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**WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT: AN ANALYSIS BASED ON THE FOOD PRODUCTION AND SHELF HELP GROUP'S ( SHG S) CONTRIBUTION IN THE MISING COMMUNITY OF NORTH-EAST INDIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Women are undoubtedly the foundation of the basic unit of society- the family. Even in traditional roles they demonstrate great innovation, skill, intelligence, hard work and commitment. But the fact is that in most of the societies women are depriving from their rights. In Mising society also the men folk enjoy more rights and privileges than the women folk. So, it is essential for women that she must equally develop like men in different field. From the beginning we notice that women have vast knowledge on food production activities. If the proper utilization of it, they may able to develop economically. In this regard Self Help Groups will be helpful for them. The objective of this paper to analyze the food production and Shelf Help Groups contribution that enhance the income of Mising women.

**Key words:** Women, Development, SHGs, Food production, Mising

### **Introduction :**

India has been developing fast, but not always equitably or inclusively. Our development model is very much a work in progress and deep-rooted challenges remain. The biggest issue we face is the empowerment of women. Across the world, educating and empowering women has proven time and again to be the catalyst for a rapid socio-economic growth.

Women in India make up 7.5% of the world's total population. While certain development indicators show their quality of life is improving maternal mortality rates declining, literacy rates increasing.

India ranks 113 out of 135 on the world Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index. According to India's 2011 census, the sex ratio for children under six was 914 females to 1000 males, a disturbing

decline from 927 in 2001. The ranking of Indian women in economic empowerment is 0.3, where 1.0 means equality.

This is a dangerous state of affairs for any society. Denying women opportunities to realize their potential is a waste of human capital and bar to economic progress.

Women are undoubtedly the foundation of the basic unit of society – the family. Even in traditional roles they demonstrate great innovation, skill, intelligence, hard work and commitment. According to Bautras Bautras Ghali, “ Without progress in the situation of women, there can be no true social development. Human rights are not worthy of the name if they exclude the half of humanity. The struggle for women’s equality is part of the struggle for a better world for all human beings and all societies.” The development and growth of a society or a country greatly depends upon proper utilization and quality of its human resources. So, to utilize these resources, there is a need to convert human beings into human resources. The term human beings include both men and women. From the beginning the functions of men and women have been separated based on their daily life; but for development of the society both are contributing a lot. So, women cannot be undermined from the point of economic development. Statistics also shows that women are the backbone of the agricultural sector.

In all societies all over the world at all times there was some sort of division of labour between the sexes. In this division of labour the physical and mental capacities of the sexes are always taken into correlation. A woman is not always capable of doing hard manual labour but she is fit for small monotonous jobs. That is why in primitive and preliterate societies the drudgery of household work always fell upon the woman, while she never allowed facing the hazards involved in works outside the home. But now the scenario is change to some extent.

Women produce more than 50% of the food grown worldwide, according to FAO estimates (FAO, 1995 a). They also perform the overwhelming majority of the work in food processing in developing countries. If anything women’s contributions farming, forestry and fishing may be underestimated, as many surveys and censuses count only paid labour.

The roles that women play in agriculture vary from region to region and country to country. Men and women often have complementary roles, sharing or dividing tasks in crop production, livestock rising, fishing and in care and use of the forests. In other cases, women and men have distinctly different tasks and responsibilities for certain crops and livestock, fish and forests. While there are significant variations by country or region, over all women in Assam play a major part in harvesting, food processing, transportation and marketing.

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## SHG s For development of women

SHG s were formed as small functional groups in rural areas after the implementation of poverty alleviation programme “ Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana” ( SGSY ), to increase the resource base of the members through the act of thrift and credit among themselves. It improves overall conditions of the rural poor, especially rural women. SHGs are the small groups where the members enhance the socio-economic development of their families through employment generation and income generating activities. Mohammed Yunus of Bangladesh during the 1970's has worked out various schemes for upliftment of weaker section of rural people. Finally, he launched the scheme of Self Help Group and played a key role in getting loan from Gramin Vikash Bank of Bangladesh in the year 1975 for which of his act he is known as the pioneer of Self Help Groups. Since then several microfinance institutions came up and have succeeded in reaching the poorest of the poor, and have devised new ground breaking strategies with time for the fulfillment of their vision. The success of micro-credit in Bangladesh had made it a popular poverty alleviating strategy in underdeveloped and developing countries. During the last two decade, micro-finance has gained a lot of significance and momentum and now India occupies a significant place and a niche in global micro-finance through promotion of the SHGs under SHG- Bank Linkage (SBL) programme and the Microfinance Institution (MFI) model. The SHGs groups are involved in diversified activities like weaving and embroidery, tailoring, preparation of sweets and snacks, pickles and juice, poultry and piggery etc. However all the SHGs more or less adopted the same activities, indicating competitive market and that resulted in marginal profit within a geographically confined locality. Regarding micro-finance, groups financed the members as well as non-members at varied interest rates usually a higher rate (10% per month) for non-members with a repayment period of 3 – 6 months.

## Missing women as food producers

The Misings form the second largest tribal group of Assam. They are known more popularly by the term 'Miri' until recent times. Ethnically they are the mongoloid and belong to the Tibeto Burman of the greater Sino Tibetan group. The Misings are found mostly in Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat and Sonitpur districts of Assam. They are also sparsely found to inhabit in the Koliabor area of Nagaon and Goalpara district. Maintaining their tag as a riparian tribe the Misings accordingly are found on the bank of the river Brahmaputra, Simen, Burisuti, Tomgani, Jiadhal, Subansiri, Ghunasuti, Boginadi, Ranganadi, Dikrong, Pichola, Buroi, Jiabharali, Dibru, lower parts of Dihing, Disang, Dikhou, Dhansiri and Bharali on the south bank. A large number of Misings are found settled on the Majuli Island which is surrounded by the river Brahmaputra to the South and the Subansiri and Kherktia in the North.

The value of self sufficiency in food system is an integral aspect of the Mising community. Men and women collect food and engage themselves in fishing, business and agriculture. Misings are well experienced in survival skills including natural resources, for their subsistence and medicine. They know how and from where to collect medicinal herbs and for what purpose they should use it. Mising women have learned various folk remedies that have been passed down in their society from generation to generation. The Mising women depend on their natural surroundings as a

reliable source for food; they have connection with natural environment and deep understanding with nature. This emphasizes harmony between the society and natural world.

The Mising women folk of Assam have immense contribution to upgrade economy through food production, preparation and preservation. The Mising family basically depends upon agriculture and both men and women have great part in agricultural activities. The women help in the production of rice, mustard seeds, black pulse and certain varieties of other crops such as jute, potato, vegetables etc. along with men. The Mising women are very much active in rearing poultry, goats and pigs. According to some women informants they are much interested in rearing pigs because the demand for pork has increased quickly. Women have the traditional skills to rear pigs and markets are also readily available in the local area. A cluster approach with some amount of scientific inputs will make it more profitable and check migration to other areas. A woman told us that piggery serves as a way of bringing additional income to every household and requires little capital. For it, they get loan from Shelf Help Groups. So, they prefer it. The Mising tribes like dried fish and hence they preserve it by sun-drying. This is a special type of preserved dry fish which they called Namsing. From the beginning to ending Mising women has great contribution to preparing Namsing. After preparing Namsing the Mising women preserve the sufficient amount for them. Now they sell Namsing in market, food fairs etc. Thus Namsing also contribute to their economic development.

Besides it, Mising women has an important role in the preparation of Apong. The responsibility for rice beer preparation is confined only to the women folk of the Mising community. It is also seen that some women are engaged in the production of rice beer as a supplementary occupation which gives them handsome earning for their livelihood. They prepare rice beer at their homes and sell it locally. Now they also go outside such as fairs and festival for the commercial purpose. The Mising women often have special knowledge of the value and diverse use of plants for nutrition, health and income. Consequently, they are frequently the preservers of traditional knowledge of indigenous plants.

These are the some way of economic development where women also playing a great role. But now the picture is change to some extent. For the growth of trade and industry, infrastructure like proper roads, well connected markets for the products etc. contribute to think differently. The old age women have prepared food only for their survival but now they also take it on business purposes. They prepare different types of food which they sell in market. They savings the earning money in SHGs and also get loan from SHGs for developmental work.

### **Methods and observations**

For this paper the investigator has adopted both the primary and secondary sources of data. Data are collected mainly in the form of field note and also by the methods and techniques advocated by various anthropologists. The focus was given on the group discussion and personal interviews which was held among the different age group Mising women. For the welfare and equitable share of benefits (monetary and non-monetary) and ensuring the protection of traditional knowledge some information was taken by the concerned women. Though the study area was mainly in

Lakhimpur district of Assam but the survey was made at the different times at different places. Today various kinds of fairs and festivals are organized by different govt. and non.govt agencies in different parts of the state as well as country over the year. Some of the govt. agencies namely DRDA (District Rural Development Agency), ARTFED, Emporium etc. take initiative in this regards. NEDFi-haat is one of the significant platforms for the Self Help Groups. The melas are organized by the organizers along with some tourist festivals like Kaziranga Elephant festival, Dihing Patkai festival, Sobansiri festivals etc. Besides there are some melas which are associated with some cultural organizations where traditional food items are sold by different Shelf Help Groups (SHGs). The annual conference of Asom Sahitya Sabha, Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Mising Sahitya Sabha, Mising Youth festival etc. provide ample scope for SHGs through which they may able to contribute to the economic development of their family.

### **Results and discussions**

SHGs have been successful in empowering rural or in some times urban Mising women through entrepreneurial activities such as weaving, food production etc. which influence increase in income, expenditure and saving habits of rural woman. But here we basically mention the food production of Mising women which they sell through the help of SHGs. Recently many national and international NGOs have come forward with projects for formulation and strengthening of SHGs in India.

For the group's sustainability, SHG had to undertake certain entrepreneurial activities to generate income. During our survey we have got several SHGs such as Prasesta Aatmosahaiok Gut (Dhemaji), K.K.D Jonokalyan Atmosahaiok Gut, Gamig Atmosahaiok Gut, Bervokha Atmosahaiok Gut, Jilmil Atmosahaiok Gut who were engaged to prepare different types of food items such as Purang Bora with different types of pork items, Namsing, Poro Apong, Nagin Apong, etc. All the groups participated in different fairs and festivals. From K.K.D Jonokalyan Atmosahaik Gut, Purneswari Kamang and Juti Doley told us that they engage in this Atmosahaik Gut from the very beginning and it help them to enhance the socio-economic development of their families through employment generation and income generating activities. According to them, they earn highest profit over investment in piggery. Pork was very much in demands in the study area followed by poultry meat as most of the women were from a community which traditionally rear pigs. The profit utilization patterns of groups were mostly for productive purposes indicating group sustainability. All the members opined that there was increase in household income and they could realize the dream of credit for income generating activities. They could also inculcate the saving habits, meet credit needs, gain confidence etc. in more cases.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Women are often responsible for providing food for their families, if not by production than by earning the income to purchase it. On the other hand, when women have direct control over income, they tend to spend it on the well-being of the family. In this regard the SHGs will be helpful for them. In the eleventh five year plan proper emphasis has given for inclusive growth and faster reduction of poverty. Microfinance through SHGs is the vital tool for reducing the poverty. The

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NABARD is the main initiator of the SHG movement since 1986-87. Now a day's both central and state governments, nationalized commercial banks, regional rural banks, cooperative banks, NGOs, Non-banking financial corporation (NBFC) etc. have joined in the SHG movement as promoters.

Vocational training is equally important to women's economic independence. The inspirational efforts of the Self-Employed Women's Association, founded by Ela Bhatt, and other successful Self-help groups have showed the spirit of entrepreneurship in hundreds of women. Still we need to develop necessary awareness programmes, markets, besides research activities.

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