



CHAPTER-VII
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7.1. Introduction

Change is certain in the development process of any society or community and socio-economic status is an important indicator to measure such changes. The socio-economic status of the women can be define as a level of access to and control over material resources includes food, income, land and other forms of wealth and social resources including knowledge, power and prestige within the family, in the community and in the society at large. In short, it involves around the social, economic, political standing of the women in the society. Studying the socio-economic status of particular community or groups will bring out the condition of their education status, health status and economic status. This component is an essential part of wellbeing of any individual or society all together.

In Manipur there are many communities which have experienced the socio-economic changes brought by the development process. However, the benefits from the development are not equally distributed among all individual or communities due to many socio-political factors. The tribal communities in Manipur live in the interior hilly region and very often they are deprived relative to the Non-Tribals groups. The Kuki of Manipur is one of the groups whose identity has been surrounded with controversies. They have suffered from political and ethnical problems which lead to fragment of the Kuki tribes. Between all this processes the Kuki women have largely been affected and their socio-economic status remains low relative to female of other tribes and Non-Tribals group. Moreover due to primitive and patriarchal nature of the tribal society the women are lacking behind every aspects of well-being.

The overall situation of Manipur in terms of sex ratio, literacy, health indicates that the prevalence of gender disparities in the state. The sex ratio of the state is observed to be in favour to the female till 1971. In case of the educational level, disparity between male and female is observed. Even though there is rise in the level of education among female but it is still below than that of the male in the state. Even if the workforce in Manipur constitutes a large number of women, the disparity in the work force is still retains over the decade. The women are found employed in the unorganised sector such as household industries, petty trades and services,

construction works and few numbers were absorbed in the public sector and Central Government, State Government and local bodies. The health scenario of the women in the state indicates poor health condition. The percentage of women suffering from anaemia was seen increasing from 28.9 percent (NFHS-1) to 35.7 percent (NFHS-3).

Similarly, the tribal society is also in a transitional phase and is passing through the process of planned change in many aspects. The tribal communities being most unprivileged communities among all the backward class are severely affected by poverty, low level of literacy and health care facilities, hunger, malnutrition and low job opportunities. In most cases the socio-economic status of tribal women are lower in comparison to the women of other communities. They are comparatively more illiterate; they bear more problems related to reproductive health, and are less exposed to the practical knowhow of world as they are mostly confined in household works. The low educational status is reflected by their lower literacy rate, lower enrolment rate and their presence in the school. Higher illiteracy, poor health and low income give indications of lower socio-economic status.

Many studies have been going on from earlier period to highlight the problem and prospect of the tribal. As consequences of all these efforts many strategies were adopted by the Central as well as the State Government to safeguard their identity and to protect them from being exploited.

It is rightly said that the tribal women are doubly deprived, first in term of being a tribal and second for being a women. Therefore great efforts are required to bring the tribal women in the mainstream of development. Their inactive participation in the development process indicate desecrate of human resources. However the severity of the problem may vary from one individual to individual or community to community. The level of deprivation depends upon many factors like the social, economic, political, cultural phenomenon.

In a developing country like India, the resources and wealth are divided unequally. Some groups have received more opportunities while some remain untouched by the development. The story of the tribal women belongs to the second group. They mostly remain isolated, illiterate, engaged in unorganised sector, they lack knowledge of health facilities and other developmental programs. However the level of deprivation or the socio-economic status of the women differ from a particular area to another

area owing to their geographical location, historical background and the process of social changes.

The study carried out here is an exploration about the level of socio-economic deprivation of women of selected tribal group that is Kuki women of Churachandpur District, Manipur. Conceptually, we can measure socio-economic status of an individual by some list of queries. But in our study we have opted for alternative procedure. We know level of deprivation and level of socio-economic achievement of an individual moves in opposite direction to each other thus higher the socio-economic status/ achievement lesser will be the level of deprivation.

The socio-economic status of a woman can be defined as a finely graded hierarchy of social position, which can be used to describe a woman's overall social position or standing. It is a composition of different dimensions such as educational attainment, health status, income, employment and occupation. Socio-economic status is an implicit theory caused by some exogenous factors in a formative manner. There has been a conflict on the agreement on the concept and measurement of socio-economic status. Two different schools of thoughts re-emerge on the very conflict of measurement of socio-economic status of women like the unitary concept of measuring socio-economic status and multidimensional measurement of socio-economic status.

In this study, we have opted the second school of thought that socio-economic status is an amalgamated term which can be measured with composite of different dimension of life. The dimensions like health, education, income and occupation are important among many other dimensions. Female specific variables for each dimension are taken into consideration for the both the Kuki and Non-Kuki women. Even if there are many sub-tribes under the umbrella of Kuki tribe, for the purpose to bring justice to the study, we are considering Kuki as earlier described by writers and authors.

Bearing this concept, the present study is designed with set of objectives and research question to find out the socio-economic status of Kuki women.

The units of the study are the women belonging to Kuki and Non-Kuki groups residing in the Churachandpur district of Manipur. The data is collected with the help of a pre-tested structured questionnaire from sample individuals through personal

interview method. Out of the total sample size of 500 women, 300 women belong from Kuki community and 200 belong from Non-Kuki community. The Kuki women are further segregated as the married women and unmarried women. The women under this study belong to a wide range of age group. For better result the women were classified as the 'Married Women' and 'Unmarried Women'. Selected indicators were employed to measure the Health status, Educational Status, Employment status, Income status and Socio-economic status of the Kuki women. The same process was employed in the case of the Non-Kuki as well.

7.2. Empirical Finding of the Study

The discussion under this section provides a synthesis of the empirical findings from the study. The assessment of the health condition of the married Kuki women produce evidences that it cannot be described as a good health status. More than half of the married Kuki women lack proper health facilities. Some of them were not aware of the medical facilities available to them and hesitated to go and undertook the facilities. The most ironic finding was in this modern world of technology some of the women in the villages still rely on the outdated method of child delivery. They feel embarrassed and many of them feel that it is not essential to avail these facilities. They generally prefer the primary maternity care by traditional birth attendants (Dai). This may be due to lack of awareness and confidence over medical facilities. When the health condition of the unmarried Kuki women is examined it is noticed that health condition of the unmarried women is in a better situation. Nearly half of the women fell under the high health status category. While looking at the within group comparison it was spotted that the health condition of Kuki women is moderate (reflected by the health index values). During the survey it also came to light that poor health condition of the women is mainly due to poverty and least consciousness about their health. The health indices for the Non-Kuki women (both for married women and unmarried women) show that the health status fall in low health status category. It is found that the Kuki women are in better position than the Non-Kuki women for both the cases of married and unmarried categories.

The educational level of the married Kuki women shows a very poor situation. The women are found either as illiterate or have attended primary or secondary level of education. Only insignificant numbers of women are found to have attained higher

education. But in the case of the unmarried Kuki women, the study has found better educational attainment. The huge gap in the educational qualification is brought by the changes in the educational system of the state. But such mere percentages of women enjoying higher education does not justify that Kuki women are having higher education. Similarly in the case Non-Kuki women the same result is observed. In both the group the unmarried women are found to have a better education. Overall, the educational level of the Kuki and Non Kuki are observed to be very low.

The income earning capacity is undervalued in unorganised sector. This observation is made in case of the Kuki as well as for Non-Kuki women. Maximum numbers of the women fall under the category of women having low income. Sample women respondents were found to be either engaged in petty business or unorganised sector and hence their contribution to the family income is a minimal amount. Most of the women were financially dependent to other family members. Generally, if a woman has financial independence, then this may have positive influence on the decision making power of that woman, leading to greater empowerment.

Sample women respondents were mainly engaged in cultivation and small business but at same time few numbers of women are seen to work in organised sectors. The women work as daily labourer, street vendor, tea stall, meat stall, cloths merchandise, forest products seller etc. Few are found to be working as Primary school teacher; college teacher, Anganwadi helper and Government employees. A very important thing is observed here that these working women belong to the family where the household head are educated. Thus it gives indication that education level of the household head is very important determining factor for development of women of that household.

In contrast to our assumption, scenario in the district shows that the Kuki women are found to have a better socio-economic status relative to Non-Kuki women. Thus we can draw a definitive end with the observation that though Kuki women are more affluent than the Non-Kuki women but still socio-economic status of the Kuki women is far below the satisfactory margin. This gives clear impression that in rural society women are still deprived of their capabilities.

The factors which play an influencing role in determining the socio-economic status of the Kuki and Non-Kuki will provide help us in framing future strategies. Factors

like income of women, their educational attainment, their BMI, educational gap between spouse and eligible age of marriage turn out to be strongly determining the socio-economic status of married women. Here, educational gap and age gap between spouses are found to influence the socio-economic status of married women. The income of the respondents, family size and BMI are found to positively influence socio-economic status of married women. In case of unmarried women factors like the income of women, their educational attainments, their BMI are found to be the major factors determining the socio-economic status.

7.3. Major Conclusions

This section of the study includes the valuable observation made during the survey.

- ❖ A good number of women were found to have delivery by the traditional way by Dai at their home and have delivery in absent of any skilled person. It also came to light that especially in the case of the Non-Kuki women the elderly members of families do not prefer visiting hospital or clinic for delivery and its related reasons. It reflects lack of consciousness to the importance of health care of the mother and the child.
- ❖ Even if the Kuki women were deprived in term of education, work and health facilities. Christianity has brought modernization and irreversible changes for the Kukis. A striking thing we discovered from our empirical research is that Kuki woman has more liberty on the freedom of movement than the Non-Kuki women. The Non-Kuki household are observed to be bound with more of traditional believes and norms. Moreover, many kuki women who are illiterate are found to understand and communicate in English. They are called as the functional groups. This is due to the positive impact of Christian missionaries and churchly activities.
- ❖ Villages like Mata, Tuibong, Molnom, Torbung, Bungmual nearer to District Headquarter and main market in the district are found to be more developed. The women are having more opportunities of work and it gives them easy access for trade and commerce, than that village farthest from the main market.
- ❖ Chieftainship has a diverse bearing on the socio-economic life of the Kuki people. It is instrumental in the preservation of customary laws and matters

concerning village administration. In the traditional society the system of chieftainship system was favourable to the people but its continuation system is no longer favoured in the contemporary society. The chief has total authority in the villages. In matter of political ground, the chief decide on behalf of the villager to whom to caste the vote. The women do castes their votes but either under the influences of the chief of the villages or head of the household. It shows violation of human right.

- ❖ A significant number of women are found to be consuming intoxicant like tuibuh (tobacco juice), chewing of tobacco leaves, beedi (Indian cigarette filled with tobacco) etc. However, this practice was found lesser among the Non-Kuki group.
- ❖ In a Kuki household, it is a normal routine that the men and women in the household to take meal together whereas in case of Non-Kuki household, it was very uncommon as it is consider inauspicious in their tradition.

7.4. Policy Prescriptions

Keeping in mind the problem and disadvantages faced by the Kuki women and the Non-Kuki women, the following policy prescription are put forwards.

1. As a solution for employment of women with low level of education or no education, training on income generating programmes such as weaving of basket, tailoring, weaving of traditional handmade cloths should be implemented.
2. Awareness should be spread among every woman and their parents about the risk involved on women health because of early marriage.
3. Development plan should be implemented respecting the traditional and cultural ethic of the each community.
4. Extra subsidies can be provided to poor families for educating girl child. This will encourage the family to send their girl child to school.
5. At the bottom level importance of educating the girl child should be spread among the villagers. More opportunities should be provided to the tribal children in order to bring them to the mainstream of economic development.

6. Initiatives must be taken by the head of the villages and concern authorities for efficient functioning of the Primary Health Centres and Primary School.
7. Knowledge must be spread among the women on issues such as family planning, reproductive health and contraceptive methods.
8. The middle age and elderly women are more deprived in term of education as the required facilities were not available to them in their earlier stage of life. So, effort must be put to educate them with formal education and technical education training.
9. Strategies like frequent workshops and programmes need to be adopted in order to spread the level of awareness among the villagers for educating their girl child and women.
10. High level of consumption of intoxicant is found in the study area. Health campaign to discourage the consumption of these items must be organised.
11. The level of knowledge of the Kuki and Non-Kuki women on HIV/AIDS is not satisfactory. The women feel embarrass and hesitate to talk on such important issues. Therefore, pamphlets in their own language with diagrammatic presentation need to circulate among the female.
12. Training on income generating programmes such as weaving of basket, tailoring, weaving of traditional handmade cloths should be implemented.
13. The Local, State as well as Central Government should intervene by providing micro credit related facilities to encourage the small cottage industries. In this manner, their business activities of handloom and handicraft can be expanded.
14. Poverty and hunger are alarming factors in rural areas. So the State as well as the Central Government should ensure food security for BPL families by providing them with better functioning services of Public Distribution System.
15. The Health Department of the State should frequently monitor the performance and attendance of specialist doctors and trained birth attendants. At the same time regular audit is necessary to check whether necessary health facilities are reaching every nook and corner of the rural areas.
16. The Kuki women and Non-Kuki women lack in awareness about the various Government supported development programmes. The local bodies and the

Chief of the villages should be encouraged to participate in the process of awareness building.

17. Due to lack of proper market infrastructure the women are not able to sell their goods in the market directly. So very often they are exploited by the middlemen. So in order to increase their economic condition it is essential to provide the required infrastructures for the spread of commercial market within the reach of rural women.

7.5. Conclusion

From the present study we can finally sum-up a conclusion that the socio-economic status is a multi-dimensional concept. For measuring socio-economic status of women, female specific variables are required. The socio-economic index used in this study shows the Kuki women have a poor socio-economic status. There is a need for improvising the different dimension to bring them in the mainstream of development. When an inter-group comparison was made with that of the Non-Kuki women, it is observed that the Non-Kuki women are in the worse scenario in the Churachandpur districts. In conclusion, it can be remarked that the low socio-economic status of the women in the district is because of socio-economic deprivation of developmental opportunities rather than community base deprivation.

Socio-economic Status of women in this study we have found that many women are the bread earner of the family. Educated women are working in different departments of the Manipur Government. In the contemporary days, with the transition of people's outlook and perception, the Kuki women no longer hesitate to go along with the needs of modern times. The women have started to involve themselves in casting of votes. The women are ready to step out of their societal shroud and are actively participating in every sphere like politics, economy, sports, education, church, religion and administration. If ample opportunities are provided to the Kuki women, they can make an influential identity of the 'Kuki Women'.

In this the conclusion is drawn for Churachandpur district only. In order to conclude about the overall status of Kuki women there is a need to undertake such type of research work for other districts of Manipur. So there always remains scope for further study.