



INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES AMONG THE SINGPHO TRIBE OF ASSAM AND ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

Religion is an indispensable component of cultural life a community. Every tribal have their distinct religious belief which is inherent from ancestor. The Singpho tribe lives in the range of Patkai Bum or Singpho hill (known as Patkai Hill) have their own belief and religion in worship of *Nat* (spirit). They treat all the objects of nature as their *Nat* and also believe that *Nat* is responsible for any phenomenon of the society and even the rising of the sun, the moon, the season, natural phenomena like storm, wind, fire, rain, shine, decease, death, sorrow etc. *Nat* is basically two types i.e. good and evil. The former is for social welfare and the latter normally causes harm. There are some important *Nat* whom the Singphos worship and offer sacrifices. However, the Singphos follower of Buddhism still they retain their indigenous religion. In this paper an effort has been made to trace the indigenous religious of the Singphos. The study is based on field study of Singpho habitant villages of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. It is noteworthy to mention that with the spread of modern education, occupational diversification, assimilation of the Singpho society with the outside world changes the attitude and thinking of the Singpho society. As a result indigenous religion and practices are edge of tradition and modernity in the Singpho society.

KEYWORDS: Singpho, indigenous, religion, spirit

INTRODUCTION

Humans have been adored of their belief or super natural power from the beginning of the civilization. There are various beliefs which have been congregating since time immemorial and human are very keen to satisfy them to harmony between man and nature. In this aspect the Singphos are not exceptional. Despite impressive socio-economic changes have been taken place among the Singphos still retain their pristine elements of age-old belief.

The Singphos are one of the frontier tribe inhabited in the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh adjoining the Patkai Bum (hill). All together 7958 Singpho people with 3999 males and 3959 females are living in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh (Census 2011). Moreover their kin are live in China (Yunnan Province) known as Jingpo and Kachin state of Myanmar (Burma) called Kachin (Macheey, 2013). Although they live in different countries they retain same language, culture and tradition.

They mostly inhabited in Tinsukia district of Assam and Changlang, Lohit and Namsai districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Moreover, small sizes of the Singpho speaking people are living in Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam (Macheey, 2013).



The Singphos are now Theravada Buddhist but simultaneously retain the indigenous religion of naturism and worship of *Nat* (spirit) (Borah, 2006). They treat all the objects of nature as their *Nat* and also believe that *Nat* is responsible for any phenomenon of the society and even the rising of the Sun, the Moon and the season, natural phenomena like storm, wind, fire, rain, shine, sunshine, decease, death, sorrow etc. With this backdrop, it is very imperative to study about their indigenous religion and practice.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The prime objective of the study is to inquire indigenous religion of the Singphos.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study is based on field study of the Singpho villages of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Qualitative data were collected through interview schedule and focus group discussion.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In the 19th century there was a renaissance in Singpho religious life. The Singphos have been highly influenced by Buddhism since the last two decades of 19th century. As it is said, a monk named *Dingla Chrado* who came from Hukong valley of Burma was the first to introduce Buddhism among the Singphos.

The Singphos bear the faith that after the creation of the Sun and the Moon by '*Mathun Matha*' (the creator of the universe), the earth bloomed up with flowers and fruits and become a posture ground for all creatures (Ningkhee, 2008).

The Singpho people accepted the non-violence principle of Buddhism but most of them are still adherents of traditional religious belief and practises of *spirits* and *deities*. The Singphos have no regular priesthood, however, they have village priest called dumsawa. On the other hand, they have not given up their shamanistic beliefs. A number of spirits (*Nats*) and deities are considered as malevolent and responsible for causing miseries to human being and therefore such spirits and deities are worshipped on a number of occasions by sacrificing bulls, pigs, cows and chickens.

There are some important *spirits* and *deities* whom the Singphos worship and offer sacrifices. These are:

Natkun (Abode in the village): The Singphos believed that the *Natkun* protect family members from the malice of the malevolent spirits. The *Natkun* is considered as the guardian of the family. Therefore, for the welfare of the family or an individual the spirit of the *Natkun* is worship by sacrificing a fowl.

Smathi (Abode in the house): When family member suffer from sick for long time then the head of the household or Dumsa (village priest) offer meal to the *Smathi* to cure from ill.

Ga Nat, Kha Nat and Cithang Nat (Spirit of soil, water and forest): The Singphos believed that a good agriculture depends on the blessing of the spirits, so they perform rituals and act for bless of the Ga Nat, Kha Nat and Cithang Nat by offering sacrifices of a piglet and five fowls.

Namsang Chote (The Jungle Deity): When the paddy is damaged by insects or for any other reasons, the Singpho tribe performs a ceremony called *Numsang chote*. It is performed village wise after performing divination and offerings are made to *Numsang*. To perform the ceremony they collect donation of money from the village as well as pigs and chickens. The



ceremony lasts for three days and after completion all the village paths are closed for one day to prevent coming of outsiders. Before opening the paths the village priests offer some grains of rice to the jungle deity. The priest starts the incantation from the evening and last for three days. On completion of three days sacrifice animal and cooked heart and liver separately to offered the deity by the priest. The Namsang Nat would bless the villages with a bulk of crop (Baruah, 1977).

Soanjo: Rice people perform a ceremony called *soanjo* one or twice in a year after plantation of the seedlings or after harvesting. In this ceremony they sacrifice four chickens or one pig.

Tisam Nat: During the fifth month of pregnancy a religious ceremony is performed sacrificing a female pig and a male chicken in the name of *Tisam Nat*, a female deity. There are two *Tisam Nats* one is mother and the other daughter. The pig is offered to the mother and the chicken is offered to the daughter. This deity is propitiated for the welfare of the expectant mother as well as the child in the womb.

Birth: The Singphos believe that birth is give of God. If the accouchement is successful everybody feels happy. If however there is much labour it is believed that some spirits (*Nats*) are at work and the priest is informed immediately, who sit down to perform the necessary divination and the remedy there of, which is then performed accordingly.

Naming: A chicken is killed in the name of *Natkun* the household deity or guardian Nat, the *Laruwang*, the spirit responsible for name giving. The village priest performs the ceremony. On completion of one month the women can go to the fields and perform all the works as well as usual.

Death: The Singphos do not attribute the causes of death to the evil actions of any spirits or deities but they consider it as bad luck *marna* and think that the person has no luck to enjoy the earthly happiness anymore and hence died. They believe that man is mortal and is destined to die one day.

Nimon: Nimon a female spirit and she causes fever at night. To satisfy her family offers a pig, a chicken and articles used by a woman.

The Idea of the Soul: The Singphos believe that the soul exists for ever as an imperishable substance. But they conceive the soul as of two kinds, good and evil. The good souls are destined to go to heaven and the evil souls to hell. Further, the evil souls may turn into evil spirits, who roam about on the earth without any shelter and do harms to human beings.

CONCLUSION

The religious belief is the part of culture and every society has own religious belief and practices. In this respect the Singpho tribe of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh has been practicing their traditional religious belief from the time immemorial. Hence, it is noteworthy to mention that the Singphos have a very rich indigenous religion which still adheres although most Singphos are today are Buddhists. In every Singpho villages they practices traditional religion to satisfy the spirit and their ancestors in conjunction to Buddhism.

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**A STUDY ON PREVALENCE OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE SINGPHO TRIBE****Dr. Ashwini Machey**Assistant Professor, Department of Economics
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Abstract: Indigenous knowledge of a community is the root of their civilization. It denotes a value based society correlated with harnessing nature. The way of life of indigenous peoples is closely linked to nature and its resources and knowledge is deeply embedded in their local cultures and traditions. Indigenous knowledge of food, housing, clothing, language and culture can give a separate identity to a population. The Singpho people are closely attached to nature and have hereditary traditional knowledge on food, housing, clothing, and so on. Their rich cultural heritage gives them a unique identity amongst the 705 existing scheduled tribes of India. This paper tries to investigate the prevalence of indigenous knowledge among the Singphos and observe that they have a rich practice of indigenous knowledge in their life.

Keywords: Indigenous knowledge, Singpho tribe, tradition, prevalence, cloth, house

Introduction

Indigenous knowledge refers to distinctive understanding of ideas and actions, confined within a culture or society. Besides, we can also use the terms such as local knowledge, folk knowledge, traditional wisdom or science, etc. which is directly associated with living experiences of humans and are transmissible. The ideas and actions included in an indigenous knowledge system can be transmitted orally or through imitation and demonstration. Since it is based on human experiences of living peoples, it is always changing, being produced or generated, as well as reproduced, discovered, lost, or recreated. It can also be acknowledged as the understanding, skill and philosophy developed by human societies with long histories of interaction with their immediate natural surroundings.

Prior to colonialism, indigenous knowledge was considered primitive and unsophisticated. The Europeans treated the indigenous peoples as tools or subjects rather than participatory social group. Indigenous knowledge was viewed as religious superstition and scientists were ignorant about its rationality. In due course of time things have changed a lot. The United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the General Assembly on September 13, 2007, recognizes Indigenous ownership and validates traditional practices as contributors to "sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment".

Human cultures are directly associated with ecological conditions and different social institutions help in the promotion of 'constructive dependence'. It is a network and sum total of different acquired knowledge, beliefs and practices; where 'knowledge' can be termed as factual data, 'belief' as religious concept and 'tradition' as practice. We have noticed that native peoples around the world over the years have preserved their distinctive understanding in relation to human existence with sustainability in a specific ecosystem and are clearly visible in their cultural practices. Indigenous knowledge on food, housing, clothing, language and culture can give a separate identity to a population. The way of life of indigenous peoples is closely linked to nature and its resources and knowledge are deeply embedded in their local cultures and traditions.

The Singpho people are closely attached to nature and have hereditary traditional knowledge on food, housing, clothing, and so on. Their rich cultural heritage gave them a unique identity amongst the 705 existing scheduled tribes in India. The documentation of indigenous knowledge can help the community in popularising their understanding on sustainable livelihood and can attract the external world.

The Singphos are one of the frontier tribes inhabiting the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh adjoining the *Patkai Bum* (hill). All together 7958 Singpho people with 3999 males and 3959 females are living in North East India (Machey, 2018). Moreover their kin live in China (Yunnan Province) known as Jingpo and Kachin state of Myanmar (Burma) called Kachin. They mostly inhabit in Tinsukia district of Assam and Changlang, Lohit and Namsai districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Moreover, a small size of the Singpho speaking people is living in Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam. Despite living in different countries they retain same the language, culture, tradition and more specifically their indigenous knowledge.

The Singphos are now Theravada Buddhist but simultaneously retain the indigenous knowledge and belief. They have their expertise in agriculture particularly Tea (*Phalap*), housing construction, production of clothes with elegant design and colour, food and drink preparation and so on. With this backdrop, an attempt has been made to enquire prevalence of indigenous knowledge among the Singphos.

Objectives of the Study

The prime objective of the paper is to enquire the prevalence of indigenous knowledge of the Singpho tribe.

Methodology

The triangulation method is employed to explore the fact and prevalence of indigenous knowledge in Singpho society. Primary data are collected from Singpho households of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Secondary information is used from print document and also conducted focus group discussion to collect the required information.

Findings of the Study

In the study we have tried to enquire the prevalence indigenous knowledge of the Singphos in various aspect of their social life. Basically, we cover textile and loom, housing construction, food and drinks preparation among the Singphos. The findings of the study are presented in different heads as mentioned below.

Loom and Textile

The handloom products of the Singpho tribe are renowned for elegant designs and striking colours using indigenous weaving techniques. Unlike many other tribes of Assam, majority of Singpho women are still engaged in handloom weaving as they prefer wearing traditional attires. Each household has at least one indigenous set of loom. The use of back-strap loom is more prevalent among the Singphos than any other type of loom. All the textiles required for the family are woven in the indigenous loom.

The Singpho women wear a rectangular piece of woven cloth, wrapping it around the waist which reaches down to the ankles. It is called *Bukang* (for old women *Batut*). It is woven in bright colours such as navy blue, purple, black etc. with multi-coloured decorative border on both sides along the length. There are generally two varieties of *bukang*, namely *Khakhukheng* and *Manmowkheng* of which the former is popularly used by Indian Singpho women throughout the year and the latter is used on special occasions (generally by young women). The upper part of the body is (above waist) covered with *polong* (like a short jacket) and with *ningwat or bathang*, wrapped around the breasts in such a way that the shoulders remain uncovered. It is woven with varieties of checkered (colour) designs. The *Chingket* is tied around the waist. It is a long and narrow piece of cloth and generally worn by married women. The head is covered with a turban called *Phambam*. There are two varieties of *phambam*, colourful for younger women and white for elder women. The married women use a piece of cloth across the shoulder which is called *Bapai*. During festivals the young girls wear colourful dresses with stitched emblems made of silver which is known as '*Kumphraw Pulong*' or '*Soi Pulong*'.

Singpho men too have their specific dresses. They wear *Lasa bupa* or *Baka* as a lower garment wrapped around the waist reaching to ankle. It is also woven in the back-strap loom. It is made according to the required width by joining two pieces length wise. The common background is different shades of green on which checks are woven of different colours (the strings are black, blue, violet and green colour). The upper garment of men is a colourful jacket known as *Polong*. The Singpho men also wear a turban which is very similar to the women's turban called *phambam*. A colourful bag called *empheng* is woven on the back-strap loom. This bag is a part of traditional men's costume; on one shoulder men carry the *empheng* and on the other a *pyan* (sword) is carried.

Construction of House

The Singphos live in raised platforms constructed three to five feet above the ground which is supported by a number of bamboo or wooden pillars. The dwelling house is called 'Nta'. The Singpho have some traditional pre-conditions for construction of their homes. They are- (a) One who proceeds to build a home has to collect 3 or 4 pieces of land from that particular plot and tie it separately. Then the person concerned has to carry that tied up pieces of land to get an opinion (ning-wat) from an astrologer or Buddhist monk in the very early morning hours with empty stomach. (b) After getting the opinion of the monk or astrologer that the plot of land is suitable for home construction, a particular day is fixed to lay the foundation of the main pillar (Ningong-da). (c) According to traditions the house should face the north-south direction.

They are found living in *Nta* in the vicinity of forests, rivers and streams. Generally the size and length of a Singpho house varies depending on the size of the family. The houses are built with locally available materials like bamboo, wooden planks [*Lerang fun* (Chapa), *Bi fun* (Bhola), *Lecghai fun* (Ajar)], cane, *tokou* (Assam fan palm leaves). The roof of the house is generally covered with *tokou* leaves. It protects the floor of the house from the dampness of the soil below. The floor and the walls are made of split bamboo, wooden planks and *Tokou* mats.

The house is built on stilts and is rectangular in shape with double stooped roof. A Singpho house has mainly three parts: the *Nbang* (front), the *Dun* (middle) and *Npan* (rear). They use *lakhan* (wooden stairs) to go up and enter the house. The entire floor area is partitioned into several chambers. They give different names to the chambers. The living room is called *yup khok*, the guest room is called *manam khok*, the entrance room or first compartment from the front side is called *imbangtutat* or *rang tun* or *nbang* and the firewood store is called *Npan*. For a joint family the household has small compartments where each individual family is accommodated (Dutta, 1990). The first compartment is generally used for *manam* (guest) and there is a fireplace. The second compartment where the old parents sleep is called *ganugawa-tap*. The third compartment is occupied by the eldest son and his wife (*kha ang dun*). Each married couple occupies a separate compartment. The younger ones sleep towards the rear compartment (*dum 'nta*) and the unmarried girls sleep in the rear most compartments (*pinla kha 'k*) (Rajkumar, 1978). At the centre of the chamber is the hearth called *indab kap* for cooking so that the members of the family can sit or make arrangements for sleeping around the hearth, so that they can get the heat from the burning fire. Over the hearth there is a hanging smoking rack at a height of about 3 to 4 feet from the floor. Bamboo shelves are built on the walls of this compartment where they keep the cooking utensils, cooked food and other articles. This shelf is called *chufa*. Under the shelf there is a place called *chingthun chinat*, where they keep the water reservoirs.

Attached to the front side is the open bamboo platform called *imbang chan*, where they dry their paddy and other articles. The *imbang* is used for their loom and other accessories required for weaving. At the eastern most corner of the *imbang* close to the roof, there is a small shelf for worship, where they keep either an image or a statue of Lord Buddha. They decorate the place of worship with flowers. The place of worship is called '*chuwom tan char*'. The Singpho houses are

very simple, without any decoration. They are very particular about keeping the house neat and clean. Their sitting tools are only small pieces of wood, with two legs fitted to it. Some of them have sitting tools made of bamboo. They do not make any other furniture for themselves.

However, some changes were observed in the housing construction during the field study. Modern materials like brick, concrete, rods, cement plaster are used and also non-traditional houses are seen in some villages.

Preparation Food and Drinks

The Singphos are very particular about their food. The staple food of the Singphos is rice, pulses and vegetables which they usually have three times a day. In their meals, almost all the Singpho people consume meat in large quantities. Most of the dishes are cooked with traditional spices and herbs collected from the forest using bamboo shoots, ginger, garlic, chili and salt. They make a special kind of rice in steam called *Pungkhong Sat* (Steamed rice) and rice prepared in bamboo called *'Khaolam'* (Rice cooked in bamboo tubes). *Khaolam* is very delicious and usually prepared during festival.

They cook *pungkhong sat* (steamed rice) in a specially made utensil. The steamed rice is then wrapped immediately in *'Kowpat'* which they call *'Chatmukai'* or *pungkhong sat* which is served with boiled vegetables, roasted fish and meat etc. in spicy herbs. Names of some vegetables and pulses collected from the forest and the kitchen garden are- Millets, Beans, Taro Roots, Yam, Taro Stolons (Naifa Nai), Sweet potato, Tapioca, Mustard Leaves, Mustard Greens, Pumpkin, Ginger, Garlic, Green Chilly, Sesame, Bamboo shoot (Kowa muku), Cane shoot (Rri-ci), Banana flower (Ngujja-ci), Fiddlehead Fern, edible Water Hyacinth, *Cinglapju*, *Fokcampa khamaupa*, *Chum-pai kampaklap*, *Cimring-mukung*, *Murulap*, *Lupdui-lap*, *Adui-lap*, *Laphaw*.

They drink *Chapuk* (traditional beer), a special type of beer that is prepared from rice. It is a conventional drink and it is a part of their conventions and practices. Beer made of fermented boiled roots is not merely a favourite drink of the Singphos, but also a sacred libation for the spirits (Boruah, 1977). The Singpho community is credited with being the pioneer of *Phalap* (Singpho tea) in India. It is the most popular hot beverage among the Singphos. They brew and consume *Phalap* as medicine to combat against diseases like Diabetes, Blood Pressure, Tumour, Cancer, Malaria etc. The Singphos pluck tender tea leaves and dry it in the sun and expose it to the night dew for three days and nights. The leaves are then pressed into a bamboo cylinder. It is then exposed to the smoke of firewood and then the contents are made into 5 gram tablets. Each tablet gives about 20 cups of tea (Ningkhee, 2008; Singpho, 2001). The Singphos have the *Phalap* by just dissolving it in hot water without milk.

Conclusion

Indigenous knowledge is inherent among tribal people across the globe. It has been continuing generation after generation. In this respect the Singpho community of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh has been experiencing a change in various aspects of their social life. Despite momentous changes have taken place in tribal society the Singphos still retain their indigenous knowledge in

every aspect of life. In fact, indigenous knowledge is an indispensable part of Singpho society and is deeply embedded in their local culture and tradition.

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A STUDY ON FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION IN RURAL AREAS OF TINSUKIA DIATRICT OF ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994 reiterated the importance of economic activity among women, towards aiming the goal of gender equality and women empowerment. The conference noted that the empowerment of women is anchored to their economic status in the society. Social recognition and status also hinges on economic empowerment (UN 1994). Studies have revealed that female labour supply is both a driver and an outcome of development. As more women enter the labour force, economies can grow faster in response to higher labour inputs. At the same time, as countries develop, women's capabilities typically improve, while social constraints weaken, enabling women to engage in work outside the home. This paper has been made an attempt to examine the trend of female labour force participation within the period 1999-2000 to 2019-2020 in India and in the state of Assam. Moreover try to inquire the rate of female labour force participation in the rural areas of Tinsukia district and to compare the same with the national and state level data. And to make an attempt to highlight the problems associated with female labour force participation.

Keywords: Female, labour force participation, worker population ratio, work force participation, economic activity.

INTRODUCTION

The objective of economic policy planning in developing country is high rate of growth with sustained improvement in standard of living. To realize this objective it is essential to generate productive and gainful employment on a sufficient scale. It must be noted that any policy measure aimed at growth and development would not be possible without adequate and equal attention being paid to all the members of the society, irrespective of gender, caste and class. Women represent half of the global population, which means half of the global human resource is in the form of women. As such, no one can deny the importance of women as human resource in the process of economic development otherwise; the economy will never grow as it could.

But women have not been treated at par with men in relation to participation in decision making at home and outside and in many other aspects of living. Such discrimination has limited their opportunities to serve as positive agents of socio-economic progress of a country. Today, most of the national constitutions prohibit gender discrimination. But turning the policy in to reality remains an enormous challenge. The Global Gender Gap Report (GGGR) 2015 concludes that since the first report, 10 years ago, in 2006 "while the world has made progress overall, stubborn inequalities remain." The gender gap has been reduced by only 4 percent during this period of time and at today's rate of progress, the world will not reach gender equality until 2133. This shows the intensity of the problem of gender inequality

in the world. In article 14 and 15 of the constitution of India, provisions have been made to prohibit any discrimination on the ground of sex, religion, race and caste. Again article 16 ensures equal employment opportunities to every citizen of India irrespective of gender, religion and caste. Along these fundamental constitutional provisions to ensure equal opportunities on the part of women, some special policy measures have been implemented in our country. One of such major step was introduced as a part of sixth five year plan (1980-1985), with the inclusion of a separate chapter on women and development. The plan emphasised the need for the opening up of opportunities for independent employment and income generation for women. To bring equal opportunities on the part of females in relation to employment a series of programmes have introduced with provisions for women beneficiaries, for instance Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (30% reservation for women), Integrated Rural Development Programme (40% reservation for women), Training of Rural Youth and Employment Programme, Rastriya Mahila Kosh and Mahila Samridhi Yojana etc. Besides these efforts the condition of women in India is deplorable, particularly in relation female participation in labour market.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Irrespective of region, religion, social groups and economic status, women's participation in labour market is considerably lower than that of the male in India. Since independence good-enough number of special plans and programmes have been implemented, for the improvement of the condition of women and to make the socio economic environment conducive on the part of the female, including the reservation for women in education and employment. Unfortunately the situation remains the same, which proves that there is something fundamentally wrong with the system. The theoretical frameworks of the programmes meant for the betterment of women are found to be comprehensive enough. But the problem is associated with the implementation aspects. So to bring change in real sense in favour of the women, it's important to increase their participation in economic activities i.e. to increase the rate of female labour force and work force participation. However, it should be noted that, the problems or constraint arising in case of female labour force participation varies on account of region (urban/rural) and social groups. So the study of female labour force participation among the rural population is required to take proper policy measures and programmes. The present study "A Study on Female Labour Force Participation Rates in Rural Areas of Tinsukia District of Assam" is an attempt in this respect.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Woman's life in India, on some counts is comparatively worse in many aspects. When we take a look at women's condition in relation to economic participation and opportunity, a miserable picture comes out from the Global Gender Gap Report (GGGR), published by World Economic Forum (WEF), as India's position is fixed near the bottom since last three years, as depicted in the following table.

Table 1 Women's Economic Participation and Opportunity

Years	Rank	No of Country Surveyed
2020	149	153
2021	151	156
2022	143	146

Source: Gender Gap Report of (WEF) 2020, 2021, 2022

The World Economic Forum estimates female labour force participation as one of the determinants of women's economic participation and opportunity. India's position in respect of women labour force participation is deplorable, as revealed by the information presented in the following table.

Table 2 Women's Labour Force Participation

Years	Rank	No of Country Surveyed
2020	145	153

2021	148	156
2022	140	146

Source: Global Gender Gap Report of (WEF) 2020, 2021, and 2022

Moreover some other miserable statistics as reported by WEF in relation to gender gap in India clearly exhibits the socio-economic status of women in India. For instance, on an average, Indian women spend 352 minutes per day on unpaid work, while the same is 52 minute on the part of male, the heights difference in the world.(GGGR 2015).

The above information strongly asked for attention on the part of researchers to investigate in the respective areas where by we can ensure gender equality.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- (1) To study the trend of female labour force participation in rural areas of India and in the state of Assam within the period 1999-2000 to 2019-2020.
- (2) To measure level female labour force participation in the rural areas of Tinsukia district and to make a relative analysis with national and state level data.
- (3) To identify the problems associated with female labour force participation on the part of rural population of Tinsukia District.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

On the basis of the objectives of the study, a comprehensive interview-schedule is prepared and primary data are collected from the sample households in the rural areas of Tinsukia District. The secondary data relevant for the study have been collected from the published and unpublished sources through: (i) Annual reports and statements of different NSS rounds (ii) Annual reports and statements of GGGR published by WEF. ((iii) Journals, periodicals and reports (iii) M. Phil dissertations and Ph. D. theses (iv) Different website.

Sampling Design

In order to examine the rate of female labour force participation among the rural population of Tinsukia district and to identify the socio-economic problems associated with female labour force participation the researcher adopted a multistage sampling design for the present study.

Stage – 1: Community Development Block (CDB) has been taken as the first stage of sampling design. Tinsukia district has seven CDB namely, Guijan, Hapjan, Itakhuli, Kakapathar, Saikhowa, Sadiya and Margherita. Out of the seven CDB three CDBs namely Guijan, Margherita and Sadiya and Hapjan have been taken from three sub division of Tinsukia District.

Stage – 2: The second stage of the sampling design is sample villages. Out of the inhabited villages of the sample CDBs 5nos of the villages have been drawn at random as sample villages.

Stage – 3: The third and final stage of the sampling design is sample household. 10nos of total household of each sample villages have been taken at random, as sample household for the present study.

Data Analysis and Key Indicators

Labour Force Participation Rate is one of the basic key indicators of employment and unemployment situation in an economy. It reflects the economic strength of a country, as it stands for the economically active part of population. Information regarding Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) and other related indicators like Worker Population Ratio (WPR), Proportion Unemployed (PU), and Unemployment Rate (UR) highlight the extent of human resource utilisation in a nation. The conceptual framework of labour force participation for the present study is strictly maintained in the line as it is followed in 66th NSSO round on Key Indicators of Employment and Unemployment in India.

To examine the level of female labour market participation among the female population in the rural areas of Tinsukia district measures including FLFPR and WPR have been estimated.

Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR): It refers to the population which supplies or offers to supply labour for pursuing Economic Activities for the production of goods and services and therefore, includes both employed and unemployed persons. Labour force participation rate is defined as the proportion of persons in the labour force to the total persons. These ratios are given in per 1000 of persons and is estimated by the method as follows,

$$LFPR = \frac{\text{No of employed persons} + \text{no of unemployed persons}}{\text{Total population}} \times 1000$$

Worker Population Ratio (WPR): The work force according to the usual status (ps+ss) includes the persons who worked for a relatively long part of the 365 days preceding the date of survey and those persons from among the remaining population who had worked at least for 30 days during the reference period of 365 days preceding the date of survey. It stands for the number of persons employed per 1000 persons and estimated as follows,

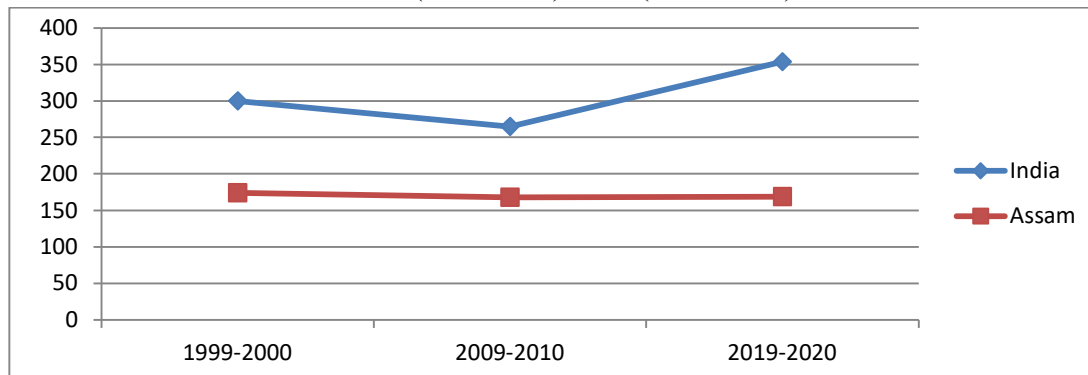
$$WPR = \frac{\text{No of employed person}}{\text{Total population}} \times 1000$$

Trend of Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP): the trend of FLFP in rural areas of India and in the state of Assam during the period 1990-2000 to 2019-2020 is depicted by the following table

Table 3 FLFP usual status (ps+ss)

STATUS	FEMALE		
	1999-2000	2009-2010	2019-2020
India (Rural)	300	265	354
Assam (Rural)	174	168	169

Source: NSSO EUS rounds: 55th (1999-2000), 66th (2009-2010), PLFS, 2019-20



It has been observed that FLFP in the rural areas of India was 300 in 1999-2000 and 265 in 2009-2010 so it experiences a declining trend during the period 1999-2000 to 2009-2010 and a rising trend within the period 2009-2010 to 2019-2020 as the respective figure increases from 265 to 354.

As far as the state of Assam is concern throughout the period 1999-2000 to 2019-2020 FLFP is considerably lower than the respective national figure. It was 174 in 1999-2000 which decline to 168 in 2009-2010 and remains almost unchanged 169 in 2019-2020.

Measuring Female Labour Force Participation for Sample Population

FLFP among the sample household is measured following the standard formula and the outcome is presented in the following table

Table 4 FLFP (Per 1000) According to US (principal + subsidiary status)

Labour Force Participation	No.	Percentage	No./1000
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In Labour Force	53	22.1	221
Out of Labour Force	187	79.9	779
Total	240	100	1000

Source: Field Survey

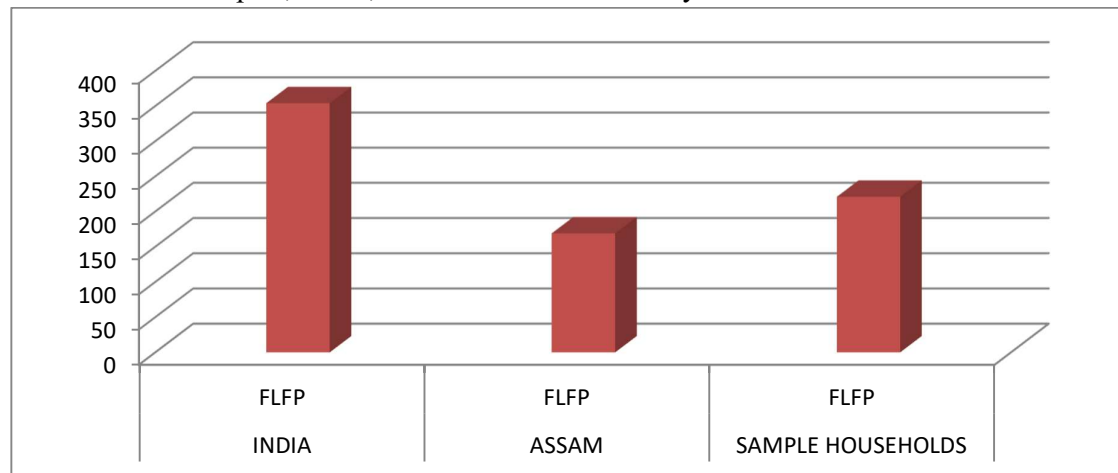
It has been found that out of 240 respondents of sample household 53 respondents are in the labour force and 187 respondents are out of the labour force. So 22.1% of respondents are found to be in the labour force which is measured to be 221 per 1000 female.

Relative Comparison of FLFP

Table 5 Comparison of FLFP (per 1000) according to US (principal + subsidiary status)

India	Assam	Sample Households
Female (rural)	Female (rural)	Female (rural)
354	169	221

Source: Annual Report, PLFS, 2019-20 and Field Survey



It is clearly observable from the above table that FLFP among the sample household (221) is way behind the national level (354) however it is found to be greater than the state level figure 169.

Worker Population Ratio (WPR) for Sample Population

Worker Population Ratio, which is also termed as work force participation rate, includes persons who have actively participated in production of different goods and services in a specified period of time. The rate of work force participation among the two social groups sample population of Tinsukia district is as follows.

Table 6 Work Force Participation (Per 1000) According to US (principal + subsidiary status)

Worker Population Ratio	No.	Percentage	No./1000
In Work Force	37	15.4	154
Out of Work Force	203	84.6	846
Total	240	100	1000

Source: Field Survey

It has been seen that 15.4% (154/1000) of respondents have participated in work force, whereas 84.6% of female are out of work force.

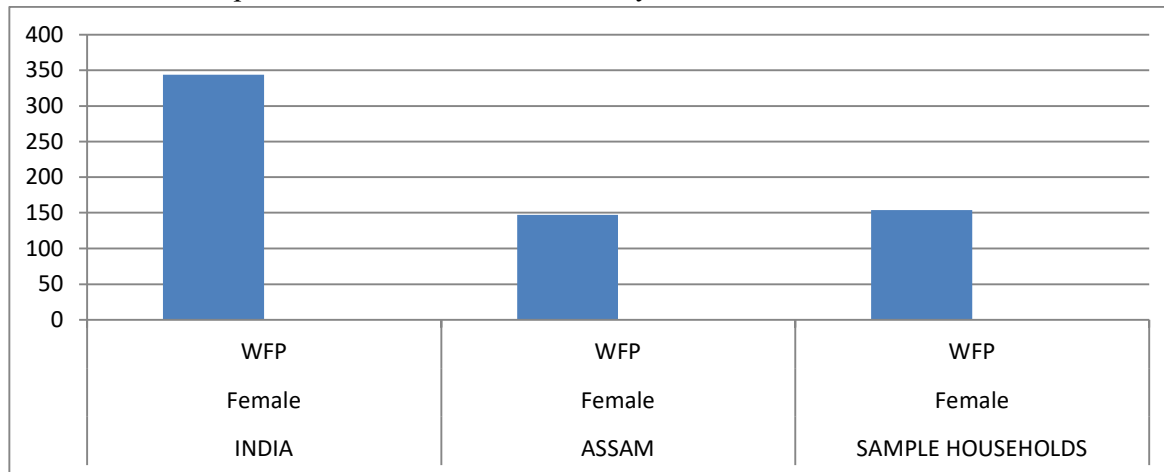
Comparison of FWPR: it has been found that FWPR the sample households of Tinsukia district with national and state level data drawn from the Annual Report, PLFS, 2019-20 conducted by NSO on

employment and unemployment situation in India is as follows.

Table 7 Comparison of work force participation rate (per 1000) according to US (principal + subsidiary status)

India	Assam	Sample Households
Female (rural)	Female (rural)	Female (rural)
344	147	154

Source: Annual Report, PLFS, 2019-20, Field Survey



It is observed that female work force participation among the sample household (154) is considerably lower than the national level work force participation (344) but marginally higher than state level figure (147).

Problems of Female Labour Force Participation

Women continue to face multiple challenges relating to access to employment, choice of work, working conditions, employment security, wage parity, discrimination, and balancing the competing burdens of work and family responsibilities. The following discussion deals with the major problems and challenges, in connection to female labour force participation, as reveals by the existing literature.

Problems in Identifying Female Employment

In conducting household surveys on employment and unemployment situation in India, the NSSO defines the term “economic activity”. However contradictory definitions appear to have been adopted when distinguishing between contributing family workers, classified as employed and individuals exclusively engaged in domestic care work, which are treated as economically inactive. Despite considering activities such as the free collection of uncultivated crops, forestry, firewood, hunting and fishing for own consumption as economic activities, individuals who attended domestic duties and were also engaged in the free collection of goods for household use are classified by NSSO under code 93 as economically inactive (Kapsos et al 2014). Again it is not clear how survey investigator distinguish between contributing family workers and individuals exclusively engaged in domestic duties within a household. It may be difficult to identify contributing family workers when work is spread over time in an irregular way or when multiple jobs are carried out for short durations (Hirway and Jose 2011). As a result a number of individuals may have been classified as inactive despite their engagement in market work, which results in underestimation of labour force participation rate and related estimates. The undercounting of females in the labour force, which can be attributed to the use of poor investigation method, is one of the possible reasons for low rate of female labour force participation (Kannan and

Raveendran, 2012; Rangarajan, *et al.*, 2011; Himanshu, 2011; Chandrasekhar and Ghosh, 2011; Chowdhury, 2011; Mazumdar and Neetha, 2011).

Low Level of Education

The educational level attained by a person is expected to be associated with his or her employment prospects. It is regarded as the key determinant of labour force participation on the part of both male and female. The poor condition of education particularly on the part of rural females is clearly observable. The situation becomes more critical because of lack of employment opportunity on the part of educated females. “Employment in sectors appropriate for educated women grew less than the supply of educated workers, leading to many women withdrawing from the labour force” (Klasen and Pieters, 2013).

Social and Cultural Restriction

Many of the social and cultural rules and norms prevailing in most of the developing country including India stands as one of the major barrier in the way of participation of female in economic activities. “In India some communities, notably upper caste Hindus and Muslims, there may be a stigma attached to women working outside the home especially if it involves work considered “menial” which increase family and social pressures to drop out if the man in the household is earning enough to meet the family expenditure” (Yadav, 2015). While men often manage to move out into other activities or migrate to other areas in search of work, women have fewer options, they remain as a flexible labour force in agriculture - as own account workers, casual agricultural labour or unpaid family workers (Dasgupta, 2011). Cultural and social changes in Indian society will provide nurturing environment to females. Recognition of women as agent of production and economic development is a must to experience growth with social justice on the part of each nation. Removal of social barriers and cultural norms especially those with gender specific roles is a real challenge in the way of improving the condition in favour of women labour market participation.

Insufficient Infrastructural Facilities: Extensive and efficient infrastructure is critical for ensuring the effective functioning of the economy, as it is an important factor in determining the location of economic activity and the kinds of activities or sectors that can develop within a country. A well-developed transport and communications infrastructure network, electricity supplies that are free from interruptions and shortages, and a solid and extensive telecommunications network is a prerequisite for the access of less-developed communities and weaker section of the society to core economic activities and services. India ranks 87th out of 144 countries in respect to infrastructural facilities (Global Competitiveness Report 2015).

Limitation of Primary Household Facilities: It is another factor affecting female labour force participation. In the present study the investigator collects information on availability of basic household facilities in relation to source of drinking water, fuel used for cooking, and bathroom and toilet facilities. The limitation of household facilities affects the time consumed to handle daily household activities on the part of females and stands as barrier in the way of taking part in labour market

Family Barriers /household burden: In India women are granted for taking care of household responsibilities like looking after children, elderly parents and in lows, cooking, washing and many other household activities. Whereas men are suppose to earn livelihood and complete outside task. “Women’s household workload, lack of information, and mobility and safety concerns are important constraints to their participation” Sudarshan and Bhattacharya (2009). Liberal outlook on the part of head of the household and other member of the family towards women will help to improve the condition in favour of women’s participation in economic activity and opportunity.

Discrimination in Work Place: Discrimination in work place particularly Wage differentials of women with men influence incentives to work. Participation of females in economic activities also influenced

by the large wage differential that women face in India. At the all-India level, daily wages received by male regular wage/salaried employees in rural areas is Rs.322.28 and for females it is Rs. 201.56. In the urban areas, daily wages received by males is Rs. 469.87 and for females it is Rs. 366.15. Daily wages received by casual labours engaged in works other than public works is Rs. 149.32 for males and Rs. 103.28 for females in the rural areas. In the urban areas, the corresponding rates were Rs. 182.04 and Rs. 110.62 for males and females, respectively (NSSO 68th round).

Low productivity jobs /lack of due recognition: Many women work in low productivity jobs often without socio-economic benefits. A huge part of women are unpaid self employed helpers. The difference between women and men with regard to average minutes spent in unpaid household activity per day, as reported in Global Gender Gap Report 2015 is striking; women spent 252 minutes per day in unpaid activity when men spent only 52 minutes per day in unpaid activity. Due to this difference the contribution of women in production of goods and services is underestimated and not well recognised.

Lack of employment opportunities: “Employment opportunities play an important role especially in rural India, as female wages or expected earnings have a strong positive effect on participation in labour market” (Ahasan and Pages, 2008). Overall limitation of employment opportunity and particularly limitation of employment opportunity suitable for female repress the rate of female labour force participation in rural areas.

Other Problems: Besides the problems mentioned above some other factors are also responsible for low participation of women in labour market. Among other contributing factors safety of female, sex discrimination and sexual harassment at workplace are of great concern. However as the present study is based on rural areas, the respondents are found to be less exposed to these issues of problems due to the presence of relatively peaceful social environment. The overall environment in relation to all these aspects has to be changed in favour of women for improvement of female labour market participation in India.

Major Findings

- It is observed that FLFP in the rural areas of India experiences a declining trend during the period 1999-2000 to 2009-2010 and a rising trend within the period 2009-2010 to 2019-2020.
- As far as the state of Assam is concern throughout the period 1999-2000 to 2019-2020 FLFP is considerably lower than the respective national figure. It experiences a falling trend from 1999-2000 to 2009-2010 and remains almost unchanged within 2009-2010 to 2019-2020.
- It has been found that 22.1% of respondents of sample household are in the labour force which is measured to be 221 per 1000 female.
- 15.4% of respondents have participated in work force, which is count to be 154 female per 1000 female among the sample household.
- FLFP among the sample household (221) is way behind the national level (354) however it is found to be greater than the state level figure 169.
- Work force participation among the sample household (154) is considerably lower than the national level work force participation (344) but marginally higher than state level figure (147).
- The major problems associated with FLFP are Problems in Identifying Female Employment, Low Level of Education, Social and Cultural Restriction, Poor Infrastructural Facilities, Limitation of Primary Household Facilities, Family Barriers /household burden, Discrimination in Work Place, Low Productivity Jobs /lack of due recognition and Lack of Employment opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Improvement in the rate of female labour force participation in India is a big challenge. To the extent women’s labour force participation is decided by their families and does not reflect women’s own

preferences, or is constrained by their inability to migrate for employment, any policy measure implemented to promote female employment will not be successful. There is a need to transform the outlook, on the part of the society as a whole and among the young generation in particular for proper recognition of women's capabilities and potentialities to contribute in the progress of the nation.

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