

Ethnic aliens of Mizoram: Tribal women and their educational empowerment: Juxtapose: The Mara tribe

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Abstract

The Mara people are the native inhabitants of Mizoram State which is situated in extreme eastern corner of India. They constitute a district tribal group living in Saiha district of Mizoram state and are governed by 'Mara Autonomous District Hill Council'. Mara tribe of Mizoram is schedule tribe which is centered on patriarchal ideology. Birth of girl child is welcomed in the family due to bride price practice. Girl is considered as a helper and secondary worker. Women empowerment is a critical issue in society where their own laws do not permit women to inherit any property from parents or in-law's side. Decision making is done by male members. Society is bounded by taboos and only the seeds of education can uplift their social status as well as bring empowerment in tribal women.

Keywords: empowerment, tribe, status

Introduction

Women empowerment is a burning issue since independence. Lots of policies and plans have been made by government to empower women but still due to patriarchal structure of society goal of achieving women empowerment are far apart. Female feticide, domestic violence, sexual harassment etc are the resultant products of patriarchy. Condition is worst in case of tribes. Mara is one of the major tribe of Mizoram inhabiting in a land known as Mara-land. Women of Mara tribe are laborious and act as secondary workers whereas in society major decisions are taken by men.

Material and methods

For the present research work, sample of 509 tribal people of Mara tribe (300 males and 209 females) belonging to different age groups and education levels were selected from Saiha district by using Stratified Random Sampling Technique. Both qualitative as well as quantitative methods of data analysis have been used for analyzing the data. To ascertain the comparative status of Mara tribal women, historical method and survey method were used. Interviews of different people of society were also conducted to clarify the status. Questionnaires were administered to know the present status. Data has been analyzed on percentage basis.

Objective

To study the exploratory status of Mara tribal women of Mizoram state in educational context.

Hypothesis

There exists a change in the status of Mara tribal women in the area of educational empowerment.

Results and discussion

Status of Educational Empowerment of Mara Tribal Women In Past

1. In Mara Land, Christian Missionaries were the first inspiring agent for formal education. Before 1908, education was imparted in 'Lajpho' to the boys in 'Mara Reih' which is their local language and girls education was restricted to knowledge of domestic / house hold works from their mothers and elder sisters.
2. First written script and letter was made by Capt. S.R. Tickwell in 1852.
3. Mr. R. A. Lorrain opened first formal school in Mara Land on 16 March 1908 in Saikawn with the help of pioneer Christian Mission. Again, education was imparted only to boys.
4. To uplift the status of woman, first school for girls was opened in 1929. T. Losai and Hadley were the first teachers. However, at that time, girls who got education were not preferred by society, not even for marriage. Parents were not willing to send their daughters to school in order to get their domestic help in Jhoom cultivation. To encourage the women education, initially Sunday schools for girls were opened by Missionaries where they were provided with the training of tailoring, then reading, writing, teaching scriptures, learning short talk on Bible etc. Girls after completing their house hold chores, spent their afternoon in schools and help the Mission people in translation of 'Mara Reih'.
5. Tailoring and stitching classes by Missionaries made the girls smarter and independent. Later on Mara girls were sent to school for studying, writing, doing simple arithmetic calculations, knowledge of hygiene, needle work, embroidery etc.

Status of educational empowerment of mara tribal women at present

1. In the year 1935 there were two schools in Mara Land - one was for boys and the other for girls. In 1938, two more schools were opened. Women's school was closed in 1942 due to II World War. After Independence, the government of India has opened only co-ed schools in Mara Land. The government of India restarted the combined schools in 1947, with 21 primary schools and one middle school. Tailoring is the monopoly work of women since the sewing classes started by the missionaries. This education given to girls made them raise their standards of living.
2. Little effort had been made by Missionaries in bringing educational parity in sexes. There was need to lay greater emphasis on education among women and girls but the missionaries did not undertake any developmental activities for women but provided facilities to Christian missions who undertook minimum education and full medical facilities along with their proselytizing activities.
3. The ruling British authorities realized that it was their duty to do something for the education of the people under their rule. In India as a whole the missionaries and other organizations made English as the medium of instruction because language plays an important role in the growth of a human being from a biological animal to a social animal.
4. Literacy is an important factor for uplifting the status of since onle educated women can involve themselves in decision making, family planning, financial planning etc.
5. The analysis of data regarding perceived educational aspirations of Mara Tribal Girls out of 509 respondents (209 female and 300 male), 95 (45.28%) female and 147 (48.93%) male expressed that woman needs education to make herself a useful being. 67 (32.07%) female and 45 (14.89%) male, expressed that woman needs education so as to become independent and 36 (16.98%) female and 95 (31.91%) male said that it is required to help her children in their studies and 11 (5.66%) female and 13(4.2%) male said that education is required so as to expand her knowledge base. Analysis of data reveals that majority of Mara people perceive Girls education as a tool to make her a useful being. This shows improvement in status of Mara Women in educational empowerment with the passage of time.
6. The reasons for not favouring girls in higher education. The analysis of 509 total respondents (209 female and 300 male) reveals that 95 (45.28%) female and 45 (14.89%) male expressed that it was difficult to find a suitable partner if a girl got higher education. 51 (24.52%) female and 77 (25.53%) male expressed that higher education made a girl neglects her domestic work. 35 (16.98%) female and 89 (29.78%) male expressed that educated girls failed to give respect to their husbands and their relatives and finally 28 (13.20%) female and 89 (29.78%) male expressed that girls become proud and arrogant if they get higher education. Analysis of data reveals that after getting higher education, girl will face difficulty in getting a suitable partner and girl will also neglect her house hold work. This reflects the orthodox views of Tribal Society.

Conclusion

Every society weather primitive or modern has a social organization framed by men, women and children. Mara society is characterized by deeply communitarian nature where men and women mix together freely. Thus, it is difficult to make rigid distinction between male and female in work areas which usually let the outside observer feels that there is no distinction between male and female and status of women is no longer inferior to men. But in reality, it is different. It is high time to reveal that depression which haunts many women who have great intellectual ability, much physical strength or the capacity to administer well, but whose God given abilities are sub judged and suppressed by the rules and the customs of society and church. Education being a main factor for women empowerment can not only means mastering the three R's but should enable us to be masters of our lives. Education is providing special analytical skills which are changing the status of tribal women in India. This study clearly indicates how education is changing the attitude of society and positively influencing the status of women.

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