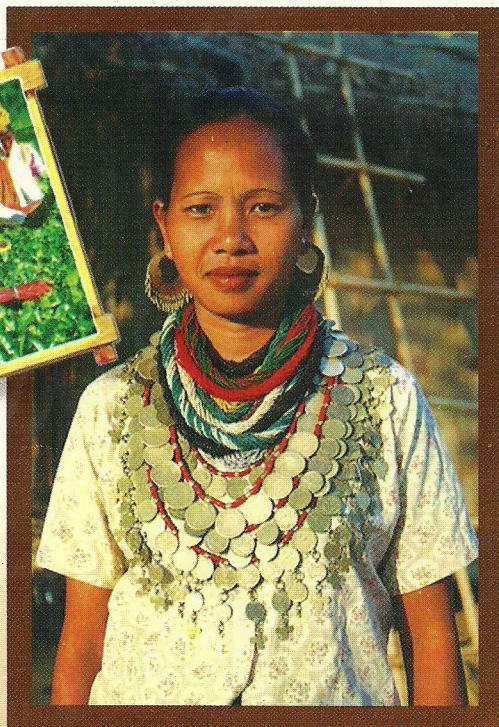
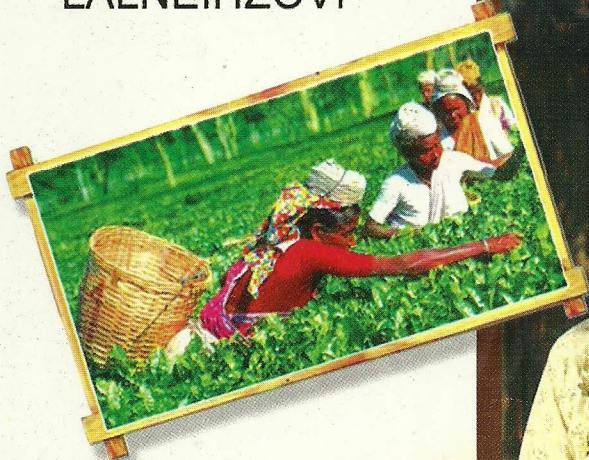


CHANGING STATUS OF WOMEN IN NORTH-EASTERN STATES

LALNEIHZOVI



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CHANGING STATUS OF WOMEN IN NORTH-EASTERN STATES

(Felicitation Volume in Honour of Prof. C: Lalkima)

THE AUTHOR

LALNEHZOVI (b. 1966), M.A., Ph. D. in Public Administration, is presently a Reader in the Department of Public Administration, formerly North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong (Mizoram Campus) and now Mizoram University, Aizawl. She has been teaching Public Administration at the post-graduate level for about two decades.

She has participated in many local, regional, national and international seminars, conferences, workshops and contributed many scholarly and research papers. She has written/edited four books on national and regional studies including *Women's Development in India : Problems and Prospects*; *District Administration in Mizoram and Role of Ropulliani in the Freedom Struggle*. She also has several research articles/papers published in both the edited books and academic/professional journals to her credit.

She is a member of some academic bodies of this University and also a Life Member of the Indian Institute of Public Administration, Mizoram Regional Branch, and New Public Administration Society of India, Warangal.

Presently, she is Chairperson of Core Committee, Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhyian, Government of Mizoram.

LALNEHZOVI



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FOREWORD

Progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment in India has been built upon strong commitments by the government and unflagging effort by the women's movement. Gender inequality arising out of social norms and cultural traditions has been addressed through a range of direct and indirect measures, and the aim of the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) has been to bring about social change—changes in attitudes towards women and women's empowerment. The policy itself reflects the aspirations of women and the women's movement. This anthology presents an overview of the changing status of women in the North Eastern Region and the achievements of the national policy, as well as the remaining gaps and challenges which will guide future action.

In actual fact, the effective and meaningful involvement of women in all the decision making bodies—political, social and religious—is very crucial. If their strength, creativity and energy are to be harnessed along with their knowledge and skills, they have to be mainstreamed and empowered to choose their pathways of development. Obviously they can exercise their choices best from a vantage position of power, prestige and knowledge. Therefore, they must be freed from the traditional barriers that hold women back from realising their dreams and their full potential. It is only then that we can talk about harnessing women-power. Women should also realise that God helps those who help themselves. They should struggle, demand and fight for the just cause. They can no more remain passive spectators. They have to come out and take a lead.

Prima facie, the status of women in the North Eastern Region may not be as low as women in other societies, but the Region has its own unique problems and is not at all satisfactory. Women have always played an important role in the socio-economic life of the communities of this region. It is the women who have shouldered most of the family's burden of work but their status has been held very low both in the family as well as in the social life. Women today continue to be the main work force and economic source in

various capacities as government employees in various categories and in business and commercial sectors and in religious life. Many women are bread earners for their family, yet their contribution is never given due recognition. Women have no right of inheritance or ownership either in their parents home or after their marriage. They have no right over their own income, over their children or over their properties. Women are excluded from all decision-making bodies in social, religious and political fields. In fact, without their active participation in these fields, there can not be any effective and efficient functioning of these social organisations.

Although the status of women in most communities of the Region has improved significantly after Indian independence, there it still a long way to go to reach a stage of gender equality.

Therefore, I heartily congratulate Dr. Lalneihzovi on this singular venture. The papers assembled in this volume assume a special scholastic significance as they furnish a comprehensive account of the status of women in the North-East. This may be the first of its kind. The fact that a set of the Region's and country's scholars, with access to materials from diverse sources, form the bulk of contributors to the present volume, imparts an added value to the present endeavour. I believe that this volume will be invaluable for social researchers, academics, policy makers, administrators, practitioners and activists in the region and in India as well as abroad.

MANI SHANKAR AIYAR

*Union Minister for the Development of the North
Eastern Region, Panchayati Raj and Youth Affairs &
Sports, Government of India*

INTRODUCTION

I congratulate Dr. Lalneihzovi for this special volume that she has edited in honour of Prof. C. Lalkima, a former Professor of our University in the Department of Public Administration. The theme of this special volume is 'Changing Status of Women of North-East Region of India'. In 13 chapters, this volume covers the status and issues of women in different States of the North-East including special articles on women in different tribes of the North-East. I am sure this volume would be of great use for academicians as well as policy planners and organisations concerned with women's issues.

A.N. RAI

PREFACE

This humble felicitation edited volume on 'Changing Status of Women in North-Eastern States' published in honour of Prof. C. Lalkima on his superannuation who had been my teacher, and very senior colleague in the Department of Public Administration, the then North-Eastern Hill University, Mizoram Campus, Aizawl and presently Mizoram University. This edited volume is a modest tribute in the recognition of his valuable academic and administrative involvement and positive contributions to the popularisation of the discipline of Public Administration particularly in Mizoram.

The Department of Public Administration was opened in the erstwhile NEHU Mizoram Campus, Aizawl in June 1985. Under the Headship of Prof. A.K.Sharma, the founder Professor of the Department and Prof. R.N.Prasad ran the classes of Regular M.A. and Diploma Courses in Public Administration. Prof. C.Lalkima joined the newly founded Department of Public Administration as Research Associate in 1987. Prof. A. K. Sharma, the then founder Vice Chancellor of Mizoram University retired from Vice Chancellor on January 2, 2006. Prof. R.N.Prasad also retired from the University on November 30, 2006. Finally, the time of Prof. C.Lalkima also came for retirement on attaining the age of superannuation on June 30, 2007. He is the last of the three to close the tripod of those who had started running the classes of the Department of Public Administration.

This felicitation volume includes thirteen scholarly and research papers which have been collected from individual scholars. I am thankful to all the paper writers for their painstaking efforts and sparing their valuable time for studying the changing status of women of their own state to be fitted in the present volume.

I express my respectful regards and heartfelt thanks to Shri Mani Sankar Aiyar, the Hon'ble Union Minister for Development of North-Eastern Region (DONER), Panchayati Raj and Sports & Youth Affairs, Government of India for writing a very befitting foreword

to this volume. In spite of having neck-deep works to perform in his office he could find time to academically encourage me by writing the foreword for this volume. He has an academic interest and deeply concerns with human development, especially women's development and their empowerment.

Prof. A. N. Rai, Vice Chancellor, Mizoram University, Aizawl deserves my profound sense of greatfulness for inspiring, guiding and supporting in this academic venture of mine and also writing a very thoughtful introduction to this edited volume.

I am greatly thankful to my colleagues - Dr. S. Pathi, Dr. Lalrintuanga, Ms. A. Muthulakshmi for their positive support and encouragement in the preparation of this modest volume. Dr. Laltanpuii Ralte, Ms. Rosalind V. Renthlei, and Mr. Biakrinawma deserve my thanks for their helps in a number of ways.

I also accord my sincere thanks to my husband Andrew Lalsangzuala and sons Alan Lalrinawma and Alban Lalfakawma for observing their very helping attitudes during my being preoccupied with this work.

Last but not the least, I tender my hearty thanks to Shri K. M. Mittal, Mittal Publications, New Delhi for getting this felicitation volume published in short period of time.

LALNEIHZOVI

AN ACCOUNT OF ACADEMIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE INVOLVEMENT OF PROF. C. LALKIMA

(Born on June 20, 1941)

—LALTANPUII RALTE

Prof. Capt C.Lalkima joined the service of the University as Research Associate on April 6, 1987 which was redesignated as lecturer in the newly founded academic Department of Public Administration in the erstwhile NEHU Mizoram Campus, Aizawl. The day he joined the Department, teaching of classes commenced. The three faculty members under the Headship of Prof. A.K.Sharma, the founder Professor of the Department and Prof. R.N.Prasad then a Lecturer ran the classes of Regular M.A. and Diploma Courses in Public Administration. No sooner had the Department been established, Professor A.K.Sharma left the Department for IIPA (Indian Institute of Public Administration), New Delhi, and later returned to Aizawl as the founder Vice Chancellor of Mizoram Central University on July 2, 2001. He retired as Vice Chancellor on January 2, 2006. Prof. R.N. Prasad also retired from the University on November 30, 2006. Finally, the time of Prof. C.Lalkima also came for retirement on attaining the age of superannuation on June 30, 2007. He is the last of the three to close the tripod of those who had started running the classes of the Department of Public Administration.

Prof. Capt. Lalkima, in his youth picked up the career of Army Service and got Regular Commission in the Indian Army from the Indian Military Academy, Dehradun on June 9, 1968. He served in the Army Service Corps for a good number of years. His application for pre-mature voluntary retirement was sanctioned and he retired from the Army on February 5, 1985. He pursued his academic works and got Bachelor Degree from Panjab University, Chandigarh and Master Degree in Public Administration from Osmania University,

Hyderabad while in service. He later on got Ph.D Degree in Political Science on September 3, 1994 under the Supervision of Dr. V.V. Rao, Prof. Emeritus, Gauhati University.

It has been seen in his life that a shift of profession from Army Service to academic life was a very rare case. He has adapted himself so well in academic life that, within a short span of time he became a Reader in December 1995. He became the Head of the academic Department in the erstwhile NEHU, Mizoram Campus in 1997-2001. In the birth of Mizoram Central University, he had made a distinctive contribution to dislodge the offer of state university by the Prime Minister in 1995 as against the Central University demanded by the people of Mizoram. The State University with Rupees Four Crores which was unacceptable to many people particularly by the intellectual circle of the Mizo Society was turned down. A number of academic associations formed a joint action committee in demand of a Central University as against a State University in which Prof. Capt. Lalkima took a leading part as the Chairman of the Committee. The representative of various Associations made appeals to the President of India, the Prime Minister and the Union Minister of HRD to revoke the order and grant a Central University for Mizoram. The general Election of 1997 brought change in the Central Government of India; the then new government led by Deve Gowda and I. K. Gujral heard the appeals and declared a Central University for Mizoram on May 22, 1997. But the bill of the Central University for Mizoram was passed by the Parliament under the leadership of Atal Behari Vajpayee which was called, "The Mizoram University Act of 2000". The President of India gave his assent to it on April 25, 2000. The NEHU Mizoram Campus, Aizawl along with the Constituent Pachhunga University College were transferred to the Mizoram Central University vide the Act of Mizoram University. The Mizoram University started functioning with the joining of the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. A.K. Sharma on 2 July 2001.

In the initial stage of the Mizoram University, Prof. Lalkima was asked to function as the Controller of Examinations. Over and above his teaching works in the Department he has carried out the functions of the Controller of Examinations and established the Department of Examinations in Mizoram University on November 13, 2001. A handful of supervisory staff and few clerical staff on contract basis started functioning in the Examination Department of Mizoram University. It was indeed a challenging task to immediately conduct the on going academic session and

Examination works of the Under-Graduate and Post-Graduate students in the transitional period. It was successfully carried out on record time that the result of the Under-Graduate Examination of MZU was declared one and half month earlier than the previous years. This has given adequate time for the new graduates to prepare themselves for admission to Post-Graduate Studies in and outside Mizoram. It had given them adequate time to prepare themselves for any professional courses and competitive examinations as well. This has become a regular practice in the Mizoram University which is highly appreciated by all.

Academic contributions made by Prof. Lalkima in the form of books and research articles are of administrative and developmental aspects of society, which shows his great concern over the human development. As he belongs to Mizo society which is developing in various fields of life, he feels the need to impress ecological administrative development upon the society. It is a known fact that India is among the developing nations of the world in which all the citizens and the states are directly or indirectly involved. He has been emphasizing in various seminars that development and progress of the eastern most state would greatly attribute to the development of the Nation. A few years back, while he was the Dean of School of Social Sciences in his speech to the teachers and students of Social Works he stressed that all round development of the Nation could be achieved only when 70% of rural population of the country become literate and are lifted up above the poverty line which demands Missionary zeal of works from all. In his published article a great emphasis was given on 'Bridging of the Gulf between the rich and the poor is the important task of political leaders and the parties whichever comes to power.' But today, even in the absence of caste system in a society, the classes of Haves and Have-nots has emerged due to money economy. He has expressed his view with great concern that all possible preventive measures must be taken to avoid exploitation of the poor by neo-rich class of the society.

He had satisfactory performance in the academic as well as in the administrative field during his service in the University, much could be expected of him in the later part of his life for the larger society.

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1

INTRODUCTION

—LALNEIHZOVI

The North Eastern Region of India, the ancient Pragjyotisa and historical Kamrupa and the British province of Assam, with a landmass of 2,65,000 sq kms. comprises of 8 States; namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. It was earlier popularly known as the 'Seven Sisters' before Sikkim had come under the umbrella of this region. This Region has a strategic geo-political situation due to its international boundaries and somewhat similar type of developmental and other problems. It is a land-locked region with ninety eight per cent of its border being international. The Asian countries which surround the Region include Bhutan and China in the North, Myanmar in the East, Nepal in the West and Bangladesh in the South and West. This land-locked area which constitutes 8 per cent of the total area of the country is connected with the main land through a chicken-neck across West Bengal. The region has wide variation in physical features ranging from plains of Brahmaputra to the highly dissected mountains of eastern Himalayas. The Himalaya range which can be classified as North-Eastern Hills and basins account for 65 per cent of the total area, whereas Brahmaputra Valley covers 22 per cent of the region and Meghalaya plateau covers 13 per cent of the total area. Briefly, these states constitute a homogeneous natural region of the hills, plains, valleys, flora and fauna and other related geographical features. Though the North Eastern Region reflects some ecological and cultural adaptive contrasts between the hills and the plains, there are also significant elements of continuity in the biological, cultural and social factors between these segments. A lot of independence and interaction between the hills and the plains has been found in this fascinating Region.

The Region has a total population of 39.04 million (according to 2001 census) which constitutes around 3.80 per cent of the country's population. Assam accounts for about 70 per cent of the region's population in which the density of population is 340 per sq. km, highest amongst the States of the Northeast whereas the density of population in Arunachal Pradesh is only 13. The sex ratio of Assam stands at 921 females per thousand males, whereas Arunachal Pradesh - 901, Manipur - 978, Meghalaya - 975, Mizoram - 938, Nagaland 909, Sikkim - 875, and Tripura - 950 females per thousand males as against the national figure of 933 per thousand males. In all the States of this Region, the female population is lesser than the male population. Various Tribal communities constitute almost 30 per cent of the total population.

The percentage of literacy in these States are : 54.74 (64.07 males and 44.24 females) in Arunachal Pradesh; 64.28 (71.93 males and 56.03 females) in Assam; 68.87 (77.87 males and 59.70 females) in Manipur; 63.31 (66.14 males and 60.41 females) in Meghalaya; 88.49 (90.69 males and 86.13 females) in Mizoram; 67.11 (71.77 males and 61.92 females) in Nagaland; 69.68 (76.73 males and 61.46 females) in Sikkim; and 73.66 (81.47 males and 65.41 females) in Tripura. (*Manorama Year Book 2006*). Therefore, in all the states of the Northeast, the female literacy rate is much lower than the male literacy rate.

Despite being rich in natural resources with fertile land, rich forests and substantive mineral and hydrocarbon deposits, development in the North Eastern Region has lagged behind the rest of the country due to historical reasons. The per capita income in the North Eastern Region on an average is Rs. 12,918 only (as per NDSP), as compared with the national average of Rs. 17,823 at current prices of 2001-02. The per capita income is the main criterion to highlight economic condition of the country. Accordingly, during 1993-1994 the per capita income of India as a whole is Rs. 7185 (in current price) whereas the per capita income of Arunachal Pradesh is Rs. 8852, Mizoram Rs. 7517, Assam Rs. 5520, Manipur Rs. 5362, Meghalay Rs. 5873, Nagaland Rs. 6638, and Tripura Rs. 4262. Unfortunately, the per capita income of the latter five states is below national average. The low economic condition of NEI states has been caused by several factors of which two are due to be mentioned. One is, per sq.km of cultivated land is very less in hill areas of the country. Economy of NEI states depends mainly on agriculture

(primary sector), but the cultivated area is very limited. Arunachal, Mizoram and Nagaland are doing a lot of agriculture through jhum cultivation.

The traditional economy is simple; in some areas it is still non-monetized. Shifting cultivation is still being practised extensively. Economic growth has taken place in recent years largely due to interventions in the government agencies apart from ancillary trade and services sector.

Therefore, special focus has been given on economic development of the North Eastern Region during various Plans and accordingly certain strategies have been formulated for removal of infrastructure bottlenecks, provision of basic minimum services, creating conducive environment for private investment etc. The continued efforts of the Government to remove impediments to lasting peace in the North East and to bring about an improved security scenario have raised hopes for faster economic development of the region in the recent years. The creation of a dedicated Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DONER) in September 2001 by an Amendment to the Government of India's Allocation of Business Rule, (the Department was formally inaugurated on November 1, 2001. It was accorded the status of a Ministry vide Gazette Notification of Government of India dated May 27, 2004), signifies the commitment of the Government of India to accelerate the pace of socio-economic development of the region.

Moreover, the National Common Minimum Programme of the Central Government further brings into focus the need for greater attention to the region. It clearly spells out the agenda for North East which include : "all North-eastern States will be given special assistance to upgrade and expand infrastructure" and "the North Eastern Council will be strengthened and given professional support". The North Eastern Council (NEC) was established in 1972 through an Act of Parliament i.e. the North Eastern Council Act, 1971, for securing the balanced development of the North Eastern Region and for inter-state coordination. Its Headquarters is located at Shillong. In addition, the Council was entrusted the task of reviewing the measures taken by the North Eastern States for the maintenance of security and public order in the Region. The NEC Act was amended in 2002. The Amendment provided for NEC to function as the Regional Planning Body for the North East, formulate specific projects and schemes to benefit two or more states and review the

implementation of projects and schemes and recommend measures for affecting coordination in the matter of implementation of such projects and schemes.

In the North Eastern Region gender inequalities are deeply inherent as their counterparts elsewhere. It may be said that women's status in this Region is much better and they use to enjoy greater mobility and visibility compared to the other region of the country. It has been recognised that women of this Region are very hardworking. As a result, they have a great contribution in income generation. They have expertise in weaving, farming in addition to the carrier of Northeast's rich culture. Acknowledging their skill and hard working nature, the Government of India also through the DONER has a very important strategic intervention to uplift women in the Region which is popularly known as 'Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Justice'.

Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Justice for North Eastern Region

The paradigms for social development have been swifly changing with greater attention to gender issues both at the global and national levels in general and regional level in particular. The Government of India has also continuously been formulating strategies and initiating process to bring women into the mainstream. Strategic intervention is of high importance because women constitute half of the Region's population and it is abundantly clear that there can be no development unless the needs and interest of the women are fully taken into account.

Towards the development of women, there have been various shifts in policy approaches of the Government of India in the last fifty years from the concepts of "Welfare" till the 70's to "development" in the 80's and "empowerment" in the 90's. For uplifting the status of women, various government agencies have been implementing special programmes designed to improve the socio-economic status of women. In its nodal capacity, the government has also formulated policies and programmes enacted/ amended legislations affecting women and co-ordinating the efforts of both the governmental organisations and non-governmental organisations working to improve the status of women. Over the years, employment, credit facilities, training, awareness generation, income-generating activities have been major interventions for improving the position of women. In addition, provision is made for

support services of various kinds, including help to women of vulnerable groups by forming self help groups.

Following the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women which was announced in the year 2001 to bring about advancement, development and empowerment of women, the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region and its organisations have undertaken the following programmes aimed at empowerment of women to improve their skills and income generating capacities :

(a) North Eastern Handicrafts and Handlooms Development Corporation Ltd. (NEHHDC) has taken up several initiatives during 2003-04 to impart training to women in weaving, designing and handicrafts. (b) North Eastern Regional Agricultural and Marketing Corporation Ltd. (NERAMAC) in its two projects of Cashew Processing Unit and Fruit Juice Concentration Plant employs a large number of women. There are approximately 45 women working in the Cashew Processing Unit at Agartala. In the Fruit Juice Concentration Plant at Nalkata 45-50 women are employed during day shift. NERAMAC under its franchise scheme for using vending machines encourage women entrepreneur. (c) Under the Ministry's Plan Scheme of Capacity Building, SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) is being supported to help NER Women's Groups, to establish themselves economically. SEWA is the single largest union of poor, self-employed women in the unorganized sector, with a membership of 4,20,300. SEWA's goals are to organize women for full employment at the household level and for self-reliance. This is being planned for implementation in association with another NGO, Tribal Welfare Society and is in continuation of a networking effort initiated in 1999-2000, SEWA's Team visited Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura in May-June 2002. 15 Women's Groups from these States had earlier visited SEWA Centres in Gujarat to learn from their activities and had set up Women's Self Help Groups on return. These women have also taken a leadership role in linking women to existing beneficiary oriented schemes of the Government and organizing them for economic activities including starting of marketing outlets. Presently, 10 Groups of around 200 women from Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Meghalaya are expected to participate in the Study-cum-Training visit to SEWA Centres. Around 200 women in 9 batches have been trained so far during the current year of 2004-05. In addition, a pilot training programme in Toy Making for the women of North Eastern States has been organized through the Institute of Toy Making Technology (ITMT), Kolkata. This programme targets women with

lesser educational levels and is expected to benefit them by providing employment opportunities. (d) As part of the IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) funded NERCAMP (North Eastern Community Resource Management Project for Upland Areas), in the States of Assam, Manipur and Meghalaya, Women's Self-Help Groups have been supported. The Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have addressed the issue of micro-credit effectively. They have also created awareness on health, nutrition, sanitation and education. (e) North Eastern Development Finance Corporation (NEDFi) has taken important initiatives for women's empowerment in the Region. Financial assistance of Rs. 5.63 crore has been provided to 84 units which are exclusively managed by women entrepreneurs. A sum of Rs. 9.69 crore has been disbursed to 202 NGOs under micro finance scheme. It has created employment for 22,573 persons of which 10,308 are women. NEDFi has provided training to 281 qualified youths of all the States of the Region under "New Enterprise Creation Programmes" out of which 117 are women entrepreneurs. Opportunities are given to women entrepreneurs to participate in various Trade Fairs including NEDFi Haat for which the expenses are born by the Corporation. (f) In pursuance of the directions of Hon'ble Supreme Court in their judgement in the case of Vishakha and others Vs State of Rajasthan and others, a "Complaints Committee" has been constituted under the Chairpersonship of Joint Secretary DONER, consisting of two Officers in this Ministry to look into the complaints of sexual harassment of women employees. The Committee is also looking into matters relating to appropriate work conditions having an impact on the health of the women employees in the Department.

Economic empowerment of women is one of the most important strategies to empower women. This has been instrumentalised by the DONER also in its gender mainstreaming and gender justice for North Eastern Region. Remarkable achievement is also made in this aspect as beneficial programmes are utilised by a good number of women in the Region. It is suggested that the DONER also take full initiative to politically empower women to improve women's participation in politics and decision making. This can be brought about by facilitating the governments of Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland to introduce the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment (the introduction of these Constitutional amendments are not mandatory due to the operation of the traditional democratic village councils in their states) and making

the implementation of the same in a true sense where these have been in operation in some states of the North East Region. Therefore, the implementation of the provisions of Part IX and X of the Constitution relating to their participation in decision-making and implementing processes concerning rural and urban development is an imperative need. The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Nagarpalika are to function as an institution of local-self governance and they have been endowed with powers and authorities to formulate and implement their own plans for economic development and social justice in the rural and urban areas of the state and of the country.

Some Problems Faced by Women in North Eastern Region

Like their counterparts of other regions, women of North Eastern Region has also encountered with a number of specific problems over ages. Most of the societies in the Region are casteless society where there is no room for caste based social distinction especially in the tribal states. However, since they follow patriarchal system of the family, except in Meghalaya, there is a sharp distinction between men and women in regards to their roles, position and status. In opposite to this there is matriarchal system in which mother and her lineage are given importance and women enjoy better status in family and society. In other words, women in this society become the heads of families, own property and have most of the authority. But matriachal system followed by Khasi and Garo communities is slightly different because women in these societies are powerless in several aspects of their life and live under the control of men in their society. Hence women of both patrilineal and matrilineal societies are badly in need of empowerment in their respective society to become efficient partners of their men who cannot give up their superiority complex and feeling over their women.

Women in this Region become the main workforce in family economy in agricultural work and allied activities (in both shifting and permanent cultivation). How much energy and strength women contribute in agro-jhum cultivation cannot be imagined because paddy and cereal harvests are carried by hand with their forest product bamboo baskets and bags by walking through several kms on zigzag non-jeapable roads. Besides agricultural work they also carry out all kinds of household works whereas their men are attached to agricultural work only by leaving all household works to the hands of their women. Despite their extra hard labour

extended in household works are not counted or recognized by their men. Although they are denied of credit and appreciation from their men folk the women cannot escape of doing such tiresome work due to their willing sacrifice for their respective family economic survival. Not only in primary sector of economy but also in secondary and service sector women are working to earn for livelihood. Thus, women of North Eastern Region are found and are available in all trades of human economy. This indicates that women's economic contribution in cash and in kind is beyond our common opinion and apprehension.

Nevertheless, women of many societies, including societies of NER, are denied of economic right. This necessitates economic empowerment of women. 'One who works has to reap the result' is the universal principle of work ethics. But when it comes to the issue of women their male counterpart want to suspend such universal principle of work ethics. Michaille Walish, the founder of Women's World Banking, stated, "I saw that women did 65 % of the world's work, yet earned only 10% of the income and owned less than 1% of the world assets". This would be true in many cases and the worse may happen in several cases of women. The sowers have to reap what they have sown. Let the women be encouraged to claim what they deserve, and let them enjoy the result of their work. Economic empowerment is urgent need for women in order to let them reap the harvest of their labour. Women share the work with men and they have to share the result too. Let us be courageous to give what is due to them.

In most of the societies, the nature of discrimination of women can be identified in the following aspects : (i) women has no right to inherit parent's property both movable and immovable except certain minor items; (ii) the name and title are drawn from father's line except in Meghalay where matrilineal system is followed; (iii) no women is given right to own land even the valuable property of the parents use to keep and register in the name of male member only i.e. women have no property rights; (iv) in religious aspect too, no woman is appointed as Pastor or Minister, even church Elder—'Upa' is not given in most of denominations; (v) in traditional society, no women were allowed to come to the worship place; (vi) women are deprived in the highest decision making body of the church; (vii) women's participation in public meeting is still neglected by men; (viii) the attitudes of the majority of the parents found more positive towards male child than a girl child; (ix) women are culturally regarded only as

supporting section of the society; (x) irrespective of their status, qualification and age, women are looked down upon; (xi) almost similar to dowry or dowry system in other parts of the country, the parents of their daughter allow marrying to a person by charging some value; (xii) women are denied to participate in politics and decision making body; and so on and forth. Briefly, women of North Eastern Region are suffering from lack of political empowerment, low level of women's participation in decision making, deprivation in the highest decision making body of the church, patriarchal culture, inadequate access to productive resources, non accounting of women's domestic works, insufficient advancement facilities, etc.

It is imperative that we empowerment women in the North Eastern Region so as to bring rapid socio-economic and political development in the Region. This can be brought about by (i) creating consciousness and imparting the knowledge of women's rights in their minds in lines with International Bill of Human Rights, reiterated in the Charter of the United Nations in 1945, and its Convention on Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1967 and Nairobi Declaration in 1979 provided women have complete and equal rights with men in every respect; (ii) formulating empowerment programme through revision of customary laws and practices enabling women have better position in the society; (iii) implementing the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment in a true sense and enacting the same where such is not enacted yet to ensure women participation in politics and decision making bodies; and (iv) cooperating with empowering forces and agents i.e., to join hand and look around and start doing things for themselves. If they unite together they fight stronger for their cause leaving the glaring disparity of different communities behind them as unity in diversity may be more suitable for Northeast women. They can join together themselves as a colourful umbrella and find shelter inside it. United for a single purpose of uplifting themselves, then there will be food, shelter, education, employment, empowerment and ultimately social status to all of them irrespective of caste, community, religions, and regional differences. No unity, no achievement, no effort, no eradication of poverty and illiteracy among women. A united all Northeast women's organisation can wield considerable influence and power on bureaucracy and society which stands in the way of women's progress and prosperity. This will create an inroad into the political and administrative set up of the country.

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The changing status of Indian women can be traced back to the early Vedic period wherein women held a position of equality in almost all spheres of life. But the position of women deteriorated to a great extent due to certain factors and the situation became worse during the mediaeval period. After independence, a slight improvement has taken place due to the introduction of the Constitution of India where certain provisions for equality of citizens have been laid down for the benefit of women. Moreover, the UN and other world organisations have made certain efforts to improve women's position effecting nations of the world. However, the pressure of old traditional customs and norms continue to determine the society's attitude towards women.

As the North-east region is very much a part of India the problem faced by women of India is equally shared by women of North-east in addition to their unique problems. Therefore, a study of this kind is necessary so that the problems of women in this region can be reduced if not resolved.

The present volume includes various aspects of problems against women of the North-east. The importance of the work lies in inventing some valuable innovative ideas, which will be of tremendous help for social researchers, policy makers and activists in working out a pragmatic approach and feasible policy towards responding to the problems more meaningful.

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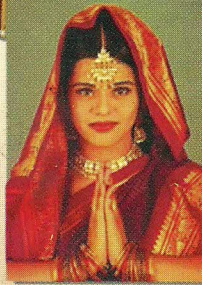
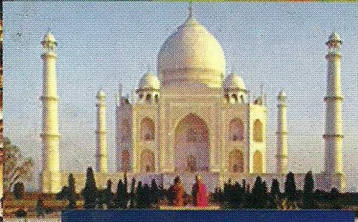
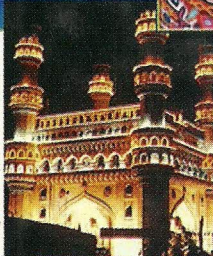
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