

From Tradition to Modernity : Changing Position of Women in Tripura

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There have been remarkable changes in the position of women in India in the last century, especially after independence. Constitutional equality of the sexes has been ensured, various laws have been passed to improve the position of women, more and more women have been entering into educational institutions, various professions and different spheres of public life.

In spite of all these changes women cannot be regarded as being emancipated from the old traditions and customs detrimental to the making up of their personalities.

During the second half of the 19th century, the birth of a girl child was considered to be a mishap by many families, specially among the higher caste Hindus. The education of women was considered as a sinful act. No doubt the traditional conception regarding the position of women has changed and is still undergoing thorough changes. Various studies, as shown here with a few references of Merchant (1936), Rajagopal (1936), Hate (1948 and 1969), Desai (1957), Kapadia (1958 and 1959), Kapur (1960) and Kannan (1963) indicate the trend towards continuous change. Yet older attitudes and prejudices still persist and social opinion is taking its time in changing itself.

It is only after the independence of India that women legally and politically emancipated by virtue of various acts and statutes have achieved equal rights with men in education, employment, franchise, inheritance of property, marriage at a mature age. Divorce and remarriage, even of widow, have also brought about changes in the position of women in almost all parts of India. Tripura is no exception. In the present paper attempts have been made to highlight some of the changes in the position women within the geographical area of Tripura.

Problems

Any work must have some specific problems and so also the methodology. The initial framework helps in understanding, orientation, working out, and finally, achieving results. Although the problem and methodology are two distinct components, they are related to each other. In the present work the problem is concerned with the position of women, particularly in Tripura. The area is situated in the north eastern part of India.

The state of Tripura is with an area of 10,477 sq. km., accommodates a total population of 20,47,351 persons. The proportional ratio of female is 946 per 1000 males. Even then, the geographical area is quite large. It is practically almost impossible to focus the attention on the whole state. Still considerations have been taken in such a way so that the generalised contents are not excluded. In this case data have been collected from the living population and thereby information on two generations are conspicuously present.

The problem has further been materialised with inclusion of a number of traits as earlier education was not prevalent among females. Later on the gradual increase of a number of educated females is prominently found. Presence of women in the field of education means exposure through education. Simultaneously females made turn to various forms of life style.

Earlier the main occupation of women was household work. At present in the recent generation a considerable percentage of women are with diverse occupation mostly in jobs and services. This has created a great difference in the economic stability of women and their dependence on male is found to be curtailed to a great extent. It is true that women with jobs and education, their economic stability are also permitting them to behave in different ways than earlier traditional forms. This has made an important change in their way of life including dress, general behaviour and socialibility. Along with the same a good amount of consciousness has been found to be developed as with rights and privileges, position and claims, in various fields like education, economy, and politics. In traditional society it is almost a compulsion that married women will observe certain norms as putting vermilion on the forehead and partings. Use of conchshell bangles was also essential. These two items are considered as the sign of married women. The custom is still prevailing but not with strict and rigid compulsive form. Earlier women were not allowed to put on leather slippers or shoes even when they were out of house. At present this is hardly found to be present. Women whether married or unmarried or even in youth or during old age had most strict measure as not to mix or even to talk with males specially the adults. A good deal of taboos were maintained by women. They were not allowed to talk with the elder brother-in-law. Widows were in strict frames of restrictions. Now-a-days such rules for restrictions have almost been wiped out, though in certain cases the vestiges are found to be present.

These are practically some of the observations which are related to the position of women in society. Changes from traditional norms have also been found. Within the fold of the problem the factors responsible for such changes have been attempted to account for.

Although changes are present in all spheres of the society whether rural or urban or even educated or uneducated, there is a good deal of variation or gradation of change. It is also a part of the problem to find out and to estimate the effects of change in the bigger society with the impact of elevated part of the societal canvas.

There is another area which cannot be avoided from the problem. Within the society under consideration especially in Tripura, there are a number of different groups as of scheduled tribes and scheduled castes and other caste groups. In the normal aspect of tradition each of this group is provided with some special features related to the position of women. In course of the present generation a kind of amalgum has been formed within the society and thereby in the total society itself. Universality is coming up in a greater speed.

As the work is on women greater consideration on males have intentionally been avoided. Without any doubt whatsoever it may be said that women of Tripura are undergoing a process of changes. With changing forces, position and status are also being elevated here. This may be inferred as an incessant change.

Data

In fact methodology is practically the ways and means by which the work is carried out. To carry out the work of present type some data are required. Collection of data depends on the nature of problems. There is a close coordination between the data part and the application of methodology. After all the data are pulled with a view to finding out the problem areas in great detail and depth.

Instead of taking the whole of the state of Tripura, a cross section of the same has been taken and accordingly samples of representative nature have been pulled. In sampling procedure the methodology has not been excluded. The city of Agartala is composed of 10 wards, These wards are with varied area as well as total number of population, both in terms of number of family and of individual. For the purpose of attaining a minimum amount of uniformity 100 families from each wards have been taken to show the process of change.

Away from the city some more samples have been drawn from non-urban areas like Bishalgarh, Mohanpur and Jirania. From each of these areas 300 samples have been pulled. As a matter of fact the total sample size is 1300. Besides these the direct questionnaire technique has also been applied. This has helped the worker to acquaint herself not only with the informants but also with the background of the family. In such technique the reliability of data is of course greater than other indirect technique.

The final aim of this work is to estimate the attitude in terms of acceptance and non acceptances, experience and exposition of both male and female. Total number of informants from each area has been pulled in random nature. The survey records include five categories of answers as definitely accepted, accepted, neutral, not accepted and never accepted. To avoid complications both the scales of acceptance have been taken together as one unit. Exactly similar treatment has been made with the non-acceptance part. From the numerical figures through computations average percentages have been worked out.

In such attempt the comparisons are absolutely impossible due to enormous differences between two groups of materials. To avoid the situation without disturbing the temporal framework, collected materials have been divided into three classes practically on the basis of question. The generation classes are within the age group of 30 years and for further specificity this has been limited to the age group of 16-30 years. Earlier to this the older generation is within the age group between 31 and 50 years. Even earlier to the sense those persons have been included who are above 50.

Further ratings have been made on the basis of different units, viz. age groups : Young (16-30 years), middle aged (31-50 years) and old (above 50 year) male and female, positive, neutral, negative and three areas as with regard to space three units have been indentified. These are progressive urban (Ward-I), Backward urban (Wards -10) and rural (Localities 11-13). In ward 1 almost all the urban traits are found to be present. In the second unit of Backward urban despite its situation in urban area other associated traits are not found up to the mark of standard urbanised.

Analysis on women's position in time dimension is practically a difficult task. In usual manner such works are carried out with two uncomparable mass. For the present, information may be pulled from the local population through survey works. In such cases early materials are collected from reports and records. As

there are three units as Progressive urban (ward-1), Backward urban (ward- -10) and rural (wards-11-13) the position of women also varies from one unit to others.

With group A the younger generation thinks that the position of women has been elevated. In such case 34.49% and 9.91% males and females respectively have the same opinion. The same criteria is found to be supported by lesser number of middle aged population, 27.94% male and 26.92% females. The percentage goes further down in case of old generation in which males and females are having the percentage of 16.96% and 4.65% respectively. From the total analysis and the result thereof a condensed final result may be presented with relevant interpretation. This synthesis is an integrated product of both status and liberation of women which changes her position in society.

The major points are space or area, namely, Progressive urban (ward-1), Backward urban (wards-2-10) and Rural (wards 11-13). In addition to the same the temporal unit has been classified into three sub-units as younger generation (16-30 years), middle generation (31-50 years) and older generation (above 50 years). The former parameter related to space indicates diffusion mechanism while the latter one are points to change through time. In fact, the historical implications are very much involved in the total results.

The acceptability, recognition and desire toward modernity through change is most among the younger generation and conversely it is least among the older generation. The middle age group stands in between as an intermediate group. In other-words, the older people are more traditional and almost without acceptability for supporting the change, specially with the women - their liberation and status both. Compared to the same the younger generation is less traditional and more modern with their interest for the upliftment of women's position. Women themselves are naturally the operators. This appreciable change may be accounted for with the aid of historical axis. It is also proposed that the same will be accentuated with time, of course with greater acceleration.

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