

Eminence of Tribal Women Entrepreneurs in Lakhimpur District of Assam

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ABSTRACT

Tribal women in general and in comparison with castes, enjoy more freedom in various walks of life. Because entrepreneurial activity can promote economic development among women. Therefore it is very crucial to understand what motivates these women to select entrepreneurship as a profitable occupation. This is mainly because of change in attitude, diverted conservative mindset of society to modern one, daring and risk-taking abilities of women, support and cooperation by society members, changes and relaxations in government policies, granting various upliftment schemes to women entrepreneurs. The status of tribal women is comparatively lower than that of tribal men. The Mishings are the second largest Scheduled tribe (Plains) group of Assam after the Bodos. They play a role of great importance both economically and socially. Agriculture is a source of income for the Mishing women. They also rear pigs, goats, poultry, etc. which form a great share of family income. Their contribution is outstanding in family expenditure. A total of 120 tribal women were selected as a sample of this study.

Key words : *Eminence; Tribal; Women entrepreneurs;*

The population of Mishing (tribal) in Assam is estimated to be 1,257,596 as per 2006 census. The tribal population is an imminent part of India's social fabric. According to oxford dictionary 'a tribe is a group of people in a primitive or barbarous stage of development acknowledging the authority of a chief and usually regarding themselves as having a common ancestor'. Women in a tribal society play a vital role in their social, cultural, economic and religious ways of life and are considered as an economic asset in their society. Mishing women are mainly engaged as workers in agriculture and allied activities. They involve in both traditional and non-traditional sectors for their overall development. They play an important as well as active role in the tribal society as compared to men. Though they are involved in different types of activities, but surprisingly, it is seen that they cannot claim property rights after getting married. Mishings, the second largest tribal population of Assam, are mainly the rural inhabitants. Like other womenfolk of developing nations, most of the Mishing women are engaged in various economic

activities not only to fulfill the day to day necessity but also to uplift their economic status in their society. Generally the women sections of the Mishing community are very active in household as well as in economic activities. They are born weaver, skilled in agricultural and allied activities but the modes of operation of economic activities are primitive in nature. *Hagone et al (2015)* revealed that majority (75.33%) of the respondents belonged to middle age, illiterate (40.67), medium family (62%) and (61.33%) joint type of family. *Saikia (2017a)* revealed that a large majority (75.00%) of women entrepreneurs engaged in the area of weaving were from lower middle age group (31-50 years), followed by young with 14.17 per cent. Only a small percentage (10.83%) was from upper middle age group. The findings indicated that crossing 31 years of age, respondents realize their responsibility towards home and family remain energetic and become mature to take up new ventures of income generation, hence get motivated to start an enterprise for income generation. A study conducted by *Saikia (2017b)* indicated that a

small majority of women entrepreneurs (40.00%) engaged in weaving area were HSLC passed followed by higher secondary passed (20.00%). Nearly an equal percentage of the respondents (19.16%) had education up to class X standard and 15 per cent were graduates. A very small per cent of the respondents (4.17%) and (1.67%) were post graduates and had other qualification such as certificate course of fashion designing. *Palaniappan et al. (2012)* highlighted that lack of strong leadership, systematic planning and working followed by health problem, non- awareness of government schemes, non repayment of loans by the family members, lack of education and proper training were main problems faced by the women entrepreneurs in Tamilnadu. *Saikia (2017c)* highlighted in her study that a large majority of women entrepreneurs (84.17%) were married; only 13.33 per cent were unmarried. Only a small percentage (2.50%) were widower in the area of weaving which might be due to the fact that being married the financial liability of the respondents increases such as education of the children, health security of family, so they are inclined to set up a weaving unit as a source of assured income to utilize popular yarn of Assam such as muga, pat and nuni which has a significant position/contribution in the global market. *Saeed et al. (2014)* revealed that majority of the respondents (36.70%) were between age group of 31-40 years, 32.50 per cent of respondents were under metric, 10.80 per cent education up to above graduation level. It study also revealed that majority of respondents (62.50%) were married, 53.30 per cent and 4.20 per cent of respondents belonged to nuclear and extended families respectively. *Vadavadagi and Joshi (2014)* found that 42 per cent of the women entrepreneurs belonged to 20 - 29 years followed by 30- 39 years (32.00%). The study also revealed that 52.00 per cent of the respondents have educational qualification of SSLC. Majority of the respondents (92.00%) were married and 66.00 per cent belonged to nuclear families. *Sugaraj and Salve (2014)* found that women entrepreneurs faced different constraints such as personal, social, environmental and general in the journey of entrepreneurship.

Saikia (2017d) reflected that personal motivational factor was found more fruitful among entrepreneurs than economic and social factors in the two attractive areas of weaving, food processing and preservation unit.

As we know that entrepreneur is a catalytic agent of modification, which produces employment chances for others. Like male entrepreneurs, women entrepreneurs have many functions. They explore the prospects of starting some new enterprise, undertake risks and introduce new inventions. They also create new jobs for themselves and others also. Keeping this in view, the present study entitled “*Eminence of tribal women entrepreneurs in Lakhimpur district of Assam*” was therefore an attempt in this direction with following objectives:

- i. To study the background profile of tribal women
- ii. To determine the various livelihood options of tribal women
- iii. To identify different complications of tribal women.

The findings of this study will definitely encourage those unemployed women who wants to make entry in the field entrepreneurship but unable to involve due to some reasons like fear, hesitation , ignorance, poor knowledge, lack of family support etc. It is also expected that, the findings of the present study will be helpful for other women entrepreneur to overcome their different challenges in the journey of entrepreneurship. The study would definitely encourage prospective women entrepreneurs to start micro enterprises for their self-independency as well as to raise their cognitive and rational development.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Lakhimpur district, of Assam. The study is based on primary data. To collect primary data from sampling unit, a sample survey has been made and for this purpose a suitable interview schedule was constructed to collect information from the sample respondents. Out of total households, 30 (thirty) households from each village were selected. A total of 120 respondents were selected as sample respondents for this investigation. The sampling method chosen for this research design is random sampling method by considering the extensiveness of the study, cost and time factors. The desirable data related to socio-economic characteristics viz. age, education, marital status, family type, family size, type of house, annual income, support received etc. was collected directly by personal interview method. Percentage, mean score and t-test were selected for statistical analysis of data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Background profile : The data with regard to socio-economic characteristics is presented in the Table 1 highlighted that majority of the respondents (58.33%) belonged to lower middle age group (31years to 50) and a sizeable per cent of the respondents (54.00%) were married. The data also revealed that less than half of the respondents (36.66%) educated upto class X and more than half of the respondents (52.50%) were from nuclear families having small family size i.e. 2 to 4 members. Since a majority of the respondents were married so they have chosen some traditional home making responsibilities against some service outside home. The findings also reflected that women in the study area had varied level of educational qualification. With education women learn some tips which influenced them to select various livelihood options to secure their family.

The data on main occupation of family in the same Table also shows that farming was the main occupation for 61.67 per cent of the respondents followed by business (35.00%) and service (3.33%). This finding revealed that young generation preferred to earn income independently without any work pressure that is why more than half of the family occupation was farming.

The data with regard to type of house possessed by the respondents indicated that less than majority of the respondents had katcha house (45.83%) followed by pucca with 29.17 per cent .This could be due to the reason that respondents in the present investigation are able to contribute to the family expenditure and supplement the family income to improve their socio-economic condition.

Level of income: It can be observed from the Table 1 that a small per cent of the respondents (40.00%) head of family income is between Rs.10001 – Rs.15,000 per month followed by Rs 15,001 – Rs.20,000 .Only 11.66% of the total sample households earned below Rs 5000. The findings showed the varied level of income of sampled households.

Membership in organization: The data with regard to the membership in organization is presented in Table 1 reflected that less than majority of the respondents (43.33%) were member of one organization i.e. general member or a large percentage (56.67%) of the respondents had no membership of any organization. Social participation through membership in the present study although found not very high but quite encouraging.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to socio-economic characteristics (N=120)

Characteristics		No.	%
Age	Young (below 30 yrs)	30	25.00
	Lower middle (31 yrs to 50)	70	58.33
	Upper (51 yrs and above)	20	16.67
Edu. status	Upto class X	24	20.00
	H.S.L.C. Pass	48	40.00
	H.S.Pass	23	19.16
	Graduate	18	15.00
	Post Graduate	5	4.17
	Certificate course	2	1.67
Marital Status	Unmarried	56	46.67
	Married	54	54.00
	Widow	10	8.33
Family type	Nuclear	63	52.50
	Joint	37	30.83
	Extended	20	16.67
Family size	Small (2- 4 members)	62	51.67
	Medium (5-7 members)	48	40.00
	Large (8 and above)	10	8.33
Family occupation	Service	4	3.33
	Business	42	35.00
	Farming	74	61.67
Type of House	Katcha	55	45.83
	Mixed	30	25.00
	Pucca	35	29.17
Level of income (in Rs.)	Below 5000	14	11.66
	5,001– 10,000	15	12.50
	10001 – 15,000	48	40.00
	15,001 – 20,000	33	27.50
	Above 20,000	10	8.33
Membership	one organization	52	43.33
	No membership	68	56.67

It was also reported by the respondents that they were not only engaged in household activities but also engaged in different types of livelihood options that hinders them to get free time to spend in an organization. Hence they did not feel it necessary to be a member of any organization that is why only a small per cent of respondents had membership in an organization such as SGH in the present investigation.

Livelihood options of Mishing Women : The data on distribution of respondents according to engagement in different livelihood options is presented in the Table 2 showed that majority of respondents (65.00%) engaged in the weaving sector as a source of livelihood followed by agriculture with 57.50 per cent. The probable reason

might be due to the fact that weaving is largely a household profession and passed on through generation. Moreover, it is also a traditional occupation where women have acquired such skills from their childhood that inspired them to select in this option.

It was also reported by the respondents that they used to sale rice beer (54.17%) and a very small per cent i.e.32.50 per cent were engaged as wage laborer not only to contribute their family income but also to improve their economic condition.

These findings further highlighted that own interest seems to be the strong influencing factor that is why majority of respondents from different background entered in the various livelihood options as a gainful source of income to supplement and support the family expenditure.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to different livelihood options

Type of activities	No.	%
Agriculture	69	57.50
Weaving	78	65.00
Selling of rice beer	65	54.17
Wage labour	39	32.50
Poultry farming	57	47.50
Piggery and fishery farming	44	36.67

Table 3. Support received by tribal women entrepreneurs

Support services	No.	%
Parents	36	30.00
Husband	74	61.67
Friends / Relatives	10	8.33

(Multiple response)

Support received by Mishng women: The data presented in the Table 3 indicated various support services received by Mishng women to engage in different livelihood options. The finding showed that majority of the respondents (61.67%) got support from husband followed by parents (30.00%) and friends / relatives.

From the above findings it can be inferred that with marriage, women learn to shoulder the responsibility of their own families and social issues as well, develop maturity in managing families which on the other had teach them to get engaged in the livelihood option to manage families. Moreover, it was reported by the respondents that they got more support from husband as compared to other tribal women, which influenced

them to engage in the gainful area of livelihood.

Table 4. Ranking of different complications of tribal women to engage in income generating activities

Hindering factors	MS	Rank
Lack of capital	0.97	I
Lack of Awareness about govts. schemes	0.22	VI
Lack of support services	0.21	VII
Lack of basic infrastructure facility	0.17	VIII
Lack of proper marketing mechanism	0.27	IV
Lack of leadership quality	0.16	IX
Traditional socio religious beliefs	0.36	III
Poor health status	0.37	II
Exploitation of middlemen	0.24	I
Natural calamities like perennial flood	0.97	I

Complication factors: In the category of hindering factors or problems, ten attributes were identified and the data is presented in the Table 4. The most common problem faced by respondents to engage in different livelihood options was lack of capital and due to natural calamities like perennial flood ranked I followed by poor health status with rank II. Moreover, other problems faced by tribal women to engage in different livelihood options were lack of traditional socio religious beliefs, lack of proper marketing mechanism, exploitation of middlemen ranked as III, IV and V respectively. Problems got lowest rank were lack of awareness about government schemes, lack of support services and lack of basic infrastructure facility on the basis of the mean scores of 0.22, 0.21, 0.17 respectively.

Table 5. Relationship between some selected livelihood options with independent variables of respondents

Livelihood options	r value	t value	
Agriculture	Age	0.18	1.67 ^{NS}
	Education	0.04	0.40 ^{NS}
	Member of organization	0.63	7.50 ^{**}
Weaving	Age	0.01	0.13 ^{NS}
	Education	0.02	0.01 ^{NS}
	Membership in Organization	0.03	0.02 [*]

* Significant at 5% level of significance

** Significant at 1% level of significance

From the above findings, it can be concluded that respondents from different background and socio economic status entered into the various livelihood option might be due to their economic compulsion for which they selected weaving, agriculture and farming etc as a source of income to support the family expenditure. It

is also true that many women are not able to start business in spite of their willingness due to the shortage of finance, though they started their business but unfortunately they miss the route to success. Therefore, it may be mentioned that these respondents should encourage entering in different organizations, especially SHG as government is widened up the facilities to the members of SHGs on easy terms.

It is clear from the Table 5 that there was no significant relationship between livelihood options of respondents with age and education. It only shows that there was a significant relationship between membership in organization with livelihood options i.e. agriculture and weaving at 5 and 1 per cent level of significance respectively. Therefore, it can be concluded that, women should be encouraged to become member of any organization to update their knowledge through proper interaction among the members of organization in any aspect of life through intelligent discussions. Further it will be helpful for women to involve in any profession to improve her standard of living.

CONCLUSION

This study indicates that Mishing women are not fully empowered economically as well as socially. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the settlement of infrastructure, awareness, education, competition, willingness, confidence, self motivation, mindset and encouragement from family and society. Moreover, it is further essential for the upgrading of economic development of Mishing women especially in the river bank and flood prone areas of Lakhimpur district. Government and NGO should prepare the special plan and programme for the economic empowerment of tribal women in particular. Moreover, health status and health care system are not satisfactory in Mishing areas. Through SHGs government should implement micro financing properly and provide them financial support and raise awareness programme for empowerment of Mishing women in tribal society. Hence, it is essential for government or voluntary organizations to launch special programmes for Mishing women for the overall development of the community.

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