



## STATUS OF NAGA WOMEN AT A GLANCE

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### ABSTRACT

**T**he status of women has changed over the past few millenniums; position of women in society is the index to the standard of social organization. The women have the right to receive education, participate in public life & political life, economically independent and can seek employment anywhere. The status of Naga women live in a politically sensitive environment given their people's prolonged struggle for self-determination. In the past, Naga women were generally bound by a host of social taboos, superstitions, ignorance, etc which greatly curtailed their participation in the family and society. Nevertheless, Naga women have managed to engage themselves effectively within their traditional space and have significantly impacted their society. Several factors like women's education, reform movements by many social reformers, women participation in politics and social legislation were held responsible.

**KEYWORDS:** women, Gargi, Maitreyi, tribal woman, society, Discrimination

### DISCUSSION

Status of women refers to the position of women in society in relation to men. Because of lack of acceptance from the male dominant society, women suffer immensely. Earlier in the Vedic age, the status of women were equally important as men and getting married at their mature age and free to select their own life partner at that time. Gargi and Maitreyi are two great and notable women sages who have been mentioned in the Rig Veda and Upanishads scriptures. However, the status of women started declining with the Smritis and with the Islamic invasion of Babur and Mughal Empire and Christianity later curtailing women's freedom and rights. Then women in India started facing confinement and restrictions due to the bad practices in the society like Sati, child marriages, child labor, ban on widow remarriages, etc. Purdah practice was brought in the Indian society by the Muslim conquest in Indian subcontinent. Jauhar was practiced by the Rajputs of Rajasthan whereas Devadasis in temples were sexually

exploited by the rich people. Social leaders like Mahatma Gnadhi, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and other prominent leaders have played an important role to bring women in the fore front and also played a key role to remove all kinds of social evils which hindered in improving the status of women. The status of women in India improved post independence. Government of India initiated many constitutional provisions which guarantee upliftment of women. At this age women are participating in every areas of work (like politics, social work, IT field, driving, etc) without getting fear. Women are leading in many areas of work even they are showing much interest and performing better than men. We cannot say that status of women in the Indian society has been fully developed but it is continuously going up as women are being more conscious about their rights. Status of women in India in general is interesting as well as complex. There are numerous discussions on the honoured position of women in Indian



religious and culture but at the same time, the poor status of Indian women in education, health, income, livelihood and decision making in the society is a great concern for one and all statistics do not say anything but yet they reflect experiences and trends. In the past decade, changes have occurred in the status of women in India. There has been promotion of gender equality to a great extent in the recent times and emancipation of women empowerment is the talk of the day which is considered to be the most important factor to enhance the status of women.

The status of women in North East India (NEI), inhabit a more liberal culture than their 'mainland' India, the reality is that women and children are in a particularly vulnerable situation because of the conflict in the region, especially those in indigenous, minority and low-income communities. Discrimination against women is widespread and incidents of physical and sexual violence are frequently reported. Almost all Tribal Councils categorically exclude women and their traditional customary law discriminates against them by denying them the right to own or inherit property.

"A tribal woman is in herself exactly the same as any other women, with the same position, love and fear, the same devotion to the home, to husband and children, the same faults and some virtues",<sup>1</sup> Verrier Elwin.

According to Austrian ethnologist Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, "Many women in more civilized parts of India may well envy the women of the Naga Hills, their high status and their free and happy life and if you measure the cultural level of the people by the social position and personal freedom of its women you will think twice before looking down on the Nagas as savages".<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Lucy Zehol, in her book – *The Women in Naga Society*, states "the status of women in Naga society from the traditional and modern scenario which provides vital information on the Naga women from both the men and women point of view. She also emphasis on the role of women in education and employment as well uncovered the educational and social problems faced".<sup>3</sup>

Nagaland state that do not conform to the general perception of women's status in India. The traditional practices of the Nagas have generally cared for women and the girl child still exists. The state has also

successful achievement in the field of literacy, increasing sex ratio, health and entrepreneur development. It is also often said that Naga women enjoy more privileges than most other women elsewhere. But one thing that must be kept in the mind is that the vast majority of Naga women are still engaged in agriculture. Certain factors like education, changing vocations, increasing mobility, awareness and participation in various workforces among the Naga women thus help the womenfolk to face more new experiences. The impact of prolonged insurgency in the land has made them not only victims of violence but charged with additional responsibilities of supporting their families and communities to cope with the adverse impact of violence, collectively and individually. They have played a vital role in helping their communities survive and enabling human development across Naga society. The female literacy rate of Nagaland is above the national average, but they are still far behind those of developed countries where everyone can read and write. The growth of literacy rate is very challenging; there are many areas where interventions are required for women like employment-generation, higher education for women development violence problems.

## CONCLUSION

Women have come a long way from a state of regressive dependency in a patriarchal structure to that of a self reliant high status at this age of globalisation. The possibilities of attaining the impossibilities have now become a reality. If we divulge into the journey undertaken it is infact noteworthy and truly to be lauded. It is a known fact that we have a patriarchal set up which has been existing from time immemorial and the underlined fact that it can never be rooted out still remains a farfetched dream. But to make one visible as women in this whole male dominated set up is not an easy task. To come out from the clutches of male induced roles and to prove that women are no less capable than men folk. Over the years the journey itself has been remarkable and up to some extent women have been able to attain a notch higher than expected excelling in all fields sums up everything. The glorification of women does not confine only to roles assigned as mother or daughters or within the four corners of the wall. But over the years women have beautifully acknowledged the fact that they are no less than the male

### (Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup> Elwin, Verrier, *Nagaland*, Sree Saraswaty Press, Calcutta, 1961

<sup>2</sup> Furer-Haimendorf, Christopher Von, *the Naked Nagas*, London: Methuen and Co. 1939

<sup>3</sup> Zehol Lucy, *Dr. Women in Naga Society*, Regency Publications, New Delhi

counterparts and have realised to look beyond the required discerning capabilities and abilities as women. There is still much hype or it is still very much debatable in a society like ours as to what kind of status is given to women. Though there are still lots to be done in every front whether in the political arena or to be economically independent or relating to the safety of women much has to be done for the upliftment of women. In fact, the status of women has really improved over the last few decades. An attitudinal change towards women perceived by the society has broaden up in all dimensions. The rights or privileges denied to women are no longer considered as a hurdle. Women have rightly asserted their rights and have fought against all odds for the privileges entitled to them. There are sections of people that paint the picture of women in a very poor light, as mentioned earlier. It is

ofcourse still quite debatable if we take a look at the progress women has attained, the whole unsaid journey is so beautifully interwoven. Women have frightfully undertaken this journey but in the process of doing so have remarkably set a bench mark higher for the male counterparts in every front.

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