to Kohima*

Self Help Group acts as an inclusive programme of self development as well as groups of women. The SHGs is believed to be function of the belief, 'by the women, of the women, for the women.' The starting of the SHGs can be traced back to the Grameen bank of Bangladesh founded by Mohamed Yunus. It was founded and established to assist women in the year around 1975. It was formed specially for the rural women to help them provide for themselves as well as family. the SHGs was formed in Nagaland sometime around the year 1999-2000 which has been a great help as well as blessings for the women since it not only provide the financial assistance towards women but also helped them to have a better outlook in overall aspects of life. It was formed in Nagaland to empower women in the fields of economic, politics, social as well as moral support. It not only helped women to utilize their skills but also reduced the poverty to some extent. It not only helped women in various fields but also adds to the economic development of the state in providing to the unwaged women to earn their livelihood. This SHGs includes activities such as farms, Crafts, weaving, bee keeping, piggery, producing local products in the form of pickles, detergents both in bars and powders and decorative items which paved a way for the women in showcasing their skills and take parts in exhibitions of handlooms and handicrafts. The SHGs with diverse platforms has helped under privileged women to make a place for themselves in the society and these actions not only build the self esteem of women but helped Naga women in general to know their skills and abilities which will give them the sense of equality (P.Neiphresenuo, 2017).

### *Changing Status of Women in Modern Period*

The study of women has been core point of the researchers dating back till now because the change has been seen and reviewed with such intriguing outcomes. This paper stresses on the equality of women to that of men where women should be equally dignified as men and at the same time treat women with respect as that of men. This research paper concluded on the basis of the importance of education that has changed the status of many women across India. The status of women though yet to achieve the equal status has drastically changed from period to period. It also stresses on the perception of equality of both men and women respectively but the education has played a vital role in making both the genders see the positive despite the differences and that is one of the reason why today women are no more just the home makers but a bread winners who are good at providing to the family economically as well as contributes to the society by their recognized capabilities ( Manikamma N. Sultanpur & A.G Khan, 2021).

### *Educational Status of Sumi Women in Zunheboto District, Nagaland: Changing Dimension*

Education has been a key factor in empowering the women not only to the Sumi women but the women in general. This research paper stated that there were challenges and hindrances for the women to access an educational system because of the patriarchal nature that was once present in the olden days and that it hampered women to achieve their dreams to be socially and economically independent through ceasing the opportunity of education that was provided. This research paper has shown that the present statuses of women are higher as compared to gone years and that itself says that women has been empowered through education. With the coming of modernity and the introduction of education has drastically empowered women though the status still differs from rural to urban areas. Women are also of the view that education uplifts their spirit to soar higher which leads to their independency socially and economically. In the olden days patriarchal nature has neglected women of their deserving opportunity and never considered women as the decision makers but gradually the support system towards women form both society and family has empowered and encouraged women to get their higher degrees and make a name for themselves in the society though the support system do differ from urban and rural areas as said however the dimension has shifted and women are grabbing the opportunity that come their way to make their desired dreams alive through accessing the education that is inclusive in the present generation (Y. Inaholi Kiba, 2021)

### *Gender Narratives: Reinterpreting Language, Culture and Tradition in Nagaland*

Nagaland is known and viewed by others as vibrant due to its culture and traditions. Nagas have emerged as advanced people in its own course however there are holding back in the advancements when it comes to gender roles and identities. The oppression in the power are still prevalent and rooted strongly in the psyche of the Nagas that people tend to take as one of the societal norms. There are many views and ideas regarding the gender unbiased culture but sadly nobody seem to put it in actions. The positions of women have improved but there are still some loopholes that need to be rectified. The society is such that the roles of the gender are strictly followed and observed due to the assets of patriarchy (Bendangsenla, Lanurenla, I. Yashikala Jamir Maogienla and I. Imwapangla, 2021).

### *Women and Gender; Emerging Voices from North-East India*

Women have faced various sorts of crimes in the name of their identity if not in Nagaland but in India. The status of women has always been pleasant since the time immemorial in the societies thus leading to gender biasness. From education to politics, socio-economy women are subjugated and not well taken care of. Women of Nagaland though counted as equals and played a vital role, the history of Nagas will always be confined as His Story and not Her Story. The history of Nagas from folksong to folktales or even to the extent of political struggle for self determination will always give importance to the man thus His Story and not Her Story. Whilst taking about the Indian women facing crimes such as sexual oppression, violence and molestation, many forget to hear the silent hues and cries of the Naga women. The patriarchal nature has stifled the voices of the women and thus emerged the women associations of different tribes to protect the rights of the women and look after the well being of women and their concerns (Temjensosang, O. Athungo and A. Lanunungsand Ao, 2015).

### **The status of Sumi Women in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Nagaland is a state of casteless and classless societies hence; no doubt woman enjoyed the responsibilities and privileges bestowed upon them. However, one cannot deny the fact that since time immemorial Nagas has been practicing the patriarchy system and being a woman in a patriarchal society comes with expectations and norms. Though woman enjoyed the high status in the societies, she was expected to bow down in certain areas such as man in the family is the head interceded by the other male members in the

family. Inheritances were always given to the sons in the family whereas daughters were not given the right to inherit the family's property such as lands.

Talk about the Nagas as a patriarchal society, the thought of woman enjoying their responsibilities and the father is the head of the family is the first thing that pops up in every individuals mind. Of course Naga women do have to be grateful since unlike other Indian societies they did not have to wear clothes that cover their face, they did not have to face what sati system does to woman, they did not experienced infidelity, or the ways of prostitution was not in the blood of Naga women even in the ancient times. However, there is certain traditional law that expects woman to be submissive and subjugated to man and hence proved that the patriarchal society reflected a notion of what we call gender bias and so there is more to be written and discussed about the women in the ancient times and their transition to modernity. Naga history predicts, especially Sumi women to be a great warrior and participated in the war and attacked enemies in order that the village remain protected. However, this instance of women participating in war does not change the fact that Naga has a patriarchal system. There is so much to bring to light about the woman during the both eras. In this chapter we shall explore the areas in which women were held with great responsibilities and in which areas women were subjugated.

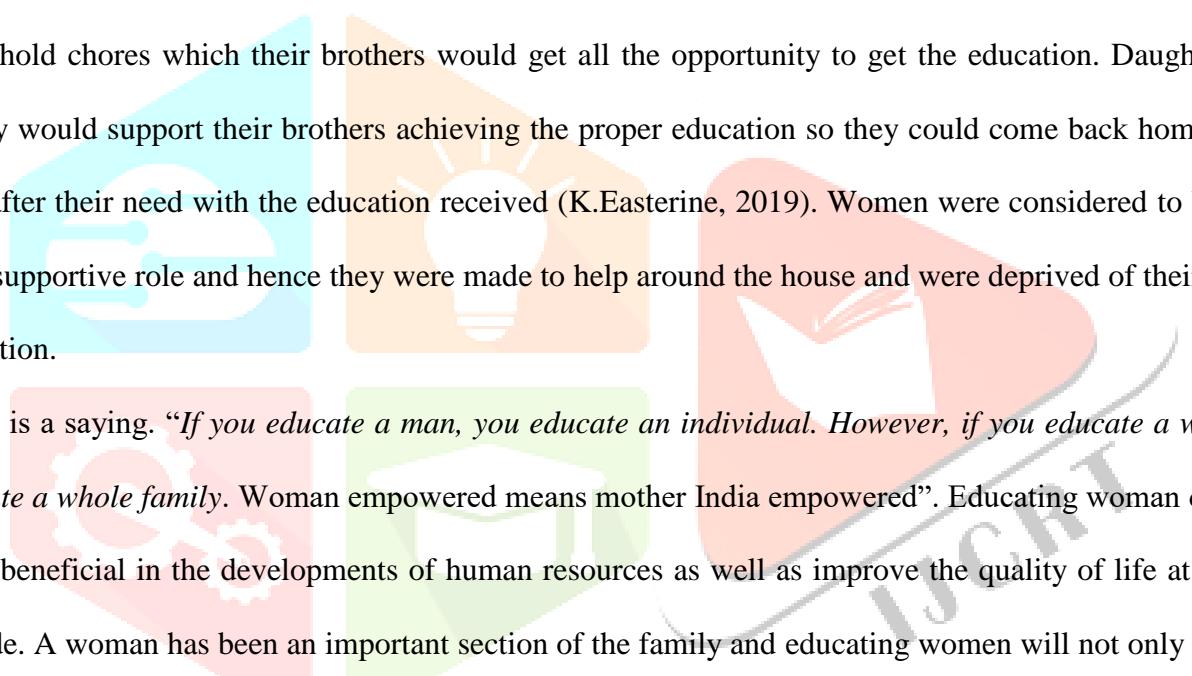
- *Decision making in the family*

Naga women though showered with greater responsibilities, they had to remain submissive to their husband. Decision was made by the male member in the family since they were the head of the family and their participation in the decision making were not welcomed just because they were woman or strong patriarchal system might have been the reason. Being a woman comes with many challenges. Women were always considered as the weaker sex hence leading to the submission in any circumstances. In some region and villages, it is rare to see woman participating in the decision making as that of man though there were few instances here and there. Though women were given the opportunity to participate in social activities but were not allowed to make the decision for the family or the society. Even if she was allowed to make the decision, it is only because of the consent of her husband and thus, husband takes decisions directly or indirectly in the ancient times. Today, talk about decision making, it is observed that women do make

decisions in the family. The factor that woman was considered as the weaker sex did not stop them to invest emotionally as well as mentally in the decision alongside woman. Welcoming modernity has made women to embrace their sentiments and logical sense in supporting their man in decision making. Naga women were considered as the traditional peace maker in the society and seeing their importance in this field, men in public meetings now ask, “where are the women, we need women in our deliberations”. (K.Pichano, 2018)

- *Education for Women*

Education today is equally important for both man and women unlike the ancient times. In the olden days, girls would voluntarily choose to stay at home or forced to stay at home to help their mothers in the household chores which their brothers would get all the opportunity to get the education. Daughters in the family would support their brothers achieving the proper education so they could come back home and take care after their need with the education received (K.Easterine, 2019). Women were considered to be best for their supportive role and hence they were made to help around the house and were deprived of their rights for education.



There is a saying. *“If you educate a man, you educate an individual. However, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family.* Woman empowered means mother India empowered”. Educating woman does prove to be beneficial in the developments of human resources as well as improve the quality of life at home and outside. A woman has been an important section of the family and educating women will not only benefit the society but to the larger extent, educated woman will bring about strong foundation in the life of their children ( B.Ahmad, 2015). Woman of Nagaland to some extent enjoy the equal status in the society but the literacy rate of women has always been lower than man. However, the literacy rate of women is increasing at the greater pace and now looking at the positions secured by women in the society is an evident itself that woman now are involved in academic and professional fields unlike the olden days (K.Pichano, 2018).

- *Naga Woman and their Cultural Life*

A hardworking women is said to be the backbone of every family and society and Naga women though with limited responsibilities proved to be the backbone of ones in need. Nagas strictly hailing from the patriarchy system gives woman the respect they deserve but there are certain things that distinguish the gender role in this system. Women are to be held responsible for house related stuff while man take care of the administrations. Women in the olden days were seen to be socially involved. Women and men both gets involved in learning handicrafts things from the Morung. In this Morung girls who were unmarried were kept and made to learn various skills such as dance, songs, and handicrafts. In girls Morung, they were taught to shoulder social responsibilities. Hence, women were involved in agricultural activities to sustain the life of their individual's family. Design and symbols in the clothes were done by women in the form of weaving with different kinds of weaving implements since long. Morung was the place where women were socially involved as well as learn and train others to maintain their social responsibilities. Different tribes have different traditional attires and ornaments, it is staggering even to say that the women were behind all the clothes, attires and ornaments that particular tribes wore or wear. However, the weaving of one's traditional attire was not a guarantee for women because society expects women to be of her husband's clan and take after his husband's name when she is married. Due to the coming of civilization, long gone are the days where women were seen weaving and involved in handicrafts stuffs but it is definitely clear that the tradition to be submissive to men folks remains indirectly or directly. To say the least, Naga women were to submit and remain subordinate to men folks (N.Ajailiu, 2015). Looking at the cultural aspect of woman today, there has been a decline in the area of weaving and agriculture since they adapted modernity which brings us to the conclusion that some of the patterns and symbols in an attire might have been in danger of losing since the practise of modern life is prevalent in Naga societies. However, some women in the villages still practice some of the agricultural practice as well as weaving. Due to the emergence of modernity, the practice of weaving was and still is at the higher risk to extinction but among many NGO's, one of the NGO called Exotic Echo took a brave step in resurrecting the tradition practise of a weaving. This group employed 200 women so far and was paid according to the designs they weave. The Exotic Echo has been hosting the

annual 'Loinloom Festival' during the first week of December for the last 5-6 years attracting many tourist from across the world and though this would not be enough for reviving the cultural life of every tribes but it is a small step to change and bring about life of cultural practice of Nagas in a greater way. (D. Shankar, Times of India, March 17<sup>th</sup> 2019, 05:23)

- *Prejudices in Wages then and now*

Women were always seen as the weaker sex than that of men meaning women were considered as physically weak. When it comes to economies, there exists a gendered structure. The daily work of a woman who lived in the villages was to do the household chores, tend their agricultural fields, sell goods, fetch water and fire woods. Women were paid less wages considering that they are weak in all aspects than men. It would be injustice so to say that women were paid less just because they were physically weak. Women who work in the agricultural fields were discriminated in their wages for one reason; they were women and considered to be weaker than a man. It is believed that women in some places till today are deprived and are not given equal wages (N.Ajailiu, 2015). Looking at the present perspective, it is found that Naga women are paid equal to men in any sector of employment and is recognized by their hard work in any work given to them. Women empowerment and the status of women are also seen in the area of employment. In today's generation we see the declining of labor works and it might be the impact that the Modernity brought along. However, even if there is a gender gap in terms of wages, it is only applicable in the urban areas. Gender prejudices in the work participation is more prevalent in the urban areas than that of rural areas ( Mahanta, Bidisha and Nayak, 2013).

- *Women in Religious Field*

In the olden days Nagas do not have a specific religion that they follow. All that is learnt about the religion they follow is animism. They live in the belief of nature and one Supreme Being. They also had high belief in the ancestral spirits, house deities and village deities; they believed these spirits to be a benevolent spirit who brings good fortune as well as protect their wellbeing and they offer their sacrifices showing them the reverence in the form of food and drinks. On the other malevolent spirits are the spirits who are behind all the

bad things such as death, sickness and other natural forces and lived in fear of these spirits. Amidst their rituals and practices to these spirits no women were allowed to practice their rituals for the village even though she was allowed to practice the ritual as an individual. Women were excluded from performing the ritual for the village as a whole. Special sacrifices were offered to the supreme god where women did not participate. Women were kept aside from any major roles when it comes to rituals and beliefs in the olden days (N.Ajailiu, 2015). The reason may not be accurate as to why women were excluded from participating in the village rituals but gender supremacy might have been one of the reasons. For so long patriarchy has been an injustice to women. The inability to recognize the ability of women was a big ignorance in the olden times. However, women in today's context are actively involved in the Church ministries as well as peace building. Many women have been ordained as a pastor and are actively working to contribute in the society to bring about the teaching of Jesus as a Christian and of course with dedication. Prayer warriors, counsellors, evangelist, missionaries, pastors, deacons are carried out well by women as well as men in Nagaland. Men and women collaborate together in bringing Nagaland under one roof that is, "Nagaland for Christ" which is also the slogan for Naga people.

- *Women and Politics*

In the History of Nagas, women participation in the area of politics is said to be lesser than that of men. Women as per the talk of the participation did not pay much attention towards the political areas as they were confined to the household works in the olden days. Women were prohibited in taking part in the political administrations as Naga being the patriarchal and patrilineal in its form. Women were not encouraged to take parts in such activities that involves decision making and talking about political administrations and women involve in it is a big question to the societies. Traditionally women were confined in the household works and were deprived in most of the activities that concerns social development. However, the reasons why women are deprived of their social and political status are women themselves. Many are of the opinion that women do demoralize themselves in taking up the important roles in the society. Education played a very vital role in the life of a woman. Education was and still is a booster to women and in their participation in the political administrations.

Unlike the ancient days, women are seen participating in the political administrations. As the societies goes through changes, no stones were left unturned. At present, it is evident that women are taking part in the in the political administration in the state level. Naming some of the women; Mrs Rano Mese Shaiza from Khonoma village contested in general election in the year 1970 and later in 1973 she was elected as President of the party. She contested in United Democratic Fund (UDF) party in 1977 and won the state's lone Lok Shaba seat. She also contested in the Nagaland Legislative Assembly as an independent candidate but was unable to succeed in the year 1982.

Mrs Chubalemra Jamir contested twice in the general Legislative assembly in the year 1987 but was defeated both times. Mrs. Akheli sumi contested in election with the Congress ticket in the year 2003 but lost in the election. Mrs Rhakilla contested in General election in the year 2008 in Sardar 2 Tuensand District but lost the election just by the margin of 369 votes (J.Naromongla, 2012).

There are many such women who contested election breaking the stereotype of women's participation in the political administrations. Though the failures, they were able to empower women in the form of their will power to fight for their equality. It is evident enough that women were confined in the household work in the olden days but gone are those days as we witness many challenges taken up by the women to fit in and prove that they are able in the modernized world of Nagas although there is still some accepting to do from the counterparts regarding the women's participation in the field of polities.

- *Women and Inheritances*

When talk a about inheritances, land is the most intrinsic aspect of property that Naga societies placed under the umbrella of inheritance. Land is one of the fundamental means of production. A gender difference depicts much of its nature in the Naga societies when it comes to the inheritance of the property. Land has always been a source of wealth and status among the Nagas and it is land that has been portrayed as a property that determines the power of an individual. Men along the ages have been gifted with an inheritances including land by their parents as a wedding gifts. It is the male member in the family that inherits the land of their parents. In fact, the youngest male in the family get the house as an inheritance which are still been practised today. The reason may be unknown as to why male members in the family are

given the priority to inherit the land however, the cause root of this practice can be traced back to the ancient period with ancient mindset where male member in the family are considered to be the superior and thus, all properties were handed over to the men in the family. Precisely, men were exclusively the owner of the land. Women played a vital role in agricultural activities such as food production and maintaining their responsibility in providing food for consumption in the family. Women have contributed their parts in maintaining the agricultural activities, food production and household managements actively but they were deprived in controlling and accessing the lands because of the constraining gender roles. Though the contributions of women in every aspect regarding the land are equal to that of men, many scholars are of the view that the land ownership was exclusively taken by the men. Thus, the land ownership was exclusive to men and women were deprived from inheriting the land by the cultural and traditional norm that were practised in the ancient days and has been till today among some of the Naga tribes (J.Toshimenla, 2014).

Women today, as narrated by some of the women has been fortunate enough to have been the owner of the land. In contrary to the ancient norm regarding the ownership of land, women today are being presented and gifted the property in the form of land as a wedding or parting gift from their parents. It is evident that the women in the family are considered as equal to that of men member in the family and so parents do divide the property equally to their children be it male or female. Though not all the Naga tribes do the same thing in their family but it is safe to say that the exclusivity of land has been somehow deteriorating among the Nagas. Hence, the modernity has been playing a role in changing the mindset of the Nagas to some extent.

Women in the ancient days suffered to some extent to make their identity and abilities known but due to the traditions practiced in the early days shunned their dreams to be known as they are capable of. One cannot fully blame the traditional and cultural norms that subjugate the women from their abilities back in the olden days. Traditions are cultures are two main driving aspects that the villages and societies functions. These two aspects cannot be separated as it is the fundamental source that derives the functions of the villages. There's a huge gap in the life of traditional way of living and modern way of living as seen and discussed in the above mentioned points regarding the women in many fields. There are countless fields that the women were subjugated and demoralized but it is the way the ancient period functions and one is ought to respect and follow the traditional norms that has been present. However, by the coming of civilization, it is evident that

women are starting to come out of the shell provided the help of male members in the family or societies. The ancient treatment of the women has drastically in transition and will continue to do so if provided with equality and liberty. Hence, it is safe to conclude that the Naga women are no longer the ancient women. The ways they look at themselves are way more different than the way they looked at themselves earlier. The last straw at the camel's back has broken and the women has emerged themselves as more capable than ever.

- *Retrieval of Titles*

Sumi women lived a life under the shadow of a man meaning the title that belongs to women changes after the women marries a man from different clan and that women take after the title of her husband. Women always had a label such as someone's wife, someone's mother and someone's daughter but by the coming of modernity, women today has realized the importance that the title of their own is for their lifelong identity. The Sumi Totimi Hoho (Sumi Women's Organization) has made a hue and cry for the women to keep their identity and that they cannot be owned. The petition to retrieve their title has been recognized and is granted which is one of the great achievements in the history of women empowerment. Today, Sumi women proudly walk the planet earth with their title. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has made a huge history for women or for that matter even before the 21<sup>st</sup> century women has been voicing out to demand their rightful place and rightful rights which has been fruitful. The retrieval of titles not only caters to the achievement of women but also aids to the status of women today.

- *No longer a Submissive Women*

Women no longer are submissive creatures and all societies have no doubt accepted the boldness of women in their way moving forward to be a stronger independent version of themselves. However, it should also be told that women have not yet achieved their certain dreams and desires to be who they want to be and what societies expects them to be so we are yet to arrive at the level of uniformity where women may express and explore their best selves. Having said that, the status of women in the rural and urban areas differ in this area because when we have a close study, urban areas are more willing to accept woman as their vulnerable self whereas rural areas are more prone to restrictions towards women. Naga societies is said to be casteless and

classless which ultimately brings Naga communities as an egalitarian communities but the question here is how far is egalitarianism practiced in the Naga societies? There is no doubt that the Naga women do enjoy all the privileges and freedom unlike Indian society however Naga women have had faced lot of struggles to be heard. The voice of the women has reached to the state of recognition and has been heard which is why women are on the rise. Taking about the Nagas being an egalitarian society contradicts the traditional expectations regarding women because gender roles that exists in the Naga societies has specified the contrary that men and women are labeled unequal in every aspects of life. For so long women has been fighting for their rights and as a matter of fact though the level of uniformity is yet to be achieved, women are seen actively participating in every sector equally as men and that is a staggering thing about women because regardless of gender roles women are voicing out and putting their voice into an action. Long gone are the days when women were subjugated and were expected to be submissive just because they were looked upon as the weaker gender. It is the cry of the women and humiliation that the women in general have faced sprung into the mindset that they have to be stronger and courageous in order to make their names known. Today, we see women with

multiple skills and are working in every sphere like that of men. Women are no longer known as somebody's wife but rather known by the label they build for themselves. Women no longer sit in the seat of submission but they sit in the seat of 'self made' whoever they want to be such as entrepreneur, politician, professor, doctor, officers and the list goes on (L. Watitula, 2019).

- *Women and Economic Development*

It is considered that the Naga women are the backbone of the agriculture but due to the oral traditions of the Nagas, the History of women's participation has been untold nor written or given credit. For so long women have been considered less than men which have become the reason of untold history of women. Even from the time of head hunting, the main occupation of the Nagas are agriculture and the food hunting, harvesting and gathering are the main source of their livelihood. Women have done an incredible work from keeping the household activities intact and agricultural activities are mostly done by women when men do the hunting and warfare activities. Women have worked tremendously and tirelessly which is staggering and still yet

untold in some ways. The man in the family is always considered to be the breadwinner just because the societies in the olden days regard women as the weaker gender which also aids to the reason of untold economic contributions of women. There has never been a time in the olden days when women are seen termed as breadwinner. The history of Naga women have told a different story of women such as women are the weaker gender and thus the history of women as a hard worker or the bread winner are being untold. All the untold history of women have come to the light due to the coming of modernity and therefore it is not only women who have realized their worth but it is also the societies that have opened their mind to rewrite and reimaging the work of the women in keeping the family intact as well as their economic contributions. It is always believed and said by many that the ministry begins at home. Ministry is not only about the work and the ways the family are nurtured by the word of God but it is also the good works and hard works that has been invested in keeping the family's and societies economy intact as well as contributions that has been made. Having said that, women has done and still does continue amazes many by their skills and abilities in the contributions made towards economy development. The women in the family taught their children all the agricultural works in the early age so that they can know and use the survival skills and that is one of the economic knowledge that has been imparted by the women and the mothers. Especially the girl child in the family were taught agricultural activities at the young age when the boys played outside with friends and this is one of the major reason why it is amazing when talk about the economic contributions of the women as agriculture is the main occupation of the Nagas. Therefore it is evident that women are also the strong contender alongside men in the economic development. The agricultural activities are still being carried out by both men and women in this modernized world especially in the rural areas. By the coming of Christianity, the contributions of women as well as the role played by the women as a breadwinner though untold in the olden days have come to light in the form of research, journals and articles. Let alone the agricultural activities that women has wonderfully yielded but women are also engaged in many different enterprises that contributes towards the economic development in the modernized world (Y. Vitsuo and T. Khobu, 2015).

- *Women Entrepreneurs*

Gone are the days when entrepreneurship are thought to be male dominated areas. Naga women has risen to be the example of their close one's as well as women at large that they can achieve anything that they desire if one is willing to dedicate their time and effort. The Naga world of entrepreneurs surely cannot deny that women are also the leading corporate world. Many women are earning as much as men in the areas like business and in most cases the business seems to flourish because we no longer live in the world where Nagas are thought as naked Nagas rather Nagaland has become a state where one will get to witness a high sense of fashion because the generation have developed tremendously. Women have shown their capabilities in the business areas and are almost in competition with men. Women now are indulged not only in clothing business but also crafting such as making of wearable ornaments as well as decorative items. Women have done right to themselves by involving in their best interest and being able to provide for the family. Women in the business world has ventured out and fulfilled their dreams of being an independent financially specially in the business areas. Long gone are the days when women were not allowed to work outside of home and depend only on their partners to provide food on the table. Women have changed their mindset regarding what they can do and cannot do such as flourishing in different kind of business is one of the most enduring journey women has achieved so far. In the interaction with some of the women entrepreneurs, it is evident that those women in the business line are doing more than expected in the corporate world and that they are determined to make a difference in the world where women are considered lesser than a men (O.Ricky, 2016).

- *Overall outlook of women: Not an object but a significant contributor in the community*

In Indian society women are considered to be the instrument that should please the society by maintaining their standards which is below men. One cannot deny the fact that women in the medieval age suffered just because they are born female. Women were objectified and viewed less deserving of any decisions they make in life. Women were simply stigmatized just for the simple fact that they are considered as the inferior being by birth.

Unlike the Indian culture, Nagas have become quite liberal regarding women's achievements and strength. Women enjoyed their social and community life. However, one cannot do away with the traditional belief that men are stronger in every area. Although women were given privileges, women in general always felt the need to be appreciated not just because for their women tag but for their capabilities in contributing to the society. Somehow in the mindset of the society or family women was and still is weaker sex mostly in the aspect of physicality. Women were treated with all the respect that one could give when it comes to household activities and still are appreciated for their hands in the home making. However, with the emergence of modernity, women have a stronger mindset to set their foot on anything besides home making that makes them feel empowered. Women now possess the mindset to cultivate their strength and abilities in seeking their rights in every aspects of their life. Women have come a long way enduring what was given to them at the very first place in the world of patriarchs which is now seen changing.

## Conclusion

By the emergence of modernity women all around the world has changed their mindset concerning their rights. The olden days women are by no means comparable to the modern day women. This is not to say the olden day's women are not capable to that of the modern day's women however the context and situation have changed and that the women who lived in both the old and modern context would definitely know the evolvements of the women in general. Women have fought their way up and have achieved their desired self in the present generation be it government jobs, entrepreneurs, academicians, politicians, activists, ordained pastors, orator, writers so on and so forth. Women in 21<sup>st</sup> century have gained their status that they deserve and that is one of the huge achievements in the women era. This is not to blame the men folks by being a patriarch but on the contrary men folks have contributed in lifting their women and encouraging the women to evolve and emerge in every way possible then can. Long gone are the days where women were expected to behave like a typical women, long gone are the days where women were limited of their freedom and rights, long gone are the days where women were expected only to work in the kitchen because the revolutionary has been made in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and that is women are respected by their abilities and capabilities which indicates the improved status of women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and that women are equally capable as men in every aspects of lives.

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