

## **Status and Education of Women in Tripura**

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The subject "Status and Education of Women" has attracted the attention of many scholars and social scientists. This may be because it is very important to study women's position to determine her status in the home and outside the home in order to understand her place in the society. The position of woman in the home and outside the home to determine status is so closely interlinked and intermingled that the two cannot be separated.<sup>1</sup>

The four historical periods of the evolution of Indian history which help us to understand the changing position of women are :

- (1) The Age of the Vedas - 2500 to 1500 B.C. - In this period women held a position of equality with men.
- (2) The Age of the Brahmanas-1500 to 500 B.C. - Women enjoyed the same rights and privileges and occupied an honoured position in society in this period.
- (3) The Age of the Sutras and the Epics 500 B.C. to 500 A.D. In this period the position of women started deteriorating considerably.
- (4) The Age of the later Smritis - 500 to 1800 A.D. - According to the preachings of the Smritis by 500 A.D. the conduct of a wife was expected to be one of reverence towards her husband, considering him to be her God "even if he was vicious and void of any merit."

The complete deterioration of the position of women caused by the practice of sati, the spread of Purdah, child marriage, polygamy, and lack of education reached its climax by 1800 A.D. Neera Desai in "Women in Modern India," (1957, p. 29) has given a picture of this condition saying "Ideologically woman was considered a completely inferior species, inferior to the male, having no significance, no personality ; socially she was kept in a state of utter subjection, denied all rights, suppressed and oppressed. She was further branded as basically lacking an ethical fibre."<sup>2</sup>

But after 1800 A.D. various socio-cultural and politico-economic circumstances, foreign missionaries, Indian social reformers like Rammohan Roy, Vidyasagar, Vivekananda, Dayananda

**Saraswati and organisations like Arya Samaj, the Indian National Congress, the Ramkrishna Mission, and finally, Mahatma, Gandhi and the Indian National Movement brought about significant changes in the existing social pattern through educational, economic and legislative measures.**

### **Present Setting**

After the independence of India woman legally and politically emancipated by virtue of various acts and statutes has an equal right to education, employment, franchise, inheritance, property, marriage at mature age, divorce and remarriage as a divorcee or widow which have also brought about changes in the position of women in Tripura. The declaration of the International Women's Year 1975 was the culmination of their long drawn out struggle for achieving this. This year has passed ostentatiously with seminars and workshops, meetings, national and international conferences etc organised by governmental and non-governmental institutions on a world-wide basis.<sup>3</sup> No doubt these activities have aroused world-wide interest in the problems and rights of women of all countries and have provided an opportunity to correct the prevailing imbalances in social structure. But the problem related to the improvement of women's status facing the developed and developing nations would be different. With the changing position of women the feeling of acquiring status in society began to grow in their minds.

### **Concept of Status**

In order to acquire status in the society through ability one should have the clear conception of the term 'status.' "The term status refers to a position of woman as an individual in the social structure defined by her designated rights and obligations. Each status position is expressed in terms of a role. Since each individual occupies a number of distinct statuses within a society, he/she performs a variety of roles. Status is realised through roles."<sup>4</sup> A study of diverse roles of the women in society includes that of a mother, wife, a career woman. Besides the ascribed status, there is also the 'achieved' status which results from one's efforts and personal achievements. The concept of status thus is used to indicate the ordering of individuals in terms of attributes such as, level of education, occupation, income, perception of one's status within the home and the community, decision-making role, number of restrictions imposed on one's activities, freedom and so on. Considering 'status' in the light of these attributes, it is to be noted that

the level of status of women varies from country to country, the widest difference in levels being between women in developed and developing countries. The level of status of women is low in developed countries and pitifully low in less developed countries. Even within a country the level of status of women differs from within a country the level differs from rural to urban areas.

If we turn the pages of the history of nations we find that in various stages of development of nations, women did assert their rights and played important roles to influence the society to better their status. Yet the fact remains that even to-day women's basic rights are overlooked throughout the world. Although the Constitution of India and the legal codes bestowed upon women the privilege of equal rights with men, the same facilities of education, the same opportunities of profession and employment, but the bulk of Indian women are deprived of this boon of raised status, mainly because majority of them are devoid of education, even of the elements of literacy.

Before coming to the progress of education of women in Tripura I want to mention some of the contribution leading to their status in the different fields which has been described in *Saswata Tripura*. In this respect one important comment of the East Bengal District Gazetteer is remarkable. The comment mentioned in the Gazetteer's Tripura Sankhya (1910) is "Tippra (Tripura) Hitasadhini sabha, a society with its headquarters in Calcutta - but working chiefly in Tripura, has been trying for many years to advance the cause of women's education." The contributions of some of the renowned women of Tripura in the following fields has been mentioned in *Saswata Tripura*.

(1) **Literature**— In the field of literature the name of Rajkumari Ananga Mohini Debi, Smt. Jahnabi Debi, Smt. Aparajita Ray, Smt. Karabi Debbarman, Smt. Amita Bhattacharjee are important.

(2) **Health Service** :— The health services, like the field of education, employ women at all levels, from the village dais to top ranking doctors. Doctors like Smt. Ila Lodh, Dr. Swapna Datta, Smt. Pratiba Gupta, Smt. Parul Saha, Smt. Susila Sinha, Smt. Mamata Some are giving their services to the people.

(3) **Music** :— In the field of music the name of Maharani Tulsibati, Maharani Pravabati, Rajkumari Ananga Monini Debi, Maharajkumari Bindubasini Debi, Smt. Kanika Debbarman, Smt. Jharna Debbarman, Smt. Arundhuti Hom Choudhury are important.

(4) **Dance** :— In the field of dancing the performance of Smt. Maya Chakraborty, Smt. Padmini Chakraborty, Smt. Sipra Bhattacharjee, Smt. Hira Dey is unique.

(5) **Art** :— In the field of Art also some of the women of Tripura have their contributions such as the name of Smt. Swati Debbarman, Smt. Sanghamitra Datta, Smt. Dipa Sengupta, Smt. Kamal Prava Debi.

(6) **Administration** :— In administration also some women have their achievements, such as Maharani Kaanchanprava Debi, (Regent of Tripura), Smt. Basana Chakraborty (1st female minister, Social Welfare Deptt.), Smt. Ranu Ghosh, I. A. S. (D.M.), Smt. Sipra Kar (1st female Munsif), Smt. Mili Roy (1st female engineer), Smt. Uma Das, Smt. Sova Bose, Smt. Gouri Dhar, Smt. Renuka Chakraborty, Smt. Laxmi Nag (M. L. A.), Smt. Ratna Das, Smt. Ila Bhattacharjee (M.P.) etc.

(7) **Games and Sports** :— In the field of games and sports the women of Tripura have their great achievements ; such as Smt. Chanchala Laskar, Smt. Sabitri Sur, Smt. Jyotsna Bhattacharjee, Smt. Ratanmoni Ray Choudhury (Swimmer), Smt. Ratna Dhar (Swimmer), Smt. Bani Das, Smt. Dipika Ray, Smt. Kalpana Deb Nath, Smt. Manika Deb Nath, Smt. Pranati Modak, Smt. Seba Choudhury, Smt. Ila Paul and Smt. Panchali Das etc.

(8) **Social Service** :— The activities of the women of Tripura in the field of social service is also to be mentioned. Among them the names of Smt. Niva Ray, Smt. Sadhana Chakraborty, Smt. Gouri Bhattacharjee, Smt. Ila Bhattacharjee, Smt. Sushila Ghosh, Smt. Anu Datta, Smt. Renuka Chakraborty, Smt. Bithi Chakraborty, Smt. Sanghamitra Chatterjee and Dr. Sujata Baidya are important.

Before showing the progress of education of women I want to give brief idea of demography of Tripura with the Ratio of Tribal population according to the various census from 1901 onwards.

Census year	Male	Female	Total
1901	90,543	87,782 (interpolated)	178,325
1951	339,038	306,669	645,707
1971	801,126	755,216	1,556,342
1981	1,054,846	998,212	2,053,058

Ratio of Tribal population according to census data is as follows :

1951	- 36.85%
1971	- 28.90%
1981	- 28.44%

Source : Various Census reports of Tripura.

The Table below shows the position of Scheduled Tribe, their ratio, extent of literacy of male/female and literacy among male/female of rural and urban areas according to census of 1981.

Census year	Total	Rural	Urban
1981	583920	576252	7668
Ratio of Male/female Tribes according to Census —1981.	Male - 297612		Female- 286308
Extent of literacy among male/female Tribes according to census —1981.	Rural - 293471		Rural - 282781
	Urban 4141		Urban- 3527
Literacy among the rural & urban male/female tribes according to census - 1981.	Total - 134713		
	Male - 99587		Female- 35126
	Rural - 96091		Rural - 32579
	Urban - 3496		Urban - 2547

Source : Census report of 1981.

### Education

These are all about the population of Tripura. Now I want to show the progress of education of women as education is the main back bone of the nation. The nation's primary concern is to provide universal compulsory and free primary education to its millions of boys and girls. This important goal could be achieved only through progressive increase in enrolment. For the expansion of education in Tripura so many institutions have been established by Dr. G. N. Chatterjee, the then Director of Education of Tripura in different parts of the state. There is a remarkable progress in the rate of literacy in Tripura from 1931 to 1981. Majority of the state employees belong to education Deptt. As education has been regarded both as an end in itself and as a means of realising other desirable ends, so far the improvement of women's status education is the most significant instrument for changing women's subjugated position in society.<sup>6</sup> Due to the policy of the

Govt. for expansion of education the average number of students has been increased by 43 % in 1981-82 against that of 1978-79. There were 123 schools in secondary stage in 1979-80 and in 1980-81 this number rises to 135. The number of Higher Secondary Schools also has been increased from 52 to 80. With a view to attracting the tribal girls towards education and to make it easier to them the tribal girls reading in Class II to Class VIII are being awarded stipend on the basis of their 75% days' presence in schools. Free education up to Class XI was introduced and tuition fees for the students up to class XII have been remitted. The girl students are enjoying this facility up to graduation level. The girl students who do not get the stipend or the annual income of them is not more than eight thousand rupees are getting this facility. This is undoubtedly a significant step for the expansion of education of women. But most of the tribal girls do not get higher education as they enjoy the facility with regard to employment with a minimum standard of education. But the example of a tribal woman with higher education being the Principal of Women's College is a matter of proud no doubt. Similarly few tribal women with higher education are serving as Headmistress in some schools. Among the women who have their achievements in education not only in Tripura but outside also the names of Smt. Ila Bhattacharjee, Smt. Raktakamal Debbarman, Smt. Ila Barman, Smt. Abha Barman Roy, Smt. Nira Chatterjee, Smt. Suniti Bhattacharjee, Smt. Basana Debbarman may be mentioned.

Although the women of Tripura have their contributions in the different fields in this place, I want to show their progress in education in comparison to men only in general.

In examining the progress of female literacy in Tripura (as shown in Table I we see that the progress achieved during years period from 1931 to 1981 has been only meagre. When the percentage of literate females to total female population in 1931 was 0.4, the percentage increased only to 32.0 in 1981. At the time of 1951 census i.e. immediately after achieving independence where there 92 % illiterate females in India the percentage of literate females to total female population in Tripura was 8.0. It is true that it is not an easy task for a nation which has emerged from the clutches of foreign rule to eradicate illiteracy of the teeming millions completely within a short period but it should be noted that the progress we have made in this direction during this 30 years period is only about 24 percent increase. A comparison with male literacy shows that when the percentage of literate males

was 4.9 in 1931, the percentage rose to 51.7 in 1981 which is more than double the percentage for women for the same year.

**TABLE I**

**Progress of Literacy, Tripura - 1931 - 1981.**

Census year	Percentage of literate population to total population	Percentage of literate males to total male population	Percentage of literate females to total female population
1931	3.4	4.9	0.4
1941	6.5	12.7	2.4
1951	15.5	22.3	8.0
1961	20.2	29.6	10.2
1971	30.9	40.2	21.2
1981	42.1	51.7	32.0

Source : Various Census reports of Tripura.

In recent decades the number of families in India going in for higher education including technical and professional courses has been steadily increasing. It has its effects on Tripura also where now-a-days some of the family want to send their daughters in medical and engineering colleges for better living and better marriage. "Colleges and universities provide respectable waiting places for girls who wish to get married." From the various Census report we find that in 1975 out of total 217 doctors the number of female was 22 whereas in 1984 the number of female increase to 32 out of total 478 doctors and the number of female engineer is now 3. Secondary education is largely confined to the upper and middle class in urban areas. In professional education women have good enrolment in teaching, medicine and fine arts but poor in commerce, law, agriculture and engineering.

But the uneven distribution of education among women has resulted in a diverse approach of the society towards women and their relation to education. Some are adverse to it, some are indifferent, some support a minimum standard, say, up to primary or middle school level, but some hold the most liberal views. "It is difficult to get all village girls into schools, since the girls are needed at home and in the field, since the learning they get in

schools has little practical value, since there are not enough schools." Besides there are variations in degree of women's education from urban to rural, from state to state, from region to region. Table II is given below showing the age and sexwise school/college attending persons during 1981 :

**TABLE II**

**Age & Sexwise school/college attending persons—1981**

	Male		Female	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
0-4	111	537	97	535
5-9	8778	57166	7891	48589
10-14	12832	84678	12230	62961
15-19	9219	38524	8684	20963
20-24	3404	10627	2474	3087
25-29	466	1767	375	388
30-34	103	402	64	121
35+	219	892	121	257
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	35147	194662	31959	136959
School going illiterate	972	23265	928	20134

Source : Census report of Tripura, 1981.

The impact of education on women determining their status is found in the appointment of teachers in various stages which is given below according to census report of 1981.

	Male	Female
University/College	439	74
Higher/High	3608	1344
Middle School	2045	651
Primary	3797	1320
Pre-Primary	292	699
Craft	216	116
Others	1336	1183

Source : Census report of Tripura 1981.

Discussing the uneven impact of education upon socio-economic position we find that women belonged to house work organised and unorganised labour though earn bread for the family seldom enjoy a position of prestige in home. This may be attributed to lack of education.

We have already seen from the data study that education is to be first imparted to the boy and to the girls afterwards. In educated families where girls and boys, husband and wife both work outside for the same hours, while the male ones relax and take rest after returning home, the female ones are expected to arrange for refreshment, to look after children, to attend to urgent domestic duties without any respite.

If we come across the less educated or uneducated families belonging to the lowest income group, we find that girls, even if enrolled in primary or pre-primary schools, are taken out before completion of study to help in domestic work. On the other hand a few groups of richer section of people, still oppose women's education because of traditional conservative reasons. On the whole education is most widely accepted among the middle class because of their liberal and rational outlook and because it is considered as an accomplishment and a symbol of modernisation. Nowadays, it is found from the study that lower income group is eager to have their girls educated mainly because of economic reason as well as social demands like greater suitability for marriage, greater scope for mixing with the upper classes etc.

But these ideas tell upon the socio-economic balance from the opposite direction. In the marriage market, more qualified bridegrooms are naturally sought for educated girls. This on the one hand, means heavier dowry, resulting in the family's economic hardship and on the other, non-availability of suitable bridegrooms till later age from which point other social evils may creep in. From the data study it is found that majority of the people belonging to business classes are in favour of dowry. For these reasons parents in many cases have to withdraw their girls from schools after the primary stage.

In conclusion we can say that although education is regarded both as an end in itself and as a means of realising other desirable ends, education has always been emphasised as the most significant instrument for changing women's subjugated position in society. It is about 38 years since we achieved independence and yet the women, especially the rural women have not freed themselves from the dominance of men. In order to free them from

this situation, the women should understand their rights, should be economically independent and should improve their standard of living. These can be achieved only through education and various studies conducted in India reveal that the social status of women is significantly related to their aspirations, opportunities for education and employment and improvement of their standard of living. There is no doubt that the cultural progress of a country can be judged by the status accorded to women in society. And since status is related to the educational level, occupation, income, etc. women should have the same opportunities as men for their education which alone will equip them to occupy positions of responsibility in social and public life. Education and knowledge will give women the power to reason and will in turn help them much in their fight against social injustice. Therefore, to gain the ultimate object every effort should be geared up with all available resources and accurate Planning to enhance women's education.

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