

Role of Angami Naga Women in Agriculture: Its Impact on Household Economy

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Abstract:- The economy of any human society whether primitive or modern has been sustained and developed with the contribution and support of women. Agriculture is the backbone of the village economy, Angami women from their childhood were being trained or taught to perform agricultural or domestic activities for the welfare of the family. The level of women's participation in agriculture is extensive in the Angami villages. It is estimated that 75% of the workforce in agricultural pursuits consists of women in the villages. Although women constitute the highest productive class in the agrarian structure, their status remained subordinate in society due to unequal treatment in the land ownership system. This study is an attempt to examine the productive inputs made by women in agriculture and their impact on the household economy. It will also provide insight into the land ownership system in Angami Naga culture to assess the social and economic position of women. The study will be foundational for the inclusion of women's experiences and perspectives in the historical record of the village economy of the Angamis.

Keywords:- Agriculture, Economy, Workforce, Land, Gender.

I. INTRODUCTION

The economy is defined as the management of household or private affairs and especially expenses (Merriam and Webster Dictionary). Like any other tribal society, the village economy of the Angamis was dependent upon land and livestock rearing for livelihood. Agriculture is part and parcel of the lifestyle of the Angami people in rural areas. Land is the most important source of both economic value and social standing (Khala,2012). People take pride in flaunting the number of cultivable lands they own. The Angami villages are adorned by beautifully carved terrace fields. All the activities related to agriculture are performed through a communal labor force. The Angamis practice terrace cultivation as well as jhum cultivation. Rice has been the staple food for the people, and the wealth of a person in the traditional Angami village is recognized from the amount of rice he owns. Weaving and spinning were a common household activity. It was a practice of the Angamis both in hunting and in terrace cultivation that the communal effort was utilized to achieve the maximum benefit and efficiency in the practice of these tasks. The system of communal labor was on an organized level, called

the *pele* where a group of young people would work in each other's fields in rotation (Sanyu, 1996). A communal labor force is an informal action group whose sole purpose is to maintain and improve life together (Kavito,2012). In all the Angami villages, there exists a peer group that is formed by dividing the people into different categories based on age.

II. GENDER ROLES IN ANGAMI SOCIETY

In tribal communities, the role of women is substantial and more crucial than in other social groups, because they work harder and the family economy and management depend on them. The status of women in tribal society is a significant reflection of the level of social justice in that society. Women's status is often described in terms of their level of income, employment education, health, and fertility as well as their roles within the family and the society (Awais, al. 2009). The traditional Angami society not only placed women in the family and assigned them little or no place in the social, political, and religious institutions; women were also assigned enormous roles in economic activities (Yano & Pande, 2012). Angami women's identity is based not on the satisfaction of their own needs and desires, but on altruism and sacrifice for their family and menfolk of the village. They play a multifarious socio-economic role both inside and outside their homes. All economic and domestic activities revolved around them.

The entire economic function and activity is related to the process of production, consumption, distribution, and exchange. Studies have shown that the development of an economy can be measured not only in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), per capita income, and wage but also in terms of effective participation and utilization of the capabilities of both men and women as an effective human resource potential. However, the productivity of a woman to generate income is closely related to the amount of space allocated to her to operate independently as an economic agent (Lalhriatpuii, 2010).

Gender roles to a certain extent are distinguished about economic activities in a tribal society. Women were always burdened with the majority of the agricultural work by engaging in activities such as weeding, sowing, clearing fields, winnowing, reaping, etc. as such their roles in feasts stand as recognition of female contribution to production. While men usually dominate in areas of distribution and exchange, women are vital in production (Jacobs, 1998). A

traditional division of labor existed between the sexes in the Angami society where men concentrated on hunting while the women and children collected insects and vegetables for food. In Angami society, the production, processing, and distribution of food have always been the primary responsibility of women. In traditional society, women were also expected to maintain certain social norms in and outside the family. Women were confined to the four walls of their homes. Aphuno Chase Roy has mentioned that Angami women maintained a strong sense of *mhosho* (pride and prestige) that was carried over to every aspect of life be it work, domestic chores, community activities, or women's personal bearing.

III. WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

Agriculture is the age-old practice of tribal people or primitive communities. The Angami village economy is sustained by the practice of agriculture. Agriculture being the backbone of the village economy, Angami women from their childhood were being trained or taught to perform agricultural or domestic activities for the welfare of the family. The level of women participation in agriculture is extensive in the Angami villages. In fact, women are becoming the dominant workers in agriculture leading to the feminization of agriculture in many Angami villages. Feminization of agriculture refers to the rise in female labour force participation and a relative, if not absolute fall in men's employment (Mathew E.T, 2006). Women are occupied with agricultural activities all through the year as they are acquainted with all agricultural tasks from their childhood. Preparation of seeds, clearing fields, ploughing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting are the major activities in which women are engaged in. It is estimated that 75% of the workforce in agricultural pursuits consists of women in the villages. Women were trained from a young age to perform different agricultural and domestic activities. In the traditional Angami society, the societal norms and beliefs dictate the roles of men and women. Whereas men are given the social responsibility of looking after the affairs of the village, womenfolk are expected to concentrate their service towards the welfare of the family. Thus, bearing the bulk of responsibility that comes with domestic work and agricultural pursuits. The contribution of women in both subsistence farming and commercial agriculture is greater when measured in terms of the amount of time invested and the number of works performed. In agriculture, women contribute as wage laborers, as farmers, as co-farmers and as unpaid family labor (Maithreyi and Aruna, 2011).

In any human society, women have always experienced challenges or mistreatment by being a woman. Since birth women were categorized as the subordinate gender. In patriarchal societies such as the Angamis, the culture and traditions support the male domination and superiority in all facets of life. Such traditions have its impact in regulating the treatment of men and women as agricultural laborers. There exists a wide disparity in wages between male and female workers. The unequal payment of wages has been an accepted trend, particularly in rural areas.

There is not a single agricultural activity where women enjoy a higher wage than male workers. In most villages, female workers population is higher than male workers. As such there is a greater availability of female workers for all types of work throughout the year. Therefore, it can be safely assumed that female labor is exploited and abused. Female workers are paid relatively less than their male counterparts. Although women invest an equal number of working hours for the same nature of work as male workers, they are paid approximately 20% less. For instance, if a male worker is paid Rs 500 per day for the work of ploughing, a female worker is paid Rs 400 only which is 20% less than the wages of their male counterparts. It can be safely assumed that the prevalence of gender differential wage rates is associated with the categorization of female work as part of the household activity. However, their lower wages cannot be devalued or undermined on the impact it has in household management.

The productivity of Angami women in agriculture is limited due to the lack of access to finance, technology, and training in agricultural practices. To ensure the economic growth, the issues that hinder the progress of production needs to be addressed. One of the biggest threats to the female labor population in agriculture is gender-based discrimination. This issue can be taken care of by promoting gender equity in wages.

IV. LAND OWNERSHIP SYSTEM

The laws and conventions, which have their roots in religious law, are implicitly biased against women's roles and status (Khala, 2012). According to Angami tradition, the land belongs to the clan, and the males have the exclusive right to inherit and determine their line of succession (Pienyü, 2017). Every male member in a family get access to land through inheritance. In Angami society, women are not given due recognition or included in the distribution of land. In fact, women are not given any share in immovable properties of their parents. The meagre property that is bestowed upon her are the moveable objects which are gifted to her during her marriage. Unmarried women are allowed to cultivate the ancestral lands, however, they do not have ownership rights over those lands.

The idea of Angami women enjoying a privileged and equal position as men is often expressed by many. However, in reality, women are subjugated and controlled by men in every aspect of life. Angami women are submissive in nature and give the utmost respect to the male members of the family and society. As such, the decision made by the head of the family is always respected and obeyed. The Angami society is highly patriarchal. It is the male members who are attributed with the status of being the head of the family. Women were never considered capable of leading the family and therefore, women were never given the opportunity to make decisions on behalf of her family even on the death of her husband. Women were believed to be innately unfit to inherit freedom and independence.

V. IMPACT ON HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY

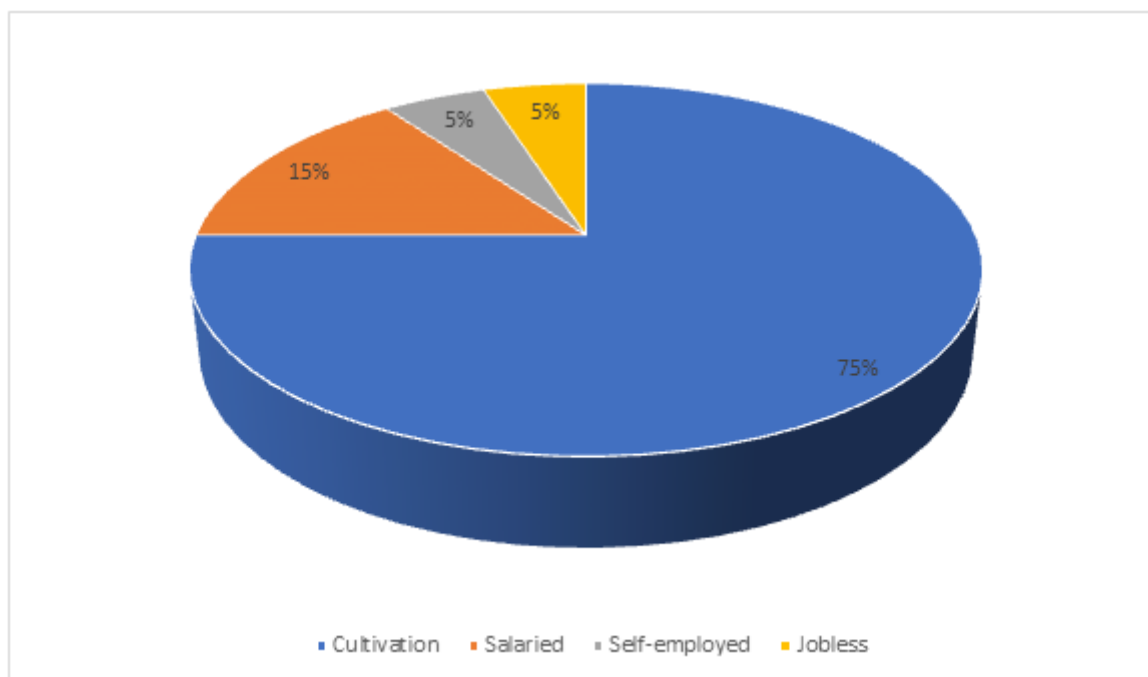


Fig.1 Female Occupational Structure in Angami Villages:

The rural household economy is largely supported by women. In rural areas, agriculture is the dominant occupation of the female population among the Angamis. If all activities- such as maintenance of kitchen garden, poultry rearing, grinding food grains, collecting water and firewood, etc. are taken into account, then 88 percent of rural housewives and 66 percent of urban housewives can be considered economically productive (Tomar, 2011). Livestock rearing and home gardening provides an essential source of income for Angami women. According to the statistics provided in the chart, atleast 5 % of rural women earn their livelihood by engaging in animal husbandry and maintaining home garden.

VI. CONCLUSION

Today the position of women has changed drastically. The role of Angami women occupies a significant place in the socio-economic structure of the society. It is crucial to provide economic empowerment to women by way of allowing them to get access to ownership of lands, equal wages, and rights to good health.

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