



Economic and Social Status of Tiwa Women: A Study of Five Tribal Villages of Morigaon District in Assam.

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Abstract:

This paper is an attempt to investigate the economic and social status of the Tiwa women in Morigaon district of Assam. The study is mainly confined only with five Tribal villages dominating the Tiwa community in the district. In order to find out how far the Tiwa women have empowered themselves in the present stage of women empowerment and their contribution to family income, a survey is conducted taking 50 (fifty) households from the randomly selected five villages. Morigaon is one of the backward districts where the sex-ratio is more than Assam. Information regarding economic and demographic status, level of formal education, level of income and occupation of the households has been collected through personal interview with the help of structured schedules and questionnaire. The study finds that the literacy rate among the Tiwa women is low than the male literacy rate and they are economically dependent on their male counterpart.

Key Words: Economic, Tiwa Women, Status.

I. Introduction:

The status of women in any civilization shows the stage of evolution at which the civilization has arrived. The term 'status' includes not only personal and proprietary rights but also duties, liabilities and disabilities. In the case of an Indian woman, it means her personal rights, proprietary rights, her duties, liabilities and disabilities vis-à-vis in the society and her family members. In the Vedic era, women had sufficient freedom of going to attend fairs, festivals and assemblies. They were not confined to four walls of their family houses. There is no mention of Purdah system. During the post-Vedic period, women started to lose the status in society. She lost her independence and became a subject of protection. During the Moghul rule, the socio-economic status

of Hindu women were very much lowered and had to depend on Hindu male in every activity. The social evils like Purdah system came into force. Child marriage was prevalent. Lack of education, early marriage, non-existence of employment opportunities and absence of absolute property rights were the main cause's of inequality of sex in the socio-economic field. The assumption of superiority of males has built up the ideas of male dominance and female dependence. During the British rule in India, legislation was used to bring about significant modifications in the structure of society. Various reforms were initiated with respect to status of women.

After independence attainment of equal status for women in every sphere of life was enshrined as one of the main objectives of Indian Constitution. Right from the First five year plan the issue of providing equal status to women has been sharply focused in the development process. The Eight five year plan made a significant shift from 'development' to 'women empowerment'. It recommended 33 per cent reservation for women at all levels of Government.

About the Tiwa (Lalung):

The Tiwas are an ethnic group of people found both in the north and south banks of the Brahmaputra as well as in some hill regions. The Tiwa society is generally patriarchal in nature though certain matrilineal traces are found in their traditions and customs (Das, S and Baruah, J, 2022). This small tribe mostly resides in the western part of Nagaon and Morigaon district. They are also a branch of the Bodo-Kachari racial stock. Originally they lived in Khasi-Jayantia region and from there they came down to the plains (Sarma, 1989). Having partially accepted Hinduism they became Assamese in dress, manners and speech. They worship all the deities. But they have not totally discarded their tribal beliefs, customs and observances. They are an endogenous community



but do not marry within the clan. Women of Tiwa community are very active in their household and agricultural activities. But the process of their activities is primitive in nature due to their illiteracy (Saikia, M 2019). Before the occupation of Assam by the British, the Lalungs had their own petty kings who were feudatories to the Ahom monarch. The principality known as Gobha was ruled by a feudal king.

Objectives of the study:

1. To examine the economic and social status of Tiwa (Lalung) women in Morigaon district of Assam.
2. To explore the determining factors leading to their present status in the society.

II. Methodology:

Morigaon district has been purposefully selected in our study, because in this district, the Tiwas (Lalung) constitute the major tribe and this study tries to investigate the status of Tiwa women. The district comprising of hill areas, is mostly inhabited by various castes and tribes. The study is mainly confined only with five tribal villages of the district. It is basically a micro- level study.

There are five Community Development Blocks (CDB) in the district namely Mayong CDB, Laharighat CDB, Bhurbandha CDB, Kapili CDB and Moirabari CDB. Out of the five CDB's, only one development block namely Bhurbandha CDB, and Morigaon Sub-division have been purposefully selected, considering the predominance of Tiwa Community living in these areas. From the Bhurbandha Development Block four Tiwa villages and one village from Morigaon Sub-division have been randomly selected for our

study and thereafter, ten household from each village have been randomly chosen and detailed information regarding economic and demographic status, level of formal education acquired by the women, level of income and landholding pattern of the household have been collected through personal interview with the help of structured schedules and questionnaire. The data so collected at the field level have been analyzed with the help of simple statistical tools. In this study, both primary and secondary data have been used. The secondary information was collected from various published reports, census data, books and journals.

Morigaon District: A Brief Profile

Geography and Location:

The Morigaon district having a total population of 9,57,853(as per 2011 census) and covering a geographical area of 1551 sq.kms. is bounded by the mighty Brahmaputra on the North, Karbi-Anglong district on the South, Nagaon district on the East and Kamrup district on the West. The greater part of the district is an alluvial plain, criss-crossed with numerous rivers and waterways and dotted with many beels and marshes. Killing, Kollong and Kapili rivers flow through the Southern part of the district.

There are three Reserved Forests constituted under Assam Forest Regulation Act 1891. These are Sonaikuchi, Khulihat and Bura Mayong. The Pabitora National Forest Famous for its thick forests, resort of one-horned rhino is situated on South-Western part of the district. Agriculture is the mainstay for the people belonging to both tribal and non-tribal.

Demographic Profile:

Table-1 shows the demographic features of Assam and Morigaon.

Table-1

Demographic features of Assam and Morigaon, 2011 Census.

District/ State	Area (Sq.km)	Population	Rural Population	Urban population	% of rural population	Sex ratio	% of Literacy	Density per sq.km
Morigaon	1,551	9,57,853	8,84,557	73296	92.35	974	69.37	618
Assam	78,438	3,11,69,272	26780516	4388756	85.92	954	73.18	397

Source: Census of India, 2011

Table-1 reveals that population of Morigaon district is predominantly rural and the literacy ratio is also low as compared to the state literacy rate. But the sex-ratio which shows the female per thousand male is more in Morigaon

district than the state level according to 2011 census. The percentage decadal growth of population between 2001-2011 in the district is 23.39 against 16.93 experienced in Assam during the same period. Perhaps this is due to low literacy



rate among tribal people. Poverty, low level of literacy, lack of mother's basic health knowledge, etc. have profound effect on the fertility of women. Health knowledge learned in school assist future mothers in diagnosing and treating child health problems and formal schooling makes women more receptive to modern medical treatments and

adopting contraceptive devices for controlling fertility behaviour.

The literacy rate among women of major ST's is found very low compared to male literacy rate. This can be shown from the following table.

Table-2

Literacy rate among ST's

Sl	Name of the Scheduled Tribes	Literacy rate (7yrs. & above)			
		Total	Male	Female	Gender Gap
1	All Scheduled Tribes	62.5	72.3	52.4	19.9
2	Dimasa	59.6	69.4	49.3	20.1
3	Mikir	53.7	64.1	43.0	21.1
4	Bodo	61.3	71.4	51.1	20.0
5	Deori	76.2	84.8	67.5	17.3
6	Kachari	81.4	88.2	74.4	14.2
7	Lalung (Tiwa)	61.8	72.0	51.6	20.4
8	Miri	60.1	71.4	98.3	23.1
9	Rabha	66.7	76.2	57.0	19.2

Source: Office of the Registrar General, India Census of India-2001

Kachari (Sonowal) with 81.4 per cent literacy rate is well ahead of others while Mikir has recorded the lowest literacy rate (53.7 per cent) among major ST's. Gender gap in literacy among Mikir has been recorded to the highest 23.1 per cent points followed by Lalung with 20.4 per cent points. In case of female literacy rate, the Miri has recorded highest with 98.3 per cent while female literacy rate of Lalung community is only 51.6 per cent. It is far below the male literacy rate. Thus table-2 clearly demonstrates that Tribal women are lagging far behind than their male counterpart in terms of literacy rate.

Field Study: Data Analysis:

The study was conducted in five selected villages of Morigaon district, Assam in order to find out the status of Tiwa women among the tribal people. The selected villages are mostly inhabited by Lalung community. Lalungs are also known as Tiwa. Lalungs are mainly concentrated in Kapili, Mayong, Laharighat and Bhurbandha community development block areas of Morigaon district. The names of the selected villages surveyed have been shown in Table-3.

Table-3

Name of villages surveyed with sample households and their demographic profile:

Sl.No.	Name of the villages	No. of Households surveyed	No. of family members		
			Male	Female	Total
1	Nabhethi	10	26	29	55
2	Paniboghara	10	25	41	66
3	Hatigaon	10	27	22	49
4	Oujari	10	36	31	67
5	Garukhuti	10	25	30	55
	Total	50	139	153	292

Source: Field Survey.



It has been observed from the Table-3 that the ratio of female to male is more than 52 per cent and the average size of family members is approximately 6 persons. Thus, the family size of the surveyed households can not be considered as small. This is perhaps due to lack of mothers education and low level of literacy among Lalung women associated with other socio-economic factors. All the villages except Nabheti are situated in Bhurbandha development block, while Nabheti is located in Morigaon Sub-division.

Occupational Pattern of the Sample Households:

Agriculture is the primary occupation of the sample households. Out of 50 households, 31 households earn their livelihood from agriculture which is still carried on with primitive tools. Due to fragmentation of landholding and adoption of the old technique of cultivation, the economic life of the people is far from satisfactory. The occupational pattern of the surveyed households has been depicted in Table-4.

Table-4
Occupational Pattern of the Surveyed Households.

Sl. No.	Name of the villages	Agriculture	Service	Daily wage Earners	Retail Trade/ Small business
1	Nabheti	5	3	2	-
2	Paniboghara	8	1	1	-
3	Hatigaon	9	-	-	1
4	Oujari	1	2	5	2
5	Garukhuti	8	-	2	-
	Total	31	6	10	3
	100	62%	12%	20%	6%

Source: Field Survey.

Table- 4 reveals that 62% of the surveyed households are engaged in primary occupation followed by daily wage labourers which constitute 20 percent of the total households. Though the contribution of agriculture to Gross National Product at the National level is declining to 15.2 percent, in Morigaon district agriculture has been the source of livelihood to majority of the households. Further, if we add daily wage labour engaged in agricultural activities, the percentage

share would be 82 which demonstrate that non farm activities are not growing in the villages. It is also observed that women help their male counterparts in agriculture, and they have no own service or occupation. Hence most of the farms holdings of the surveyed households are uneconomic, small and fragmented. Table-5 depicts the educational and economic status of Tiwa women of the surveyed household.

Table-5
Educational and economic status of Tiwa women of the surveyed households:

Sl. No.	Name of the villages	Level of education				Service	Member of SHG's
		Up to class viii	Below HSLC	HSLC passed	HSSLC passed		
1	Na-bheti	8	1	1	-	1	5
2	Paniboghara	9	1	0	-	0	4
3	Hatigaon	7	2	1	-	0	6
4	Oujari	9	1	-	-	0	7
5	Garukhuti	6	3	1	-	1	5
	Total	39	8	3	0	2	27
		78%	16%	6%	0	4%	54%

Source: Field Survey



Table-5 shows that most of the women's educational qualification is up to class eight. It contains 78% and HSLC failed is 16% while only 6% women are HSLC passed. There are no graduate women. Due to low educational qualification, awareness about girls' education and about various schemes provided by the Govt. is also low among the Lalung women. Some of them are employed in Anganwadi workers and 54% of the sample women are the members of self-help Group (SHG's). Majority of the women do not possess any bank Pass-book. So it implies financial exclusion among the Lalung women. Their economic condition is very poor, they have no pakka houses and well-organised sanitation facilities. Their standard of living is very low. Some of them are living hand-to-mouth. Thus the poor economic condition has led the Lalung women towards low social status. Since, the women do not possess any Government services or own business, so they are unable to contribute to the family income. They have to depend on their male counterparts. Only a few women engage in weaving which is for their own purpose. Most women reported that their decision making power in the family is low as a result of their economic dependency. In regard to control of income, it is mostly in the hands of men. Most women seemed to think that they enjoy joint ownership of household assets. Drop-out ratio in school is high in case of girl than the boy. It implies negligence about the girl's education.

Economic and social status of Tiwa women depends on factors like occupational pattern, level of education and amount of contribution to family income. So, economic and social status is dependent variable and occupation, education and income are the independent variable. There exist a positive relation between level of education and status of Tiwa women in the society. As the level of education increases among the Tiwa women, they become aware about their position in the society.

III. Findings of the study:

Major findings of the study are-

- Sex ratio of Morigaon district is more than the state level sex ratio as per the 2011 census.
- Literacy rate among women of major ST's are very low (52.4%) in comparison to male literacy rate (72.3%).
- Agriculture is the primary occupation of the sample households which depends on primitive tools.

- Women of the Tiwa community are very active in their households and agricultural activities and they help their male counterparts in agriculture but they have no own service or occupation.
- Educational qualifications of most of the Tiwa women are below H.S.L.C. Due to low educational qualification, awareness about girls' education is found to be less. Hence, they are unaware about the various government schemes.
- More than 45 per cent women are financially excluded as they have no bank account.

IV. Concluding Observations:

Equal status of women in every sphere of life was enshrined as one of the main objective of Indian constitution after Independence for the development of our country. 33 percent reservation for women in politics is also executed. Despite of this constitutional facilities provided for the women, in the rural areas the women are not still aware about their rights.

Morigaon district inhabited mostly by the Tribal i.e, Lalung people has not made any significant achievements in empowering the women. Since the eight five year plan emphasis has been given in empowerment of women. Empowering the women implies that the women should become self-reliant economically and they should take part in decision making process. In our study area, literacy rate among the Lalung women is low than the male literacy. Higher levels of female education are strongly related to increased age at marriage, knowledge and practice of contraception and smaller family size. Because of the perception that girls are a drain on family resources, in some cases depending on the socio-economic parameters, families are unwilling to invest in daughters. Interestingly, in Morigaon district sex ratio is more than the state level. But there are some illiterate women who are still ignorant about the various developmental schemes adopted by the state as well as central government. Most of the women are simply housewives and they have no contribution to family income. Women derive their status primarily from their child bearing role and their value is often measured by the number of sons they have. Women themselves depend on male children for social status and economic security. Family planning practice rises significantly among women who have two or more sons.

Now-a-days, Self-Help-Groups (SHG's) among the women are a popular way of improving



the economic condition. From our field study, it has been revealed that the Lalung women have not come forward to become the member of the SHG's by cent percent. Those who are literate have joined in the SHG's and involve in some productive work. Due to low economic condition, it has been observed that only a few women have bank pass-book. The women should come forward to accept the benefits of various welfare oriented schemes.

There is a strong need for the government to substantially increase their spending particularly to those sections of the people who are disadvantaged, economically backward and socially excluded. It is not the financial resources, but a strong political will that is lacking (Dreze & Sen, 1995). The society has to change its mindset while the legislative and other measures may trigger the process, a persuasive approach through mass communication techniques together with involvement of social and family groups will have to be worked out through collective efforts of all concerned. It calls for strengthening the ongoing process of social engineering by creating a conducive social climate through awareness and due motivation (Kumar, 2002).

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