
CHANGING STATUS OF WOMEN IN SIKKIM

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Abstract: Economic, social and political developments in Sikkim have brought a profound change in the status of women. In general the conditions of women have improved in all the spheres such as political, social and economic change that favours equality and individual rights. At the same time cultural tradition aspects also influenced the status of women. Women in Sikkim enjoy greater mobility and freedom as compare to other region of India. At the same time advent of globalisation gave rise to the scenario of global integration. Similarly, women of Sikkim also incurred by the influence of globalisation and even changed the standard of life style. Though, Sikkim followed the nature of patriarchal system, woman seems to possess the better position. There are several NGOs and civil societies are working for the benefit of women and their main task is to protect women from domestic violence, natural calamities, structural violence, etc. The participation of women in political system has also increased and Government of Sikkim guaranteed fifty percent reservation for women in Panchayati Raj system. In the economic field women are contributed a lot and they own equal property rights but this right has not been implemented yet legally. But most of the family in Sikkimese society parents used to give property to their daughter as a gift in all the communities. The historical setting of Sikkim reflects that the women's position was not mentioned in any literature in the monarchical period. After the post monarchic period Sikkim adopted democratic system and the status of women also started too improved in the various field. So, in this backdrop this article attempts to explore the changing status of women and nature of empowerment in the era of globalisation.

Keywords: globalisation, international organisations, political participation, women.

Introduction: Changing status of women in globalisation era becomes a crucial element which caught the attention of many feminist scholars. The advent of globalisation epitomised the position of women in the society, with the active participation in different women organisation

which keenly made for women and their overall development. For instance, there are several international, national organisation are actively working for women in international, national and regional level. Women are characterised as a vulnerable during the situation of conflict, violence as well as in natural disaster. So they required protection in vulnerable situation. This study tries to explore how the concept of globalisation affects upon the status of women in Sikkim.

Concept of Globalisation: Globalisation is the process of transformation of local or regional phenomena into global ones. The concepts of globalisation define as the integration of economic, political and cultural transformation across the borders. It provide platform to the expansion of markets worldwide due to the porous borders. Nayef R.F. Al-Rodhan and Gerard Stoudmann define globalisation is “a process that encompasses the causes, course, and consequences of translational and trans-cultural integration of human and non-human activities” (Nithya N.R: 2014:728). Noam Chomsky argues that the word globalisation describe as the neo-liberal form of economic globalisation. The concept of globalisation was existed in the early period but it became popular in the year 1990s onwards.

The advent of globalisation gave rise to the different international organisation such as Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, State Commission of Women, Universal Declaration of Human rights, etc., has been playing crucial role in the development of women. UN’s Millennium Development Goals came out as a remedy for gender disparities; which prioritised to gender equality and women empowerment. While the goal of gender equality adopted by many international agreements but it lacked the meaningful female participation. Female representation in government institutions and decision-making bodies is crucial for the overall empowerment of women, especially their inclusion in decisions about all issues. Most of the women were detached from the decision making process, the main reason behind this is the practice of patriarchal system in most of the South-Asian and Sub-Saharan African countries. Father appears to be head of the family and all the major decision are decided by them in the field of domestic as well as other political, social and economical matters.

Women in earlier period of India performed a subordinate role in socio-cultural, economic and political field; their role in administration was non-existent particularly with the advent of Hindu law (*manusmriti*). The

traditional customs and culture prohibits them in getting inheritance of property rights. They spent their time in household matters. In the modern India, Constitution of India provides equal rights both for men and women in the entire field. Under Article 14, Constitution guaranteed equality before law and equal protection and Article 15, forbids the discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, sex and race. Under Hindu Succession Act equal rights enjoyed by both men and women.

Among the north-eastern states, Khasi of Meghalaya followed the matriarchal society and women have more power in decision making bodies. In case of Arunachal and Manipur one-third of the Panchayat seats have been reserved for woman candidates.

Sikkim in Glance: Sikkim is the second smallest state among the Northeast states and on 16th May 1975 Sikkim became 22nd state of Indian Union. It has estimated that the total population of Sikkim to be 610577, among them 323070 are males and 287507 are female (according to the 2011 census). Before the merger of Sikkim to India, it was monarchical state ruled by the Namgyal Dynasty. Post independent Sikkim adopted democratic system of government. Sikkim consists of three communities Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepali. Their culture, customs religions varies but they intermingled with each other. Sikkimese women have a better position in socio-economic and political field. Patriarchal system is common among all the communities. The available literature of history of Sikkim was not mentioned about the status of women. But the present status has improved a lot due to the integration of more participation of women in decision making bodies. There has been a slightly change in the role of women in Sikkim as compare to earlier monarchical period. In that particular period of time women did not have role to play in decision making bodies and as well as other spheres. There are several civil societies and national organisations such as State Commission of Women, Human Right Law Networks mainly deals with the empowerment of women.

Women in the Educational field: Sikkim government came up with different initiatives such as Mukhya mantri saaksharta Abhiyan (total literacy scheme 2015) which aim to eradicate illiteracy in Sikkim by 2015 and to achieve 100 % literacy rate in Sikkim. As per the population Census of India 2011, the literacy rate of India has improved than the 2001 census. In 2001 the literacy rate was 68.81 and out of this male literacy was 76.04 % and female-60.41 %. The present data of total literacy rate

according to 2011 census is 82.20 % and male-87.30% and female-76.43% (2011 Census). At presently number of female students has increased in the schools and different colleges of Sikkim.

Expansion of knowledge and advance information technology in the field of education is the one way or the other related to globalisation. The introduction of computers and internet facilities and other information technology became the medium of learning process across the world. The scientific way of learning made a modern man to get access to knowledge and information in a instant manner by oneself but at the same time people are isolated form the interaction with the community which drive towards more materialist world (Razak:2011:62).

Participation of Women in Political arena: Inclusive growth, which is the motto of 11th five year plan of Indian Government, it can be achieved only through inclusive governance. It can be boomed with the well functioning of system of Panchayats. Panchayati Raj institutions are the local self governance body of the people and it plays crucial role for planning and implementating the programmes for socio-economic and political development. The government of Sikkim announced 50% reservation for women in Panchayat. The post-independent period Sikkim adopted democratic system and decentralisation of powers is the main objective of democratic form of government. Such system were characterised by the grass root participation of people in the society. When Sikkim merged with India in 1975 in that particular period there was a minimum participation of women in the political field. When globalisation came into exist in 1991 onwards, the number of participation of women also increased and most of the women became panchayats in different village. So, empowerment of women is one of the main agenda of the Sikkim Government. On the other hand participation of women shows the representative in the decision making bodies.

Role of Women in Economic Sphere: Women considered as main assets of household and economic activities but they do not possessed legal rights to inheritance of property. If daughter remains unmarried then parents customarily transfer some property in her name. The engagement of Sikkimese women in economic activities contributes a lot in farming sector in sowing and harvesting crops. The main source of economy in Sikkim is agriculture and animal husbandry, which based on traditional farming and agricultural is based on the mixed type. The female participation in agriculture is also higher in Sikkim. Number of

women in government jobs is greater than that of men (Lama: 2001:33). Women also work as paid agricultural labourers, construction workers, and take part in economic activities like selling of vegetables in the market place (Lama: 2001:34).

Impact of Globalisation: Globalisation brought both the positive as well as negative impact. On the negative side globalisation has created disparities by creating imbalance in generation of income. It has brought people in contact with cultures from across the world and most of the people have adopted the new cultures which directly neglect one's own culture. Globalisation promotes homogenous society changing the world of its heterogeneous nature. Dominance of English language as an important international language, obsession for American lifestyle in terms of their fast food like KFC and McDonald, preference over American branded items like clothing, music and movies are clear indicators of the homogenisation of societies in the world is taking place (Razak:2011:64).

In the process of globalisation it gave emergence of number of international organisations such as Non-Governmental Organisations, Intergovernmental Organisation and civil societies indirectly affect the conventional westphalian notion of nation state. Economic globalisation generated jobs for women in export-processing and free marketing zones. This has enabled women in many developing countries to earn and control income and to break away from the hold of patriarchal structures, including traditional household and male dominated hierarchy. At the same time, women's unemployment rates are higher than men which gave result into the feminisation of poverty is another unwelcome feature of economic globalisation (Moghadam: 1999:368).

Conclusion: The notion of gender and globalisation become crucial in understanding the status of women. The emergence of feminist theory is the result of globalisation. It brought both negative as well as positive impact upon life-style of women in the world. Women in Sikkim also witnessed the impact of globalisation in field of socio-political and economic spheres, they got chance to participate in all the fields. They started to challenge the dominant version of patriarchal system. The western ideas also somehow impact upon the traditional culture of Sikkim, which ultimately diminish traditional value system of the particular region.

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