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The Politico-Economy Role And Its Cahllenges Of Monpa Women In Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract

The Monpa tribe, inhabiting the high-altitude regions of Tawang and West Kameng in Arunachal Pradesh, is distinguished by a unique cultural synthesis of Mahayana Buddhism and indigenous Himalayan traditions. This paper examines the critical, yet often under-documented, role of Monpa women in the community's politico-economic landscape.

Economically, Monpa women are the primary drivers of the domestic and agrarian economy. Beyond their role in high-altitude agriculture and animal husbandry, they possess exclusive mastery over traditional weaving and the production of indigenous paper and carpets-commodities that have historically been central to trans-Himalayan trade. Their control over the "granary" and household assets grants them a level of fiscal agency that is distinct among Himalayan tribes.

Politically, while traditional village councils (such as that tshogpa) were historically male-dominated, Monpa women have exerted significant "informal" political influence through religious institutions and community-based organization. With the introduction of the Panchayati Raj system, there has been notable transition from informal influence to formal leadership. However, their societal status was often secondary to men, with limited access to education and political participation. Through advocacy and support, NGOs have facilitated greater political participation and leadership opportunities for Monpa women, fostering an environment of gender equality and progressive change.

INTRODUCTION:

The Monpa is one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh largely concentrating in the districts of Tawang and West Kameng. The ethnographical study says that the word "Monpa" is derived from Tibetan language where the "Mon" signifies "Lower" and "Pa" means "People". Thus, the term Monpa is commonly addressed as the people living in South Tibet (Choudhury, 1996). Following this account the Monpas are said to have migrated from Tibet since the time immemorial and finally settled to the present districts of Tawang and West Kameng in Arunachal Pradesh.

Role and Responsibilities of Monpa Women: Historical Context:

The Monpa are traditionally shared a strong bonding with each other and highly valued to their cultural heritage that furthered endeavored and influences the roles of gender. The Monpa women are well respected and placed in a unique position that solemnly authorized to take up any responsibility that can benefit the family and whole society. Women are well known to have played a significant role n dealing with household activities, agriculture, animal husbandry, handicrafts, and preserving cultural roles in family and community life. However, the Monpa women do faces challenges such as limited access to resources, gender-based violence, and socio-economic disparities. Though the societal norms and practices evolve over time, and there may be on slught within to address the issue and bring more equitable society, the women faced challenges in many fronts. Some of the role ad responsibilities the women are actively engaged are household and family, agriculture, weaving and handicrafts, festivals and rituals, and religious life etc.

Political Participations of Monpa Women:

Political empowerment refers to the ability of individuals and marginalized groups to participate in political processes, influence decision-making, an hold government an institution accountable. It includes access to particle rights such as voting, contest election, civic engagement, advocacy for social justice, and representation in governance structures. In Monpa society, the participation of women in political activity was not looked upon in encouraging manner. Traditionally, women had virtually no role to play and were not equally treated, though there was no restriction for women becoming the member of their traditional council. However, they can freely participate in the preceding only she is involved in the case. Monpa women achieve political equality with men with the advent of modern administration. The recognition of political equality, in the Indian constitution was a radical departure from their traditional norms. Yet, the provisions of the constitution cold not bring the women at par with their counter parts because of their own antipathy and male chauvinism. With the advent of modern administrations, they were exposed to many new institutions such as Gaon Bora, Panchayati Raj system, Legislative assembly and parliament. Even in these institutions, women participation is very low. The participation as voters in elections indicates a trend of increase at each consecutive election. This shows improvement of their awareness of political right conferred on them by the constitution. However, the exercise of right even in Panchayat election is, in most cases, influenced by the male members of the family. So far as their participation as candidate in the election is concerned, it has been very low. In many tribal societies, including Monpa society, the gender roles may differ and complete sense of equality may not be feasible. It depends on various factors such as cultural norms, individual beliefs, and social dynamics within the community, however, it worth nothing that many societies, including Monpa society, are evolving, and there are ongoing affords to empower women even in political representation.

Table 1: Present Status of Monpa Women in the Decision-Making Process

Data	Frequency	Percentage
Equal	35	70
Unequal	5	10
Treated unfairly	10	20

Source: Field Visit, 2024

Economic Role of Monpa Women:

Unlike in the tradition, the Monpa women are no longer confining in household activities; they are entering the modern labor market. There are many enterprising that women are involved especially in a running shops and small-scale industries. Many are also employed in craft centers like weaving and knitting. The educated women are taking up services and professions like doctors, nurse, teachers, clerks, engineers, police, etc. the men folk no longer raise objection to their wife/daughters for doing outdoor jobs. There is no denying the fact that the employment of women has helped a lot to family in raising the standard of living. Women's increased participation in work force directly contributes to economic growth of a family. When more women are employed, it expands the labor force, leading to higher productivity and output. These not only benefits individual women and their families but also boost overall economic activity by increasing consumer spending and saving. While conducted as survey, it is also reflected in the response that almost all women have expressed that the household work should be treated as an occupation equal to other paid jobs. This view appears to be a radical in the rural villages, but has become much appealing to women who readily agreed to it. Monpa women perform household chores and are also capable to pursue professional career. However, this does not preclude them from pursuing professional careers or other aspirations outside the home. Many women are indeed capable of balancing their responsibilities within the household with their professional endeavors. With advancements in education and changes in society attitudes, more women are entering various professions, contributing to their families and communities well-being while also pursuing their own goals and ambitions.

Table 1.1: Monpa Women are Capable to Pursue Professional Career

Data	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	50	100
no	0	0

Source: Field Visit, 2024

Current Status of Monpa Women:

The status of women in the Monpa tribe, primarily residing in the north-eastern region of India has seen significant changes in recent years. Traditionally, Monpa women played crucial roles within their households and communities, engaged in agricultural activities, and were skilled in crafts like weaving. However, their societal status was often secondary to men, with limited access to education and political participation. Recent advancements in education, healthcare, and government initiatives aimed at empowering women have led to improve literacy rates and greater economic independence among Monpa women. Increasingly, Monpa women are pursuing higher education, participation in local governance, and becoming more involved in decision-making processes within their communities. This shift is gradually redefining gender roles and enhancing the social and economic status of women in the Monpa tribe.

Challenges and issues:

Women face significant, intersecting challenges in the political-economy, primarily driven by patriarchal norms, lack of financial autonomy, and structural barriers. Key challenges to women in political-economy:

- **Challenges for women's right and empowerment:** Despite these positive changes, challenges remain, such as persistent gender inequality in some spheres like gender inequality, limited access to resources, and opportunities in remote areas, and the need for greater awareness of women's rights and empowerment is required a calibrated from all fronts.

- **Women status in family:** the gender dynamics is visible in Monpa society where women are considered inferior to men. But, efforts for equality is actively pursuing though complete parity may not always be achieved. There are instances where women enjoy equal status with men within the family, and sometime the traditional gender roles influence the distribution of power, responsibilities, and decision-making. According to the survey, 56 percent of the respondents have said the women enjoy equal status with men while the rest 48 percent differed and signaling of prevailing inequality.

Table 1.2: Monpa Women enjoy Equal Status in Family

Data	Frequenc y	Percentage
Yes	26	56
no	24	48

1. **Gender Inequality:** Despite their significant roles, the Monpa women face gender-based challenges. Imposition of traditional patriarchal norms limits the women decision-making power and accessibility to resources.
2. **Free Access to Resources:** Although there is lot of improvement for the women in the community especially living in urban areas, yet, there is still a hurdle to access healthcare, education, and economic opportunities in the remote areas, affecting women's overall development and empowerment.
3. **No shared of immovable property:** The status of women is comparatively better than other part of India. They have sense of self respect, control over their lives, make choices and decisions, and to some degree access to resources and opportunity. More so, the women in Monpa families enjoy respect and freedom. But, when it comes to the issue of property, it is always in the name of father and continued to inherit by the son. Women have no rights or roles to play with except give suggestion when consulted for her opinion. Traditionally, the Monpa women were not allowed to enjoy any right on the family property and remain content with only movable items.

Table 1.3: Monpa Women do not inherit immovable property

Data	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	50	100
No	0	0

- a. **Religious Hindrance:** The Monpas follow a sect of Mahayana Buddhist and their life and culture are centered round the monastery. Women are expected to strictly abide by the principles of the religion performing rituals and ceremonies for the happiness and prosperity of the family. Although the changing socio-politico circumstances are demanding of the women to liberate and acquire the benefit of modernity, the Monpa are highly tradition bound society and women to come out of this age old tradition is facing tremendous impediment.
- b. **Marginalization of women in Decision-Making:** According to the survey, the reason for this is because of the limited accessibility of women to education. This hinders their ability to contribute fully in decision-making. The other factor is burdening on household duties do not permit women to participate in decision-making process. Large of the women are holding significant role in informal leadership where they actively participate in community activities such as festivals, religious ceremonies, social gatherings. This involvement provides little opportunity to contribute their opinion and influence decision that affects the community's welfare.

Table 1.4: Reason for marginalization of Women Decision-Making

Data	Frequency	percentage
Burden of household duties	20	40
Lack of access to education	30	60

Source: Field visit, 2024

Conclusion

Though historically the Monpa tribe had been following patriarchal system with men typically holding the decision-making authority in family and society, it has transformed in recent decades where the women were also allowed to represent in decision-making process. It is a path-breaking step that moves towards greater empowerment and equality for the women. There are many factors in this dynamic but one of them is access to modern education. This expanded the horizon and rationality of the Monpa tribe especially the men wherein allowing opportunities for women, enabling them to participate more actively in various spheres of life. Since then, the Monpa women can be seen actively progressing in economic empowerment. Further, it has enhanced their roles and influence within their families and communities. The legislative reforms and social awareness campaigns have also contributed to advancing women's rights and challenging traditional gender norms. Despite this positive development, challenges remain, including persistent gender disparities in education, cultural barriers, equal opportunities, and representation of women in decision-making processes. Overall, the journey towards gender equality is ongoing; the trajectory shows promising signs of progress, driven by a combination of grassroots activism, policy reform, and changing societal attitudes towards women's empowerment and rights.

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