

STATUS OF KARBI AND KUKI WOMEN IN CACHAR DISTRICT OF ASSAM

Abstract of the Thesis

Submitted to the Assam University in Fulfilment of the Requirement for Award
of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

By

Anjan Shee

Ph.D. Registration No.Ph.D- 2488/14 dt. 24.03.2014



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
ASSAM UNIVERSITY
SILCHAR-788011
December 2016

STATUS OF KARBI AND KUKI WOMEN IN CACHAR DISTRICT OF ASSAM

I. THE STUDY

Relative importance of a person or group in a social setting is termed as status. The term 'status' also refers to a position in social system consisted distinct array of designated rights and obligations (Merton 1968). Status is the key component of a social setting, as the people of higher status generally occupy better position in a social setting. Linton (1936) views that status is primarily a position in social structure, which involves rights, duties and reciprocal expectations of behaviour, none of which depends upon the personal characteristics of the status occupants. That is, status is determined in terms of norms and taboos governing people's roles and behaviour in a particular community (Chauhan 1999). The status of women in family, community and society is not static; it varies from place to place, time to time and culture to culture. Rights including property rights, duties, liabilities & disabilities and restrictions imposed on women in any society and civilization at a given time always determine their status in the society. A general impression that women in tribal communities enjoy a high status is uprooting in the fast changing societies, policy decisions and their effective implementation. India has over 8% of its tribal people called scheduled tribes. Assam has 29 scheduled tribes; namely, (i) Chakma, (ii) Dimasa or Cachari, (iii) Garo, (iv) Hajong, (v) Hmar, (vi) Khasi, Jaintia, Synteng, Pnar, War, Bhoi, Lyngngam (vii) Kuki 37 tribe, (viii) Lakher, (ix) Tan (Tai Speaking), (x) Mizo (Lusai) Tribes, (xi) Karbi, (xii) Naga Tribe, (xiii) Pawi, (xiv) Syntheng, (xv) Lalung, (xvi) Barmans in Cachar, (xvii) Boro, Boro Cachari, (xviii) Deori, (xix) Hojoi (xx) Kachari, Sonowal, (xxi) Lalung, (xxii) Mech, (xxiii) Miri, (xxiv) Rabha, (xxv) Dimasa, (xxvi) Hajong, (xxvii) Singhpoo, (xxviii) Khampti and (xxix) Garo (www.Nic.in/content). Of these, the communities like Dimasa, Hmar, Karbi, Kuki, Khasia, Pnar, Naga, etc. have been living for long time in the rural areas of Cachar District.

Karbi and Kuki, the two prominent ethnic groups of Assam, belong to Kuki-Chin linguistic subgroup. Karbis largely inhabit Karbi Anglong district; to a lesser extent, some pockets of Nagaon, Sonitpur, Kamrup, Dima Hasao and Cachar district in Assam, and marginally, in some areas of Meghalaya and Nagaland. On the other hand, Kukis are remarkably settled in Myanmar, India and Bangladesh. In India they are found in a good number in six out of eight states in the North-Eastern region of India, i.e., except Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim (Haokip 2013). Karbis who are ethnically Mongoloid have a dialect of the Tibeto-Burmese language, particularly Kuki-Chin sub-group (Bhattacharjee 1986). Various groups which speak Tibeto-Burman languages originally inhabited Western China near the Yang-Tee-Kiang and the bank of Hawang-Ho rivers, from where these people went out to various areas near the bank of the Brahmaputra. The Karbi people along with others entered India and Myanmar (Burma) through this region. Another group of Karbi people migrated to the greater Assam from central Asia. It is also believed that in the long past, large numbers of Karbi people inhabited the entire Kaziranga region on the banks of the Kapili and Kalang rivers in the undivided Assam. But during the Kachari reign, Karbis were thrown out from these regions by the soldiers and then these people had no option but to settle on hill tops which were isolated in all respects. Besides, a group of Karbi people entered the Ahom Kingdom and in course of time they received tremendous torture from Burmese invaders and to get rid of them they had to select deep forests and hill tops as safe habitation whereas a

few of the Karbis migrated to lower Assam. Forest is the main source of livelihood for the tribal communities, especially for the hill tribes. They are mostly dependent upon Jhum cultivation and forest products, where their womenfolk are the main work force. Socio-economic condition of tribal communities in general is very poor; however, their population is differently placed in terms of location, culture and traditional values, and historical experiences. To improve their socio-economic condition, Government of India has recognized them as 'Scheduled Tribes' under the article 342 of the Constitution in 1956. But the factors like low literacy rate for the tribal population as a whole and their females in particular, high growth rate of population, etc. have a pervasive impact on their socio-economic development. The researches on the status of tribal women in India have examined the rights and privileges (Saikia 1993; Roy 2001), duties and obligations (Roy Burman 2015), taboos and restrictions (Karna 2015; Saikia 1993; Gurulingia 2005) and norms & conduct of behaviour (Gangte 1993; Haokip 2013) of women in India. Haokip (2013), Gangte (1993), Roy Burman (2015) and others find that the overall status of tribal women is lower than non-tribal women, including their male folk. Dewan (2011), Roy (2001), Das (2012), Fernandes and Bharali (2008), Chauhan (1999), Khonglah (2002) and others mention that tribal women are deprived from economic security and rights. Khonglah (2002) and Karna (2015) report that tribal women enjoy lack of decision-making power in families and societies as well. Phadke (2008), Karna (2015) with others observe that tribal women do not have equality of power in religious activities of any type. Farnandes and Bharali (2008), Gurulingia (2005) and others find that tribal women's low status is embedded into their customs.

Karbi and Kuki are the major tribal communities of Assam in terms of population. Both the communities have dispersed for centuries in the rural areas of Cachar district where scattered and minor tribal groups have been interacting with non-tribal populations. Their forest resources have been increasingly shared over the years. This changing ecological and social situation has natural consequences for the status of their women folk who have been the main workforce of their respective community. Though the tribal groups have been subjected to various researches, the changing status of women has received less of the focus. The changes taking place in the Karbi and Kuki groups which have stayed in the district for centuries offered a scope for study on the status of their women. Therefore, the question addressed in the research is: What social status do the Karbi and Kuki women occupy in their communities in the contemporary time? The study attempted to achieve the objectives such as (i) to know the decision-making power of the Karbi and Kuki women in their families, (ii) to understand the economic status of the Karbi and Kuki women, (iii) to find out the political status of women, (iv) to examine the health status of the Karbi and Kuki women and (v) to examine the educational and communication status of the Karbi and Kuki women. The study has been placed in the context of the Karbi and Kuki villagers in the Cachar district. The study is divided into 9 chapters; namely, Chapter 1– Introduction, Chapter 2– Field of the Study, Chapter 3– The Respondents: Their Communities and Customs, Chapter 4– Decision Making and the Women, Chapter 5– Economic Status of the Women, Chapter 6– Political Status of the Women, Chapter 7– Health Status of the Women, Chapter 8– Education, Communication and Status of the Women and Chapter 9– Summary, Findings and Conclusion.

II. METHODOLOGY

This descriptive study is based on the field data collected by administering an interview schedule to the respondents (women) of 14 years and above. All the Karbi and Kuki women of 14 years and above in the villages of Cachar district constituted the universe,

and every woman in the specified age range was treated as unit of the study for data collection. In the two communities, some families have married away their daughters of 14 years and therefore all the women of 14 years and above constituted the universe of the study. The rest girl children were not included in the universe. Most of the Karbi and Kuki (New Kuki) villages settled on hills, which are locally known as Punjees. Each village has very less number of houses. The villages are situated in the remote part of the district with very poor communication. Therefore, using census method the data were collected from one woman of each house, who was available at the time of the researcher's visit for data collection. Of the 30 villages of the two tribes, 284 Karbi households constituted 13 villages and 218 Kuki households made 17 villages. In all, 502 respondents were interviewed from the same number of households of the two tribes.

III. FIELD OF THE STUDY

The two rivers, Brahmaputra and Barak, constitute the Assam's two valleys; viz., Barak Valley and Brahmaputra Valley, separated by N C Hills and Karbi Anglong hill ranges (Das 2012). Assam has 35 administrative districts: 30 districts in Brahmaputra valley, 03 districts in Barak valley and 02 districts in the hills (accessed from www.assamtourism.gov.in/destination/district./html on 21.12.2016 at 5.40 a.m).

Cachar district has two sub-divisions (Silchar and Lakhipur) and 15 development blocks. Bengali, mother-tongue of the majority (non-tribal) is official language in Barak Valley. Besides, Bengali, Manipuri, Dimasa, Rongmei Naga, Khasia, Hmar, Mizo, Karbi, Kuki (New Kuki) and other people are also living in the district. Karbis have inhabited 13 villages in Kalain and Borkhola development blocks while Kukis (New Kuki) have inhabited in 17 villages of Udharband, Rajabazar, Lakhipur, Binnakhandi, and Borjalenga development blocks. Cachar is the largest district (in terms of area and population) in Barak Valley. Majority of the people in the district are Bengali Hindu while Muslims constitute the second largest population in the district as well as the valley. Located in the southern part of Assam, Cachar district is the gateway of three important North-eastern states; viz., Mizoram, Tripura and (Western) Manipur. The district has an area of 3786 sq km. It is bounded by Borail and Jaintia hill ranges in the north, Mizoram in the south, Manipur state in the east and Hailakandi, another district in Barak valley, and Bangladesh in the west.

IV. THE RESPONDENTS: THEIR COMMUNITIES AND CUSTOMS

1. About two thirds (64.54%) of the respondents follow Christianity: all (100%) Kuki respondents and near about two fifths (37.32%) of the Karbi respondent. Over three fifths (62.68%) of the Karbi respondents recognize themselves as Hindu and they carry on their age-old animistic beliefs. Thus, both the communities have undergone religious conversion and acculturation.

2. One finds various clans in the two communities (5 in Karbi and 37 in Kuki). All 5 Karbi clans are found in various Karbi villages. However, Terang (Hanjang) is the largest Karbi clan, having over one fourth (29.23%) of the total Karbi respondents; Ingti (Lijang) is the second largest clan with about one fourth (24.33%) of the Karbi respondents, followed by Timung (Tungjang) with about one fourth (22.53%) of the Karbi respondents. However, about one seventh (15.14%) of the respondents belong to the Enghee (Ejang) clan. Teron (Krojang) is the clan of the smallest number of the Karbi respondents, comprising about one tenth (8.80%) of the Karbi respondents.

However, people of 14 Kuki clans in the Cachar district have Changsen as the largest one, having over two fifths (44.50%) of the total Kuki respondents settled in various Kuki villages, mainly in Tupidhor, Toulpi, Bagbahar, Ngente, Songhlu etc. Thomsong is the second largest clan of about one fifth (19.72) of the respondents mainly settled in Phaizol and Bethal Punjee of Joypur block, followed by Thangew having about one tenth (7.80%) of the Kuki respondents from Saihmar, and Kharzol Punjee of Lakhipur block. Haokip is the fourth largest clan, having less than one tenth (6.88%) of the Kukis living only in Lalpani Haokip Punjee of Lakhipur block. Then, Khochung is the fifth largest clan with 6.42% of the respondents. The other clans do not have the existence in the Kuki community of the Cachar district, each, having below 5% of the total Kuki respondents.

3. By age, 68.66% of the Karbi and 70.18% of the Kuki respondents belong to the age below 44 years. So, approximately 70% of the female respondents of the Karbi and Kuki communities are below 44 years of age. The rest (almost 30%) belong to the age of above 43 years. In the field it was also observed that the females above 43 years of age were very less in every household as compared to males. Various socio-economic factors like girls early marriage, high pregnancy rate, not taking the nutritious food during pregnancy and post-delivery periods causes more death of women in these age group and therefore very less number of women of this ages are seen. This indicates poor state of women's health in the two communities.

4. Nuclear family is very popular in both the communities. About two thirds (66.53%) of the respondents belong to nuclear family and the rest belong to joint family. Over two thirds (71.10%) of the Kuki respondents and over two fifths (63.03%) of the Karbi respondents are from nuclear family. On the other hand, over two thirds (36.97%) of the Karbi respondents and over one fourth (28.90%) of the Kuki respondents are from joint family. However, by size of the family, over one third (36.85%) of the respondents belong to medium family (5-8 members) with nuclear family type: about one fourth (39.45%) of the Kuki and over one third (34.86%) of the Karbi respondents. At the same time, about one third (29.68%) of the respondents' families are nuclear with the small size of 1-4 members each: about one third (31.65%) of the Kuki and over one fourth (28.17%) of the Karbi respondents are having nuclear families. There is no joint family found in the small family category. Then, over one sixth (16.14%) of the respondents belong to the large families: 17.61% of the Karbi and 14.22% of the Kuki respondents. Thus both the communities prefer medium families having 5-8 members in each with nuclear type.

5. By their marital status, most (86.26%) of the respondents are found married: almost all (92.66%) of the Kuki and about four fifths (78.52%) of the Karbi respondents. Traditionally both the tribal communities prefer early marriage. About one tenth (8.37%) of the respondents are unmarried: over one tenth (11.62%) of the Karbi and 4.13% of the Kuki respondents. Besides, 6.97% of the respondents are widows: about one tenth (9.86%) of the Karbi and 3.21% of the Kuki respondents. The Karbi community is very strict in respect of its social norms and rules. Inter-religious marriage is also restricted and inter-community marriage is rarely found in this community. Therefore, marriage is made within a limited population of the tribe in the Cachar district. But for the Kuki community, there is no such restriction; rather, they encourage the inter-community marriages. As a result, there are more unmarried persons among the Karbis than the Kukis. But in the Karbi community, neither bride price nor dowry is part of their customs.

6. Child marriage is prevailing in both the communities. Over fourth (26.96%) of the respondents from both the communities were married in the age under 18 years: 36.64% of

the Karbi and 15.31% of the Kuki respondents. Legally this is child marriage. The trend of underage marriage (15-17 years) among Karbis is found more than the double one of the Kuki respondents. The lower level of education among the Karbi community including their womenfolk is mostly responsible for it. However, the largest size, i.e. about half (44.62%) of the respondents have married in the age of 18-21 years: 34.67% of the Karbi and 65.55% of the Kuki respondents.

In animistic belief of Karbis, male always perform family rituals and only a male can become priest to perform worship. However, on death the major traditional rituals are performed by an aged woman preferably widow, popularly called Rexarpi, in the Karbi community. On the other hand, even after their conversion to Christianity, the Kuki women are not allowed to act as priest or pastor in any ritual. However, in several Christian groups, various works are allotted to women in religious sphere. The customs of bride-price and dowry prevail in the Kuki community.

7. The customary law of both the communities discriminates in the matter of ownership of property and gives the, least decision making power to women in domestic and public spheres. But they are given more duties and responsibilities. All household activities like collecting of drinking water, participating in all family economic activities, collecting and marketing of firewood/ forest products are generally fall in the domain of women in both the communities.

In the Karbi community, marriage between males and females of the same clan is prohibited as they are considered brothers and sisters. But both the communities prefer cross-cousin marriage. In the Karbi community, people prefer to marry in their own community. On the other hand, in the Kuki community, there is not such a practice. According to the Karbi culture, neither cash nor kind is taken as bride price. Both the tribal communities use clan or sub-clan names as their surnames. A Karbi woman uses her father's surname even after marriage, while a Kuki woman uses her father's surname before marriage and husband's surname after marriage. If any inter-community marriage takes place in the Karbi community, then the newly married bride has to use the surname of her mother-in-law.

8. Of the houses in both the communities, most (87.85%) are kachcha or traditional houses. Kukis have more traditional kachcha houses than the Karbis. The same pattern is found in both the communities. Over one tenth (11.55%) of the respondents' houses are semi-pacca (Assam type) and the remaining (only 0.60%) are pacca. Almost the same pattern is found in both the communities in respect of semi-pacca and pacca houses. The overall living condition of the Karbi people in Cachar district is slightly better than the Kukis. For distribution of paternal landed property, both the tribes have the same beliefs. Parental lands are distributed among male children. In the Kuki community, the elder son becomes the custodian of the parental properties. In case of there being no son, brother's son is entitled to get the property. But in the Karbi community, though paternal land is distributed among sons, if there arises a need, a portion may be allotted to girls also.

9. Over four fifths (78.89%) of the respondents use Kachcha latrines in their houses and the pattern is the same in both the communities. Over one tenth (13.15%) of the respondents have low cost latrines, followed by about one tenth (6.77%) of the total families having no awareness about sanitation, and therefore they practice open defecation. This pattern is found more prominent in the Karbi families than the Kuki families. About one tenth (9.86%) of the Karbi and only 2.75% of the Kuki respondents have no latrine in their houses and they defecate in open space. Most of the families of Rupachera village (more than 80%); a few

from Madhurapar and Boalchera village and a few families of Shaimar Kuki village have no basic awareness about sanitation and so they are practicing open defecation. However, only around 1% families of the Karbi and Kuki respondents have sanitary latrines.

10. Over one third (34.86%) of the respondents use solar and kerosene for lighting in houses, followed by about one third (30.48%) of the respondents who are using only kerosene. However, about one fourth (24.30%) of the respondents use electricity for lighting and the same pattern of electricity use is found in both the communities. Only one tenth (10.36%) of the families of the respondent depends on solar lamp for lighting. Over two fifths (44.50) of the Kuki respondents depend on kerosene and solar lamp for lighting at night, whereas over one fourth (27.46%) of the Karbi respondents use kerosene and solar lamp at night. However, about two fifths (39.44%) of the Karbi respondents use only kerosene for light at night. About one fifth (18.81%) of the Kuki respondents use the same at night. But over one tenth (13.30%) of the Kuki and about one tenth (8.10%) of the Karbi respondent use only solar lamp at night.

11. For cooking, most (95.82%) of the respondents use firewood collected from forest; 2.79% of the respondents use LPG and the rest (1.39%) use firewood, kerosene and electricity for cooking food. Here, almost the same trend is observed in both the communities. The Karbi people use more firewood for cooking than the Kuki people. Almost all (97.18%) of the Karbi and 94.14% of the Kuki respondent use only firewood for cooking food. Due to advantage of location a few families use LPG instead of firewood. LPG also reaches to the villages which are located on the road side like New Malidhor Karbi Punjee and Saihmar, Phaizol and Lalpani Kuki Punjee.

12 In both the communities, female education is much lower than their menfolk's education. Further, literacy rate of Karbi people (65.55%) is comparatively lower than the Kuki people (78.61%). Adoption of Christianity by the Kuki community as a whole is the major reason for it. Due to this, more Kuki women are literate (76.93%) as compared with their Karbi (61.64%) counterparts. But from primary to graduation level of education, the achievement of Kuki men and women are almost the same. Due to the attitude of Kuki community towards their womenfolk, generally Kuki women get almost equal opportunity along with their menfolk in the field of education.

13. Bengali is the common language for the Karbis and the Kukis other than their mother tongue. Hmar is a common language of the Kuki other than their mother tongue (Kuki). Kuki people know more languages of tribal community than Karbis. As Kuki, Hmar, Mizo etc are languages very close to each other with almost the same alphabets. So, Kuki people understand all these languages and the marital relations of other tribal groups with Kukis are largely found. On the other hand, Karbi people know limited languages and only Bengali becomes the medium of conversation with other tribal people like Dimasa in the Cachar district. Notwithstanding this, in New Malidhor the people in a large number speak Khasi language as situated in the Assam-Meghalaya border area.

14. With Regard to land holding, one finds that about half (49.08%) of the Kuki families have the largest size of cultivable land (above 12 bighas), whereas only about one fourth (23.24%) of the Karbi families have this size of land holding. On the other hand, about half (48.24%) of the Karbi families have the small landholding (1-6 bighas), and about one third (31.65%) of the Kuki families have this size of land holding. However, over one fourth (28.52%) of the Karbi and about one fifth (19.27%) of the Kuki families have the medium landholding (7-12 bighas). Due to older habitations in remote location, the Kuki families

hold more cultivable lands than the Karbi families and most of these are government lands (khas lands) given to both the communities (in the name of male head of family) with permission for jhum cultivation.

15. Major occupation in the both communities is cultivation. Over half (54.38%) of the families of the respondents mainly depend on agriculture and about one seventh (14.74%) of the families' main source of income is wage labour. Almost the same pattern is found in both the communities. Over one tenth (12.15%) of the respondents' families have primarily income sources of jhum cultivation and part time wage labour. The same pattern is found in the two communities. About one tenth (9.36%) of them have handicraft and handloom as the primary occupation (4.23% Karbis and 16.06% Kukis), whereas only 3.39% of them have business (shop keeping). Only 2.79% of the families' primary source of income is vegetable selling (vegetable vender). Only 3 (1.38%) Kuki families have government employees, whereas no Karbi family has any government employee.

16. By monthly income, over two fifths (40.04%) of the respondents' families have monthly income of less than Rs. 5000: about two fifths (38.53%) of the Kuki and above two fifths (41.20%) of the Karbi respondents. Over one fourth (28.88%) of the respondents have family income of Rs. 5001-10,000, followed by over one fifth (20.12%) who have monthly family income of Rs.10,001-15,000. Rest of the respondent have monthly family income ranging from Rs. 20,001 to more than Rs. 40,000. The families which have the highest income per month (Rs. 40,000 and above) are from New Malidhor Karbi Punjee. Thus, more Karbi (70.78%) respondents' families have the monthly income (up to Rs. 10000/-) than the Kuki families (66.49%), whereas, one third (33.51%) of the Kuki and over one fourth (29.28%) of the Karbi respondents' families have monthly income of more than Rs. 10000/- per month. So, engaged in various occupations, the Kuki families have more monthly income than the Karbi families.

17. Household items of the respondents also reflect their living condition, financial capacity and location of the habitation. Over one fourth (27.69%) of the respondents' families have only bed and chair and almost the same pattern is found in both the communities. The combination of second most available household items among the families is chair, table and bed. Over one fifth (21.71%) of the respondents have these items, followed by the combination of household items comprising chair, table, bed, almirah and solar cell. Over one sixth (15.74%) of the families have the above household items. The items like chair, table, bed, almirah and solar cell are found in the houses of over one seventh (14.94%) respondents. The same pattern can be observed in both the communities. However, about one seventh (13.35%) of the respondents have chair, table, bed, almirah, and television and the same pattern is shared by both the tribal communities. Looms are also found in a few families in both the communities. The household items like chair, table, bed, almirah, and loom are found in 3.19% of the families with the same pattern for both the communities. However, in spite of solar-cell, many people of both the communities use solar lamp as a sources of light in their houses due to less cost.

18. For remote location of the habitation Kuki families own more transport vehicles than the Karbi families. Bi-cycle is very common among those respondents' families which have any such assets, whereas only 10 (6.94%) of the Kuki and 8 (6.11%) of the Karbi respondents' families have motorbike. On the other hand, 3 (2.29%) Karbi (all from New Malidhor) and 1 (0.69%) Kuki (Naxatilla) families have cars. Due to Government job as well as the advantage of road condition, a few Kuki villages have more motor bikes than the Karbis. Also, Karbi villages are located not far away from the highway, but except New

Malidhor, there is no proper road communication for other Karbi villages. So, luxurious transport vehicles (car and motorcycle) are mostly found in New Malidhor whereas, these assets are found in six Kuki villages.

V. MAJOR FINDINGS

Major findings of the study are presented under the following headings:

A. DECISION MAKING AND THE WOMEN

Patri-clan, patri-lineality and male headed family largely determine rights and duties of and expectations from women in a family. Here, social status of women has been attempted for analysis by using variables like women's rights and duties and their participation in decision-making in economic, educational and political matters in the family. These are discussed hereunder.

1. In general the women are not involved in decisions taken for family economy. Two fifths (40.44%) of the total respondents are involved in the decision-making for daily expenditures along with their husband or father, followed by about one third (31.48%) who independently decide for domestic expenditures. Thus, nearly three fourths (71.92%) of the respondents altogether somehow involve in the decision making. Almost the similar pattern is observed in both the communities. However, the Kuki women are more involve in the decision making for domestic expenditure than the Karbi women.

2. Of the respondents, about two fifths (37.65%) make decisions, sometimes, followed by about one third (29.88%) who participate in the decisions rarely and one fourth (25.50%) who always participate in the decision making. The rest (6.97%) do not have power to decide anything about the expenditure. Comparatively over one fourth (27.98%) of the Kuki respondents and about one fourth (23.59%) of the Karbi respondents participate in the decision making regularly. But over one third (35.56%) of the Karbi and over two fifths (40.37%) of the Kuki respondents involve in the decision-making sometimes, whereas about one third (30.99%) of the Karbi and over one fourth (28.44%) of the Kuki respondents rarely participate in the decision making. Thus, one fourth (25.50%) of the respondents have always a say in the matters of expenditures and the rest do not. Comparatively the Kuki women are positioned better in the matter, perhaps due to their better educational (and economic) status, the Kuki community keeps their womenfolk more involved in household activities along with their role in decision-making for expenditure.

3. Of the respondents only about one fifth (18.21%) independently decide for all investments in their families, whereas about one fourth (24.09%) of the respondents participate in the decisions along with their fathers or husbands. The rest, about three fifths (57.7%) have no role in the decision-making for investment. Hence, over two-fifths (42.30%) of the respondents have role in the decision-making process for family investments. Here, half (50.26%) of the Karbi and about only one third (32.92%) of the Kuki respondents are involved in the decision-making fully or partially. Due to external / urban impact in the Karbi community, the women are more engaged in decision-making role for investments than the Kuki women.

4. Of the respondents who involve in the decision-making for investment, about two fifths (39.07%), sometimes, make investment in traditional or modern or both ways. Almost the same trend is observed in the two communities. But about two fifths (37.75%) of the

respondents rarely involve in any investment, whereas only about one fourth (23.18%) of the respondents regularly involve in purchasing of livestock, leasing-in of beetle-nut garden, making fixed deposit of money in Bank or Post Offices etc. Almost the same trend is observed in the two communities.

5. Of the respondents, only about one third (31.69%) of the Karbi and over one fourth (29.36%) of the Kuki families are found involved in any kind of savings. Only about one seventh (15.41%) of these respondents have a role in decision-making for savings, whereas over one fourth (27.73%) of the respondents involve in the decision-making along with their fathers or husbands. The rest, about three fifths (56.86%), have no involvement at all in the decision making for family savings. However, over two fifths (43.14%) of the respondents are involved in the decision-making of savings: about half (46.63%) of the Karbi and about two-thirds (39.02%) of the Kuki respondents. Karbi women always enjoy a greater role in savings than the Kuki, due to the location of Karbi habitation near urban area.

6. Of the respondents who are involved in investment, 44.16% have rarely any role in family investments: 38.89% Karbis and 51.55% Kukis, whereas 33.12% of them invest occasionally: 36.67% Karbis and 28.13% Kukis. However, only about one fourth of the respondents invest regularly: 24.44% Karbis and 20.32% Kukis. Thus, more Karbi respondents have a role to decide for savings than their Kuki counterparts. Due to the location of the Karbi villages, these people have comparatively easier access to the financial institutions than the Kuki people. Besides, greater gender bias in the Kuki family also discourages the Kuki women's involvement in family savings.

7. Borrowing is practiced in families of both the communities; however, the women are not widely involved in decision making for borrowing. But due to comparatively a strong hold in family economy, Karbi women are a little more capable of taking decisions for borrowing than the Kuki respondents. Over half (55.59%) of the respondents' families are involved in borrowing: 56.69% of the Karbi and 55.96% of the Kuki respondents. But about two thirds (65.73%) of the respondents has no role in family borrowing: 63.35% of the Karbi and 68.04% of the Kuki respondents. About one fifth (18.73%) of them are involved in the decisions for borrowing along with their fathers or husbands: 19.88% of the Karbi and 17.21% of the Kuki respondents. Only 15.90% of the respondents can take decisions for borrowing independently: 16.77% of the Karbi and 14.75% of the Kuki respondents.

8. Of the respondents who are involved in borrowing, over two fifths (42.86%) occasionally involve in decision-making. This pattern is observed in both the communities. About two fifths (37.75%) of the respondents rarely involve in the decision-making for borrowing. Only about one fifth (19.39%) of the respondents are involved regularly in decision making for family borrowing. According to the customary law of the two tribal communities, property is distributed among male children only and, therefore, their women have the least role in all important economic matters like borrowing.

9. Of the respondents who are married and have children, over two-fifths (40.78%) have no decision-making role about education of their children, and in their case either husband or other members of the family take the decision: 44.54% of the Karbi and 36.22% of the Kuki respondents. About two fifths (38.25%) of the respondents take decisions along with husband about education of their children. The same pattern is observed in the two communities. However, over one fifth (20.97) of the respondents enjoy full liberty in decision making for children's education: 18.07% of the Karbi and 24.49% of the Kuki respondents. Thus, due to

the impact of education and Christianity, comparatively Kuki mother-respondents have more decision-making role in respect of their children's educations than their Karbi counterparts.

10. Of the respondents, over half (51.75%) have occasionally decision making role in their children's education: Karbi -53.79% and Kuki - 49.6%. However, about one third (31.52%) of the respondents regularly take decisions for children's education: 25.76% of the Karbi and 37.6% of the Kuki respondents. About one fifth (16.73%) of the respondents rarely involve in decision making for children's education: one fifth (20.45%) of the Karbi and over one tenth (12.8%) of the Kuki respondents. Comparatively, more Kuki respondents are involved in their children's education than the Karbi respondents. Due to the impact of Christianity and education, Kuki community is more aware about children's education as well as the role of mother for proper education of their children.

11. Of the respondents, about half (47.01%) have no role in decision-making pertaining to their health. The women in both the communities have practically the least role in decisions taken about their own health. About two fifths (39.44%) of the respondents take decisions for their own health/treatment along with husband or father. However, only over one tenth (13.55%) of the respondents have freedom to take decision about their own health. The same pattern is observed in the two communities. However, due to the location of Karbi habitation and the effect of urbanization, Karbi respondents have a little more decision-making role over Kuki respondents in respect of their own health.

12. Of the respondents, about half (49.28%) occasionally involve in the decisions taken about their own health; about one third (29.35%) of the respondents always take decision about their own health and over one fifth (21.38%) of them are rarely involved in the decision-making. Almost the same trend is observed in the two communities. Thus, both the tribal communities have almost the same pattern of women's involvement in decisions for their own health. However, Kuki community is found more orthodox about the health of their womenfolk and hence, allow the least of decision-making role to them.

13. Of the respondents who have voting right, about three fifths (70.72%) have no role to decide for vote casting in favour of a candidate or political party and they cast their vote as passive voters. Almost the same trend is observed in the two communities. About one fifth (16.05%) of them are partially involved in decisions for vote casting whereas only over one tenth (13.23%) of the respondents exercise vote casting independently: 14.29% of the Karbi and 11.88% of the Kuki respondents. Thus, the Karbi respondents have better role in the decision making as external / urban contact makes the community more aware about the political rights of individuals than the Kuki respondents.

14. Of the respondents, over two fifths (42.96%), sometimes participate in decision-making for vote casting ; about one third (31.11%) of the respondents are rarely involved and only over one fourth (25.93%) of them have their own decisions. Almost the same pattern is observed in the two communities. Due to more urban contact, Karbi respondents have greater role in the decisions taken for casting of vote.

15. Both the communities mainly depend on agriculture and womenfolk are the major workforce, but only over one tenth (11.62) of the respondents participate actively in decision making for selection of land and the type of crop to be raised. On the other hand, over one fifth (22.31) of the respondents decide jointly with husband to choose land and crop for jhum cultivation. The rest, about two thirds (66.07%) of the respondents, have no say in the decisions taken for cultivation. Almost the same trend is observed in the two communities.

However, the Kuki women have been availing more decision-making in this respect than the Karbi respondents. In both the communities, women are generally deprived from landed property of the families, resulting in their deprivation from the decision-making.

16. Of the respondents, about one fourth (23.98%) participate regularly in the decisions taken for selecting land and crop for cultivation and about one third (29.82%) of the respondents occasionally join such decision-making. The Karbi respondents are marginally ahead of their Kuki counterparts in this respect. In all, about half (46.20%) of the respondent rarely participate in the decision-making. Comparatively, the Karbi community gives more space to their womenfolk in selecting land and crop for cultivation.

B. ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE WOMEN

1. About three fourths (71.12%) of the respondents are employed or engaged in various economic activities: Over three fourths (75.23%) of the Kuki and over two third (67.96%) of Karbi respondents are employed.

2. Over three fifths (62.69%) of the Karbi and about three fifths (58.53%) of the Kuki respondents are engaged in settled and jhum cultivation. Cultivation is the main occupation of both the tribal communities.

3. Handicrafts and handlooms are found as the emerging occupation particularly in villages located in the border areas of Assam, Mizoram and Manipur.

4. Most of the respondents belong to the lowest income group of Rs. 2000/ - 5000/-. Rest of the respondents have monthly income of more than Rs. 5000/-

5. About half (49%) of the respondents get less than half the wage of their male counterparts. A negligible portion of them get equal wage. Comparatively, Kuki female of the district are found less in wage labour activities. Thus, the gender discrimination is found in both the communities.

6. Both the communities are largely transacting in kind. The mode of transaction is both cash and kind in these villages. In the era of globalization when the country is going to be cashless, the societies of the valley are still practicing transaction in kind. Comparatively, the Karbi respondents largely use payment in cash while the Kuki respondents use both the modes of transaction. Communicational remoteness is the main reason behind this type of transaction.

7. The respondents have animal husbandry in their houses. About one fourth (22.9%) respondents altogether have a single animal in their houses. Offering of birds or animals to deity for religious purpose among the Karbis makes difference with the Kukis. For religious offerings, domestic needs and commercial use, rearing of hens is very common in the Karbi villages, particularly among those Karbis who have animistic culture. Pig is very common among the Kukis, particularly in these villages which are located in Assam-Mizoram and Assam-Manipur Border areas. Pig is generally sold and supplied to the neighboring states (Mizoram and Manipur) having the Kuki habitations and also in the local market.

8. Ownership of animals in over two thirds (69.22%) of the respondents' families is with males, followed by over one fifth (21.37%) of the families where the owners are females. In

the Kuki community males are dominating and female owners are found more in the Karbi community.

9. About three fourths (70.74%) of the male family members of the respondents sell their animals while one fourth (22.90%) of the female family members of the respondents sell their animals.

10. About three fifths (74.30%) of the male family members as compared to about one fourth (22.65%) of the female family members keep the income from livestock. Only negligible portion (3.05%) of the respondent has joint control over the income. But the trend is different when we compare both the tribal communities.

11. About three fourths (69.32%) of the respondents do not have any account in any government or private bank or post office. Only about one third (30.68%) of the respondents have accounts in various institutional agencies: Over half (51.95%) of the respondents have savings account in nationalised bank; about two fifths (38.31%) of them have savings account in post office and one tenth (9.74%) have the account in private bank.

12. One third (33.33%) of the respondents save income in the accounts of their family members, followed by over one fourth (27.73%) of the respondents who have joint accounts; about one fourth (23.53%) of the respondents practice traditional savings in which they keep money at home. Only a negligible portion has their personal accounts.

13. Karbi women have marginally high economic status in respect of savings in banking sector than the Kuki women. 68.31% of the Karbi and 70.64% of the Kuki respondents have no accounts in any of such agencies. This clearly shows the economic deprivation and lack of empowerment as well as continuity of customary laws among the tribal women in Cachar district.

14. Over two fifths (44.54%) of the respondents said that their fathers / husbands spent their income while in case of about one fourth (24.93%) it is spent by them along with their husbands / fathers. It shows the economic control in the family in particular and society in general.

15. About one third (31.51%) of the respondents spent their major earning on dress material, followed by about two fifths (36.98%) who spent their income mainly on domestic articles. Then, about one fifth (18.63%) of them preferred to spend their income on children's education and the rest have spent their income on health (8.77%) and infrastructural development (4.11%). Thus, major income of the respondents is spent on purchasing domestic articles and dresses (68.49%). And the trend is almost the same among the two communities.

16. About two thirds (65.71%) of the respondents said that in their communities the economic and social liabilities of their widows were taken by the descendants. One fifth (20%) of the respondents said that the widows depended on their fathers or other family members while over one tenth (11.43%) of the respondents reported that widows were taken care of by other members of their in-laws families.

C. POLITICAL STATUS OF THE WOMEN

1. In spite of the involvement of women in almost all economic and non-economic activities, over three fourths (85.25%) of the respondents never attended any meeting of Gram Sabha. On the other hand, over one tenth (12.58%) of them have occasionally attended the meetings. Of them only 2.17% have attended the meeting regularly. The patterns are similar among the respondents of the two communities. However, Kuki society is more rigid in the matter of allowing their womenfolk to attend such meeting than the Karbi society. Hence, Kuki women always maintain more distance with regards to decision-making in any form and anywhere as compared with the Karbi women. Location and communication facility of the Karbi habitations are comparatively advantageous than those of the Kuki habitations. The Kukis have better education of family members but the family head is generally found inclined to certain individual or political party and he decides anything.

2. About the awareness of various government sponsored schemes initiated at the Gaon Panchayat level, it is found that all the respondents of both the communities are aware about Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), followed by the most (80.68%) of the respondents who have adequate knowledge about widows' pension and old age pension. MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) is also a popular scheme and about three fourths (57.77%) of the respondents have also full information about it. Due to more education in the Kuki tribe including its womenfolk, the awareness about beneficiaries of this scheme is relatively more in the Kuki respondents than the Karbi respondents. About four fifths (77.11%) of the Karbi respondents and over four fifths (85.32%) of the Kuki respondents are aware about the scheme. But advantage of location of the villages with better communication has direct impact on the implementation of some schemes such as IAY, MGNREGS etc, as, due to the location of Karbi villages, implementation of the schemes is more visible in their villages than the Kuki villages: about three fifths (57.39%) of the Karbi respondents and over two fifths (41.75%) of the Kuki respondents are aware about MGNREGS.

3. Satisfaction level of the respondents about the activities of Gaon Panchayat is very less. Over half (52.23%) of the respondents who are aware the functions of Gaon Panchayat expressed their dissatisfaction over the activities of Gaon Panchayat for ignoring their village in various welfare schemes whereas over one third (33.60%) of the respondents were partially satisfied and only over one tenth (14.17%) of them were satisfied. Here, also, location keeps most of the Kuki respondents relatively deprived from various welfare schemes under Gaon Panchayat and therefore, about three fifths (57.42%) of the Kuki respondents are dissatisfied as compared to about half (48.63%) of the Karbi respondents. Then, more Karbi respondents (35.62%), as compared with the Kuki respondents (30.69%), are partially satisfied. In the case of their full satisfaction, about one sixth (15.75%) of the Karbi respondents against one tenth (11.88%) of the Kuki respondents remain satisfied over the activities of Gaon Panchayat.

4. Headman is the administrative head of a tribal village and near about two thirds (64.49%) of the respondents are partially satisfied with the performance of headman and over one third (35.51%) of them fully satisfied. So, majority of the respondents are partially satisfied. The same pattern is observed across the respondents of the two communities. Few issues like restriction on the rearing of number of livestock, which is not favourable in respect of certain cultivation and settlement of a dispute which makes a few families unhappy with the headman. It is also seen that due to religious differences among people of several villages where co-habitation of both Christian and animistic Hindu Karbi people takes place like

Boalchera Karbi village, most of the people who have converted into Christianity, do not support the animistic Hindu headmen on all occasions. So, satisfaction over headman's work is more in the Kuki villages than the Karbi villages.

5. The traditional tribal village administration is very strong in every tribal village. In Karbi villages such body is termed Kachingdai whereas in Kuki villages, this administrative body is known as *Deban*. About three fifths (57.52%) of these respondents are satisfied with the administration and the rest (42.48%) are not. More of the Kuki respondents (63.08%) are satisfied than those of the Karbi respondents (53.52%). Due to the cultural homogeneity, strong monitoring by Church and effect of education, the Kuki respondents have comparatively greater satisfaction than the Karbi respondents. Besides, the former have also comparatively less number of disputes.

6. About the function of welfare organizations, about three fifths (58.56%) of the total respondents have adequate knowledge about the welfare organizations of their area and communities. However, tribal welfare organizations are more active in the Kuki areas. Over three fifths (61.01%) of the Kuki respondents are well aware about the functions of various Missionary trusts which provide low cost medical treatment and education. About three fifths (56.69%) of the Karbi respondents also know the activities of Vanabashi Kalyan Ashram, Ramkrishna Mission etc. very well. However, about one third (30.28%) of the total respondents have also some knowledge about the activities of tribal welfare organizations in their areas: about one third (30.99%) of the Karbi respondents and over one fourth (29.36%) of the Kuki respondents. But over one tenth (11.16%) of the total respondents has no idea about these welfare organizations and their activities: 12.32% of the Karbi and 9.63% of the Kuki respondents. Here, particularly womenfolk remain untouched with the organizations. But in most of the Kuki villages and a few of the Karbi villages, Churches always play a vital role for the welfare of the community while tribal welfare organizations in most of the Karbi villages are running various welfare programmes. However, due to a strong network of Churches in most of the Kuki habitations, maximum of the Kuki people are associated with various welfare organizations.

7. Women's participation in political activities is very poor. Most of the families (83.06%) of the respondents do not encourage them for participation in activities like political meetings or any discussion, campaigning in favour of a candidate or political party, casting vote according to the one's own choice etc and the rest (16.93%) are allowed to participate. Moreover, only 5.38% of the respondents are fully encouraged and over one tenth (11.58%) are encouraged to some extent to participate in political activities. The patterns are similar among the respondents of the two communities. The Karbi families are found more liberal towards women's participation in political activities than the Kuki families as 85.32% of the Kuki respondents as compared with 81.33% of the Karbi respondents who said that women are not at all encouraged to participate. It is reported that the families which have educated members or inclined towards any political party generally encourage their womenfolk for political participation. Urban/external impact also create positive impact to some extent among tribal people in this regard. So, due to better location of the habitations with urban impact, the Karbi families are comparatively liberal to allow women to participate in political activities.

8. For casting of vote, over two thirds (69.32%) of the respondents (61.66% of the Karbi and 70.18% of the Kuki community) have no freedom to cast their vote according to their own choice as it is decided by families, specially male members; over one fifth (21.51%) of the respondents (Karbi-21.83% and Kuki-21.10%) are allowed to some extent to cast vote of

their choice and about one tenth (9.16%) of them have full freedom to cast vote of their choice. The same trend is observed among the respondents of the two communities. However, in the category of 'No freedom' the figure for the Kuki respondents (70.18%) is much more than that for the Karbi respondents (61.66%).

9. Regarding the discussion by women on various political matter in their families largely the respondents are allowed occasionally as about three fourths (74.68%) of the respondents' families allow their womenfolk in such discussions occasionally and over one fourth (25.32%) of the respondents' families have women's participation in political discussions regularly. In the two communities womenfolk generally do not take part in the political discussions regularly as women remain engaged with the work in family all the time. But on some occasions like organizing any conference for development of the community, they participate with no hesitation. However, regular participation of women in discussions on political matters is found more in the Karbi respondents' families (27.21%) than the Kuki respondents' families (22.68%) whereas in occasional discussions, more Kuki respondents' families (77.32) allow their women folk than the Karbi respondents' families (72.79%). It is also observed that in order to manage household activities, the families generally never feel it necessary to encourage their womenfolk in such discussions as these are considered useless for women.

10. For having membership in political parties, very few respondents (only 29) have membership in two political parties, out of which over half (51.72%) are members of Indian National Congress (INC) and 48.28% are members of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). More of the Karbi respondents (64.71%) and their families have membership of BJP whereas more of the Kuki families (75.00%) have membership of Indian National Congress. Due to influence of political winds from the neighbouring state of Mizoram with Christian majority as well as its religious minority status, Kukis prefer the Congress under the influence of their religious leaders. However, due to their traditional culture and the influence of Sangha Parivar, Karbi people generally prefer BJP.

11. In vote casting, community's or village's interest plays a vital rote. Here, over two fifths (36.87%) of the respondents exercise their voting right only for fulfilling their village's or community's interest: Over one third (36.29%) of the Karbi respondents and about two fifths (37.62) of the Kuki respondents. Self or family's interest also has a great role in exercising voting right in both the communities as the second most important factor among over one fifth (21.48%) of the respondents. Here, self or community-centric voting is more distinctly visible among the Kuki respondents (23.76) than the Karbi (19.69) respondents. There is also a common belief in a section of the tribal people that through voting their citizenship (i.e., land ownership) is renewed or protected. About one fifth (18.66%) of the respondents, thus, cast their vote to protect or renew citizenship: 18.92% of the Karbi and 18.32% of the Kuki respondents. National interest is also a motivating factor in voting for parliamentary elections and 16.27% of the respondents vote for this purpose. Here, the Karbi respondents (20.08%) are more than the Kuki (11.39%) respondents while the rest of the patterns are similar across the purposes for vote casting. However, the female voters (88.45%) are particularly influenced by male guardian at home much more: 88.32% of the Karbi and 89.91% of the Kuki respondents. Headman of tribal village also creates a positive atmosphere of vote casting for a particular person or party after getting some benefit (personal, for community/village or of both types). 66.18% of the Karbi and 56.88% of the Kuki respondents believed that headman or senior respectable male person of their village influenced them in vote casting. Influence of friends is also quite a large among the

respondents (44.22%): 48.24% - Karbi and 38.07% - Kuki. Other factors like political campaign and effect of mass media/books and magazines leave no significant influence on vote casting among the respondents. Vote casting among the respondents of the communities is almost similar at the three levels of elections (above 90%). This means that women are influenced and guided for vote casting by male head of family and village headman or friends in the elections, and the community feeling is strong among them and women are less aware in the matter of political participation.

D. HEALTH STATUS OF THE WOMEN

1. Sex ratio in both the communities is very poor as compared with that of the district, state and national level. There are total 881 females per '000 males: Karbi-866 and Kuki-895 female per 1000 male. Comparatively, sex ratio is better in Kuki community (895) than the Karbi community (866). This is because the Kukis have better education than the Karbis which influences them to maintain the family size and also to adopt hygienic habits in their day-to-day life. The trend of underage marriage of girls and high pregnancy rate of mother are also responsible for early death of women which imbalances the sex ratio. According to the census 2011 report, the number of females per '000 males in India is 940, in Assam 954 and in Cachar 958 (indiaonlinepages.com accessed on 13th April, 2016 at 7.35 am). The distance of health institutions from the habitations has direct impact on their health awareness, due to which sex ratio is comparatively better in some villages – Madhurapur and New Malidhor Karbi villages and Akai, Songhlu, Luipui (Bagbahar Part V), Kharzol, Zoar Lalpeing Punjee, and Bethal Kuki villages, where number of females are more than males. Male-female ratio is 1:1 in Boalchera Poila Number and Monai Hellot Karbi villages.

2. Regarding the mortality patterns in the two communities, one finds that over one fourth (25.30%) of the respondents' families had deaths in the last 10 years: 26.60% of the Kuki and 24.30% of the Karbi respondents. The mortality rate is much higher in both the communities, when compared with the figures of the Census 2011, where Crude Death Rate (CDR) (death occurred in a year per '000 population) in Assam is 8.0 and in India it is 7.1. (www.censusindia.gov.in/vital_statistics/SRC_Report/11chap%204%20-%202011 accessed on 05.09.2016 at 6.25 AM). Underage marriage of girls, lower education and remoteness of habitations resulting into unawareness of the community as a whole are the root causes of high death rate in the Karbi and Kuki villages. Only about one tenth (8.16%) of the respondents' families altogether have faced infant death (death of a child within 1 year of birth). About 7.75% of the Karbi respondents and near about 8.72% of the Kuki respondents have experienced infant deaths in their families in the last ten years. Also, a negligible section (5.78%) of the families has experienced maternal deaths (death of mother within 42 days of delivery) in last 10 years: 4.58% of the Karbi and 7.34% of the Kuki respondents. For infant and maternal health care, traditional along with modern health services show remarkable impact, and reducing the maternal as well as infant mortality.

3. More number of pregnancies per mother are very common and mothers having 4-5 pregnancies constituted the largest group in the two communities respondents: About two fifths (36.65%) of the mothers (respondents) are having 4-5 pregnancies (35.95% of the Karbi and 34.45% of the Kuki mothers). Of the respondents, over one fourth (26.85%) had 0-3 pregnancies and nearly two fifths (37.39%) had above 5 pregnancies. Thus, most of them (73.15%) had above 4 pregnancies. However, more Kuki mother respondents (30.02%) have 0-3 pregnancies as compared with the Karbi mother respondents (21.92 %%) while more of the Karbi mother respondents (88.08%) have over 3 pregnancies as compared with their Kuki counterparts (69.98%). Comparatively, the Karbi respondents have a greater number of

pregnancies than their Kuki counterparts. This is because of the impact of education, as Kukis have more educated persons, including their womenfolk. The high pregnancy rate per mother in both the tribes is due to early marriage of women, low literacy rate and lack of health awareness among females. But impact of better education to the Kuki women than Karbi women is clearly visible in the rate of their pregnancies.

4. About family planning, over half (51.39%) of the respondents are aware and over one third (36.25%) of them are not aware. Besides, over one tenth of the respondents did not respond. Similar pattern of awareness is observed across the respondents of the two communities. However, a difference is perceived between the respondents of the two communities who are not aware about family planning, i.e.; more of the Kuki respondents (42.66%) than the Karbi respondents (31.34%) are not aware about family planning, due to the remote location of most of the Kuki habitations and less visit of ASHA worker. Over half of the respondents (53.98%) are not visited by ASHA worker at all: 42.98% of the Karbi and 68.35% of the Kuki respondents. However, in spite of having the knowledge about family planning, its practice in both the communities is rare. So, the government and non-government organisations should focus on intensive awareness programme in the tribal areas, especially among tribal women, because the habitations of the Karbi and Kuki tribal communities are located in remote areas and therefore medical facility as well as awareness about various diseases is not adequate among the people.

5. Some hygienic habits always protect people from various diseases and also help in maintaining good health. Here, near about half (47.81%) of the respondents wash their hands after coming out from latrine simply with plain water and use no wash agent (57.04% of the Karbi and 35.78% of the Kuki respondents), and this puts them to risk of health hazards. Over one fourth of them use wash agents such as soap (26.89%) and sand & ashes (25.30%) to wash hands after coming out from latrine. Here, more of the Kuki respondents (39.45%) as compared with their Karbi counterparts (17.25%) use wash agents while more of the Karbi (27.70%) respondents and their family members use sand and ashes as compared with their Kuki counterparts (24.77%). Lack of awareness of hygienic habit and its effect in the two communities is the root cause of various health problems like dysentery, jaundice, tuberculosis etc. Awareness of hygienic habit to some extent depends upon their culture and society.

6. Allopathic medicine is most accepted in both the tribal communities. Traditional and indigenous medicine systems are on decline. A few old people in some villages are practicing traditional medicine system. The young generation is getting less interested about these; rather they like to use allopathic medicine for any health problem. Three fifths (59.36%) of the respondents go for allopath only in both the communities. But over one fifth (21.51%) of them prefer to combine allopathic treatment with traditional one: Karbis - 20.08% and Kukis - 24.50%. Besides, about one fifth (19.12%) of them use both homeopathic and allopathic treatment: 21.83% of the Karbi and 15.60% of the Kuki respondents.

7. In both the communities some restrictions are imposed on women during their biological cycles like menstruation and pregnancy. Over three fifths (77.89%) of the respondents have experienced restrictions imposed during these cycles: near about three fourths (73.24%) of the Karbi and most of the Kuki (83.94%) respondents. Karbi women have fewer restrictions. So, in one sense Karbi women receive more care during pregnancy period. But in some villages some traditional beliefs are found in practice during pregnancy. Women in over three fourths (77.49%) of the respondents' families do not take nutritious food during pregnancy in the two communities. Only over one fifth (22.51%) of the

respondents' families provide adequate food during pregnancy to pregnant women: 23.59% of the Karbi and 21.10% of the Kuki respondents. In this respect the women in the Karbi respondents' families have relatively better condition.

8. Nutritious food is not provided regularly to pregnant women during pregnancy in both the communities. Poor financial condition, remoteness of location, and lack of awareness and the least scope for medical facilities are the prime factors responsible for not providing proper nutritious food to pregnant women. Over half (53.21%) of the respondents' families do not provide nutritious food to pregnant women due to unawareness, followed by those respondents' families which cannot afford to provide such food, while a small fraction of the respondents' families do not provide such food due to traditional belief as they believe that nutritious food leads to the over growth of the baby in womb and to the pregnant women's to surgery for delivery. Thus, unawareness followed by poor economy is the main hurdle to provide nutritious food to the pregnant women in the two communities. However, unawareness has greater role in the Karbi respondents' families (56.22%) and poor economic condition is more responsible in the Kuki respondents' families (43.35%) for not providing nutritious food to pregnant women.

9. Health of pregnant women is not a priority in most of the families. A large section of the pregnant tribal women do not get support for health from their family members. Due to various reasons like their financial constraints, remote and inaccessible geographical location and lack of awareness, the women become ill after delivery in most of the cases. Over two thirds (70.32%) of the respondents' families are not concerned about women's health: 65.49% of the Karbi and 76.61% of the Kuki respondents. Only over one fifth (21.71%) of the respondents' families are concerned about their pregnant women's health. Less than one tenth (7.97%) of the respondents did not respond to the query.

10. Both the communities do not have adequate knowledge about the causes and the preventive measures to be taken for various diseases. Their life style and food habits are also dominant factor for the diseases they suffer. Awareness of diseases also helps the people in knowing causes and preventing common diseases in both the communities. In most of the cases people depend upon quacks for treatment of any disease and, hence, in some cases simple diseases become incurable. However, the effect of diseases like malaria, diarrhoea, cancer and jaundice are known by the most (81.69%) of the Karbi and almost all (97.71%) of the Kuki respondents, as these are the major diseases among them. Tuberculosis is also a common disease in both the communities. Over three fourths (79.58%) of the Karbi and almost all (97.25%) of the Kuki are aware about this.

E. EDUCATION, COMMUNICATION AND STATUS OF THE WOMEN

1. General education level among the respondents is very low. Lack of awareness and motivation regarding girl's education in both the tribal communities are responsible for it. The literacy rate among the respondents is 64.74%: 54.93% among the Karbi and 77.20% among the Kuki respondents. However, one tenth of the respondents have only the knowledge of alphabets without any schooling: 12.68% of the Karbi and 7.80% of the Kuki respondents. One fourth of the respondents have achieved the educational status up to primary level (Karbi - 23.59% and Kuki - 20.13%), followed by over one fifth (22.11%) of the respondents who have education up to middle school level (14.41% Karbi and 32.11% Kuki) and only 4.17% of the respondents have studied up to High school level (IX passed). Besides, 1.59% of the respondents have passed the HSLC (Karbi - 1.41% and Kuki - 1.83%); 0.60% respondents are Higher Secondary school pass (0.35% - Karbi and 0.92% - Kuki) and

only 2 (0.92%) respondents (from the Kuki community) are graduate whereas no Karbi respondent is graduate. The Karbi respondents have average education largely upto primary school (23.59%) and Kuki respondents have upto middle school (32.11%).

2. Dropout is mostly responsible for the poor level of education among the respondents of the two communities. 272 (54.18%) of the respondents were admitted in schools, 120 (42.25%) Karbi and 152 (69.72%) Kuki. 12 (4.62%) respondents (4 or 3.33% of the Karbis and 8 or 5.56% of the Kukis) completed their up to their desired education and did not drop out. The rest, 260 (116 Karbi and 144 Kuki) respondents, dropped out of their studies. Comparatively, among the Kuki respondents the lower Primary (LP) level dropout rate is low than the Karbi respondents. On the other hand, Kuki respondents have higher dropout rate than Karbi in the classes Six to Ten. Lack of awareness for girl's education is mostly responsible for this and it is widely visible in the Karbi community at all levels of education.

3. Over two fifths (42.69%) of the dropout respondents of both the communities had to discontinue their study due to the lack of motivation for girls, i.e., gender bias of their parents / guardians. Two fifths (40%) of the respondents had to discontinue education due to the distance of educational institution and security problem while about one tenth (8.85%) left their studies before completion, due to language barrier. Similar pattern is observed among the respondents of the two communities. About one tenth (8.46%) of the respondents had to discontinue education due to financial problems of their parents: 6.90% of the Karbi and 9.72% of the Kuki respondents.

4. Gender bias of the parents is mainly responsible for the women's poor educational level in both the tribal communities. But the Karbis are more gender-biased than the Kukis, perhaps due to their Hinduization while the impact of Christianity in Kukis has brought less gender-bias. Over three fifths (61.35%) of the respondents' families preferred boys to girls for education: 65.49% of the Karbi and 56.96% of the Kuki respondents. Very few prefer girls to boys for education as only 7.17% respondents' families prefer girls to education: 5.99% of the Karbi and 8.77% of the Kuki respondents. However, near about one third (31.48%) of the respondents' families have no preference for child of a particular gender and they are free from gender bias: 28.52% of the Karbi and 35.32% of the Kuki respondents.

5. Different modes of communication like radio, television, cell phones, newspaper play important role in imparting knowledge and making people aware about the value of education. But cellphones have replaced radio in all the Kuki and most of the Karbi villages because of the facilities available with cell-phone. Newspaper is not found in these villages, due to the lack of communication and few person collect newspapers occasionally. Hence, Cellphone plays vital role in providing all types of information and entertainment. Mobile phone has emerged an important means of communication in all sections of people, including women. Of the respondents, 210 have cell phone (41.20% Karbis and 42.66% Kukis). Over three fifths (62.86%) of the respondents are using their own cell phone; over one tenth (14.76%) of them use cell-phone of their father or husband and another over one tenth (13.81%) of the respondents have got cellphone from their siblings. Less than one tenth (8.57%) of the respondents are having gifted cell phone. Most (85.24%) of the cellphone using respondents have phones with Memory Card (other than Android): 88.17% of the Kuki and 82.91% of the Karbi respondents. Besides, over one tenth (11.43%) of mobile-user respondents have ordinary cell-phones. More Karbi (13.68%) respondents have ordinary phone sets than the Kuki (8.60%) respondents.

6. Most of the respondents (about three fourths) use their cellphones for both entertainment and communication in the two communities. One fifth (20.51%) of the Karbi respondents and over one tenth (11.82%) of the Kuki respondents use their cell phone set only for communication. Respondents with ordinary handset, mostly senior members belong to this category. On the other hand, as Kukis' maximum habitations are located in the remote areas of the district with either very low or no network, about one-fifth (17.20%) of the Kuki respondents have the handset for entertainment only and 6.84% of the Karbi respondents use mobile phone for entertainment.

7. A large number (66.66%) of mobile user-respondents recharge their mobile set at their own cost: over three fourths (75.21%) of the Karbi and about three fifths (55.91%) of the Kuki respondents. Father or husband recharges mobile in case of about one fifth (19.52%) respondents: about one third (30.10%) of the Karbi respondents and over one tenth (11.11%) of the Kuki respondents-students and housewives mostly belong to this category. Over one tenth (13.08%) of the respondents get mobile recharged from their siblings and the pattern is same in both the communities. Thus, despite a relatively higher literacy rate, Kuki respondents are found economically less empowered and therefore more dependent on others for mobile's bill payment.

8. Most (88.09%) of the respondents have monthly mobile bill of up to Rs. 250/- and one tenth (10%) of them spend Rs. 251-500 per month. A negligible number of respondents (about 1%), who are mostly from the villages located near the Silchar-Shillong national highway and have economically sound position, spend more than Rs. 500/- per month. The Karbi respondents spend more on phone use than the Kuki respondents. Like the road communication, mobile network is also poor in Kuki areas than Karbi areas. Therefore, for economic and connectivity reasons the Kukis have relatively less use of mobile phone than the Karbis.

9. Television is another important means of communication. Television users among the Karbi respondents are only 48 (16.90%) while the Kukis are 35 (16.06%), totaling to 83 (16.53%). Most (86.74%) of the respondents who possess television set has colour TV set: 85.41% of the Karbi and 71.42% of the Kuki respondents. About one tenth (8.43%) of them have LCD TV set; 4.81% of the respondents have Black and White TV set and the rest (2.40%) who belong to high income families and have adequate power facility possess LED TV set. The Karbi respondents have more colour TV sets and Black & White sets while the Kuki respondents have more LCD TV sets than the Karbi respondents.

10. Over two thirds (69.88%) of the respondents who have television set watch TV through DTH (direct to home) connection, followed by the remaining, about one third (30.12%), who have access to only Doordarshan by using antenna. More Karbi respondents (37.5%) as compared with the Kuki respondents (20%) have only Doordarshan channels while more Kuki respondents (80%) as compared with the Karbi respondents (62.5%) have DTH connection. Due to the non-availability of power supply in some villages of the two communities, a few families have to watch Black & White television chargeable with power battery.

11. Over half (53.01%) of the respondents', television sets were purchased by father or husband, followed by over one fifth (20.48%) of the respondents who have themselves purchased television set for the family. In case of one tenth (14.46%) of the respondents' son or daughter purchased the television for the family and in another case of over one tenth (12.05%) of the respondents only siblings purchased the television set. Comparatively, in the

Karbi respondents' families TV sets are purchased more by the respondents or their son/daughter, or siblings, while in Kuki respondents' families TV sets are purchased more by father / husband. Thus, TV sets are purchased generally by husband / father; however, the Karbi respondents have comparatively greater role in purchasing it. In Kuki families, the family head generally purchases the family assets; also, in most of the cases, family economy is always controlled by the family head and hence in maximum cases they take a decision for purchasing any asset like television set. But Karbi women relatively enjoy more freedom for keeping and spending their income as compared with their Kuki counterparts.

12. Watching television for 3-4 hours per day is most common in both the respondents' families where television sets are available. Over three fifths (61.45%) of the respondents watch television for 3-4 hours per day, followed by about one fourth (24.09%) of them who spend 1-2 hours and over one tenth (14.46%) of them spend 5-6 hours daily for watching television. Thus, the Kukis spent more time than the Karbis in watching various programmes. Watching television also helped the villagers in adopting certain habits like washing hands before taking meal, discarding age old practice of open defecation etc. Effect of television also can be noticed in their socio-cultural life.

CONCLUSION

In both the communities women are playing crucial role whether it is cultivation or at home. The status of tribal women in health, education, or social sector of both the communities is low in comparison with their menfolk or their counterparts in the non-tribal society.

In respect of social status, tribal women (Karbi) hold the relatively higher status. For example, Karbi women never change their clan (surname) even after marriage which is quite common in other societies. Also, generally women have the least role in the rituals of a dead person, whereas in the Karbi community a woman (preferably widow), called as Rexarpi, has to perform all rituals of a dead person; otherwise, women of both of the communities have to remain aloof from performing any religious offering as priest, while women in general lead in various religious offering. In educational status, literacy rate (69.29%) of the women in the two communities is lower than the female literacy of Cachar district (74.62%) and higher than National level (65.46%) and Assam (67.27%). However the level of education, of the women in the two communities is much lower than the nontribal in the area. While in health status, the sex ratio (number of females per '000males) of the two communities is much lower than that of the national (940), Assam (954) and the Cachar district levels (958) and even from the tribal population of Cachar district (1016 female per '000 males).

Comparatively, the Karbi women have higher status than the Kuki women, particularly in social, health and political aspects. However, the Kuki women have higher level of education. Status in economic aspect, the Karbi and Kuki women have almost similar pattern. Karbi women are generally involved in producing and trading traditional jhum products, collecting and sale of forest products and wage labour whereas, on the other hand, along with traditional jhum cultivation Kuki women also run handicrafts and handlooms. The tribal women are more active in all sectors from cultivation to trading than the nontribal, while in decision making for savings, purchasing of assets, borrowing like economic activities, etc, the women have the least role. Customary law deprives the women in the two communities from getting the parental properties. However, due to urban/external impact, in few cases, a share of parental land had been given to the Karbi women whereas Kukis are more rigid in this respect. Hence, the Kuki women have relatively achieved more

educational exposure than the Karbi women. Gender bias is also revealed from the study. The relatively higher status of Kuki women than their Karbi counterparts in education fails to create any remarkable impact on political, health and social or decision making status of women. Despite the gender bias, the Karbis are more politically conscious as the Karbi women have better political understanding ranging from Gaon Panchayat to national issues than the Kuki women. But formal education has failed to develop any remarkable political knowledge among the Kuki women. In both the tribal communities most of the women are passive voters; they exercise their voting right only to fulfill the ambitions of their male guardian, headman and others. In health sphere also, education fails to break the age-old mindset such as belief in hiding the pregnant women from the public places. Hence, the pregnant women were kept away from health institutions during delivery except any accidental or critical case but due to higher educational status, incidence of underage marriage, number of pregnancies per mother, family size etc is relatively lower in the Kukis than the Karbis. Also, in sex ratio, the Kukis (895 females per '000 males) are ahead of the Karbis (866 females per '000 males). Despite the lower education in both, men and women, Karbis are little more conscious about the health of the pregnant women than the Kukis. On the other hand, because of the spread of education among Kukis, some unhygienic habits like open defecation have died down. On contrary, due to lack of education and such other factors in operation, open defecation still exists in the Karbi community. In political participation, no Kuki woman has been elected as a representative so far whereas, there is a woman GP member in Damchera Karbi Punjee. The Karbi women have relatively more liberty in participating in various meetings than their Kuki counterparts.

Thus, the status of Karbi and Kuki women is quite low because locational disadvantages and lack of awareness. Despite the active participation in almost all economic activities along with their men folk, gender bias and customary law always underestimate the womenfolk and, hence, economic empowerment of the womenfolk in both the communities is a need of the time.

SUGGESTIONS

Suggestions for uplift the status of the Karbi and Kuki women on the basis of findings are presented here:

1. As most of the Karbi and Kuki villages are located in the remote areas of the district with the worst communication facility, Government should take necessary steps to construct new roads and to repair the existing roads to improve their connectivity with the rest of the area in the district. This may be a priority under MGNREGS. This will definitely result in development of the people in general and their womenfolk in particular.
2. Due to the presence of organized corrupt syndicate at various levels of development, there is a wide gap between the planning and implementation of various schemes. So, regular review of the implemented schemes should be carried out by the government officials with the villagers. Involvement of the people including women will make them aware regarding the developmental schemes..
3. To uplift the social, political, economic, health and educational status of the Karbi and Kuki women, the awareness should be created through schools. Therefore, some strategic measures have to be taken by making awareness campaigns throughout the year in their villages. The strategy will comprise the action groups properly trained and then engage them for the awareness programme occasionally/regularly by organizing meetings, seminar,

playing drama in the local language. These campaigns and programmes should be specially prepared by keeping the women in mind.

4. The literacy and educational level of the Karbi women is lower than the Kuki women, and the major reason for that is the distance of an educational institution, particularly upper primary school onwards, as well as teacher-absenteeism in Government primary schools located in the villages. So, School Managing Committee (SMC) is required to be strengthened in this respect. Helper teacher in each primary school located in tribal areas may be recruited by the SMC from the locality, according to availability. However, girls' hostel or residential girls' model schools may be established with free tuition facilities for promotion of girls' education in those areas where girls are deprived from getting education due to the reason of security and distance of educational institutions.

5. To uplift the tribal economy, the quality of the local products may be upgraded by utilizing modern technologies. Women work force should be involved in the up gradation of local resources which include training for women to build up their skills in various sectors of economy. If they are facilitated with modern training then they gradually attain the entrepreneurship skill. Thus, keeping local methods and factors in mind, handlooms and handicrafts may be developed by providing training, loans, raw materials and marketing facilities. This will result in economic independence and confidence building in the families.

6. For providing the banking facilities among the tribal women, initiative should be taken in order to develop their habit to transact with banks by familiarizing them with banking system as well as mini Post Offices should be opened in these villages. Also, necessary steps should be taken to encourage the tribal women to form Self Help Groups (SHGs) in each tribal village in order to get the loan with minimum interest rate through the banks.

7. Location of the villages generally doesn't permit the villagers in general and their womenfolk in particular to avail the required health care from health institutions. Hence, for promoting health status of women it is very important to recruit the Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) or equivalent health worker from the respective communities. Besides, health centres with minimum health facility should be established in each village. Until health facility is provided at their door it will remain inaccessible to the women.

8. To provide the medical support to the critically diseased persons without any middleman, help-desks operated by tribal women should be introduced in Government health institutions like Medical College and other hospitals.

9. A social campaign may be started through various NGOs with the help of educated persons of the respective community to bring the notice about the clauses of tribal customary laws which deprive their women from the property rights and other rights. Also, tribal people should be motivated through campaigns to change the customs which are mainly responsible for the lower status of their womenfolk.

10. For allotting reservation in each and every sector like education, employment and others, 50% of the tribal quota should be considered for the tribal women to bring the desirable changes in socio-economic life of the tribal women in particular and tribal population in general as women are the epicentre of the tribal development.
