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# Golden Research Thoughts

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## A STUDY ON EMPOWERMENT OF THE WOMEN OF THE GARO COMMUNITY



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### ABSTRACT:

In view of the changing conditions of the society empowerment has become a global issue particularly in backward areas with various ethnic groups. Empowerment aims at enabling people to develop their personality and to have better quality life. The term empowerment is a wide ranging concept. In broad sense it refers to physical empowerment, economic empowerment, socio-cultural empowerment, political empowerment etc. In other words, empowerment encourages individual or people to gain skills, knowledge and wisdom that helps them to overcome any sort of hurdle that comes in the way of life. In the present time, women empowerment has become a significant topic of discussion in regards to development and prospects of a society. Women empowerment is considered as one of the prime issues for building of a nation. The empowerment of women is also called as 'gender empowerment'. Gender empowerment or empowerment to women is recognised globally as an element to achieve societal as well as national progress. The most common explanation of women

empowerment is the ability to exercise full control over one's actions. In the present paper, the investigator has made a sincere attempt to study empowerment of the women of the Garo community in relation to economic, socio-familial, political and legal dimensions. The Garos are one of the major tribal communities of North-East India. The Garos are one of the few remaining matrilineal societies in the world. Here in this paper, Descriptive Survey Method has been used as method of study. The investigator has used a self prepared questionnaire in order to collect primary data for the present study.

**KEY WORDS:** Economic empowerment, Socio-familial empowerment, Legal empowerment and Political empowerment

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

In view of the changing conditions empowerment of the backward classes has become a global issue in the present social scenario. Empowerment aims at enabling people to develop their capabilities and to have a better quality life. The word 'empowerment' is not new. Empowerment is a process of change by which individuals or groups gain power and ability to take control over their lives. It involves access to resources, resulting into increased participation in decision making and bargaining power and increased control over benefits, resources and own life, increased self-confidence, self-esteem, self-respect and increased well being. In other words, empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and community.

Empowerment also includes encouraging and developing the skills for self-sufficiency with a focus on eliminating the future need for charity or welfare in the individuals of the groups. Thus, empowerment is the process of obtaining the basic opportunities for marginalized people, either directly or indirectly.

#### **CONCEPT OF EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

The term 'empowerment of women' has become popular especially after 1980s. It refers to the process of strengthening the hands of women who have been suffering from various disabilities and gender discrimination. The term 'empowerment of women' refers to the process of providing power to women to become free from the control of others, that is, to assume power to control her own life and to determine her own condition. The term of 'empowerment of women' could also be understood as the process of providing equal rights, opportunities and power positions to women so that they are able to play a role on par with men in society. (Rao, Shankar. C.N.,p-844)

Historically, women have been regarded as constituting a weaker section. They have often been treated as 'second grade citizens'. They have been pictured and presented as 'home-makers' who are good in household activities. But this image of women has been changing everywhere. Extension of the voting right to women in Britain and America in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought about a series of changes in the status of women especially in the western world.

On the contrary, women of Asia and Africa were not able to secure equal status and opportunities even after 1950s. (Rao, Shankar. C.N.,p-845)

Women continued to suffer from one or the other kind of disability. They were given unequal treatment on the basis of sex. This is termed as 'gender discrimination'.

#### **HISORICAL BACKGROUND OF EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA**

The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over past few

millenniums. In ancient age during Vedic period women enjoyed equal status with men. However, later the status of women began to deteriorate approximately from 500 B.C., the situation worsened with invasion of Mughals and later on by European invaders.

Some reformatory movements by Guru Nanak, Mahaveer Jain, Raja Ram Mohan Rai, Ishwarchandra Vidya Sagar, Pandita Rama Bai and others did give relief. It is not that British did not do anything for improving the condition of women. Some laws were enacted such as '*Abolition of Practice of Sati*', '*Widow Remarriage Act, 1856*' etc. The real change came after independence. The Constitution of India guarantees equality to women (Article-14). There are articles too which ensure rights of women e.g. no discrimination by the state (Article-15[a]), equality of opportunity (Article-16) etc. Feminist activism picked up momentum in India during later 1970s. Later on many groups and NGOs have been working for the empowerment of women.

### THE GARO COMMUNITY

The Garos are one of the scheduled tribes who are mainly distributed over Garo Hills and few in Khasi Hills in Meghalaya, Kamrup District, Goalpara District and Karbi Anglong and substantial number are found in greater Mymensingh and Gazipur, Rangpur, Sunamgonj, Syllet, Moulavibazar District of Bangladesh. The Garos call themselves *ACHIK-MANDE* which literally means 'Hill Man' (*ACHIK* means hills and *MANDE* means man). Ethnically the Garos belong to the Mongoloid race like most of the tribes of North-East India.

The Garos are one of the few remaining matrilineal societies in the world. In the Garo community the line descent is always traced through the females only. The group on which the Garo society is based is the sub clan which is called MA'CHONG. MA'CHONG is described by Colonel Dalton as 'motherland'.

The Garos like the other tribes of Assam belong to the Tibeto-Burman families of Bodo linguistic group. Their language is called Garo. They are the second largest tribe in Meghalaya after Khasi and comprise about a third of the local population. Like other tribes, the Garos too depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Besides paddy, they also cultivate maize and cash crops. They are very good horticulturists and they raise pineapples in large quantities. But with the changes of time some of the Garos are now engaged in Govt. and private jobs also. The Garos are divided into the following sub tribes:

- The Awe
- The Chisak
- The Matchi-Dual
- The Metabeng
- The Ambeng
- The Ruga-Chibok
- The Gara-Ganching
- The Atong
- The Megam (Mazumdar, D.N.,p-19)

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The investigator has made an attempt to know the empowerment of the women of the Garo community in relation to economic, socio-familial, legal and political dimension and accordingly the present study has been entitled as "A Study on Empowerment of the Women of the Garo Community".

## **OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS**

### **Economic Empowerment:**

Economic empowerment means control over income, contribution to family support, access to employment, ownership of assets and land, involvement in self helped groups and involvement in family agricultural activities.

### **Socio-Familial Empowerment:**

Socio-familial empowerment means social position or status of women, satisfaction level of their social status, feeling of security of women in the locality and at home, participation over spouse selection and participation in decision making.

### **Legal Empowerment:**

Legal empowerment means knowledge about legal right, domestic support for exercising right, campaigns for right awareness and knowledge about different legal acts.

### **Political empowerment:**

Political empowerment means involvement in politics, domestic support for political engagement, exercising right to vote, involvement in political campaign, and support for specific political candidates and representation in local govt.

## **JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY**

Empowering women is a very sensitive issue in the present period. The real progress of a society cannot be thought of without empowered women. The women section has the equal role and responsibility in making the society and the nation prosperous. But in the developing countries like India, the women section has been considered as the weaker or poor section of the society. In majority of the Indian societies are of patriarchal kind where male section dominates most of the aspects of social and family life. This may be reason we often come across the news of violence against the women and India is still lagging behind to be a developed country. Without empowered women it is impossible to make a strong nation. But the Garos are one of the few matrilineal societies of the world residing in North-East India. Being matrilineal society the main role is played by women by men in the family and society. In this paper, the investigator has tried to bring into light the real picture of empowerment of the women of the Garo community. On the basis of this ground the present study has been justified.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. To study economic empowerment of the women of Garo community.
2. To study socio-familial empowerment of the women of Garo community.
3. To study legal empowerment of the women of Garo community.
4. To study political empowerment of the women of Garo community.

## **DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

1. The present study has been delimited to Lankona Village of Kamrup District of Assam.
2. The present study has been delimited to 25-60 years old married Garo women.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Keeping the nature of the study the investigator has selected Descriptive Survey Method as the

method of the study.

#### POPULATION AND SAMPLE

All the married Garo women aged 25 to 60 years of the Lankona Village constitute the universe of the present study.

The sample of the present study comprises 50 Garo married women.

#### SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

Considering the nature of data and purpose of the present study, the investigator has selected the Simple Random Sampling Technique.

#### TOOL USED

A self structured questionnaire has been prepared by the investigator consisted of 25 items subdivided into categories of economic, socio-familial, legal and political dimensions of empowerment. The respondents had to give responses by giving tick mark (v) and cross mark (x) against each item.

Dimensions of empowerment	No. of items
Economic Dimension	7
Socio-familial Dimension	7
Legal Dimension	6
Political Dimension	5

#### STATISTICAL IMPLICATION

1. Simple percentage
2. Graphical representation

#### ANALYSIS OF DATA

**Table: 1** Data showing the percentage of Garo women in the dimension of economic empowerment.

Sl. No.	Items	Yes (%)	No (%)
1	Control over income	100%	0%
2	Contribution to family support	100%	0%
3	Access to employment	87%	13%
4	Ownership of assets and land	100%	0%
5	Involvement in self helped groups	82%	18%
6	Involvement in agricultural activities	91%	9%
7	Involvement in business	66%	34%

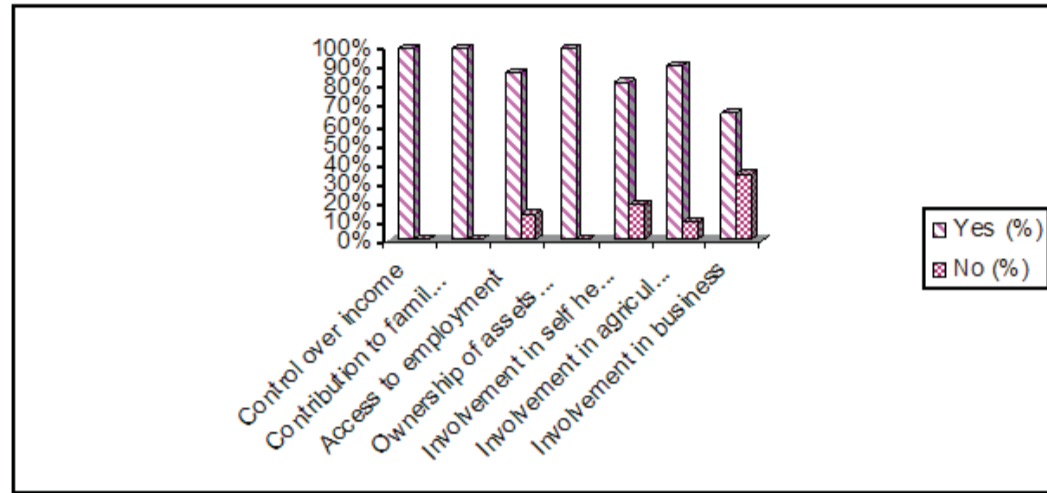


Fig.1- Data showing the percentage of Garo women in the dimension of economic empowerment.

Table:2 Data showing the percentage of Garo women in the dimension of socio-familial empowerment.

Sl. No.	Items	Yes (%)	No (%)
1	Social position of women	93%	7%
2	Satisfaction level of social status	100%	0%
3	Feeling of security of women in the locality	100%	0%
4	Feeling of security of women in the family	100%	0%
5	Participation in domestic decision making	100%	0%
6	Freedom over spouse selection	98%	2%
7	Experience of domestic violence	0%	100%

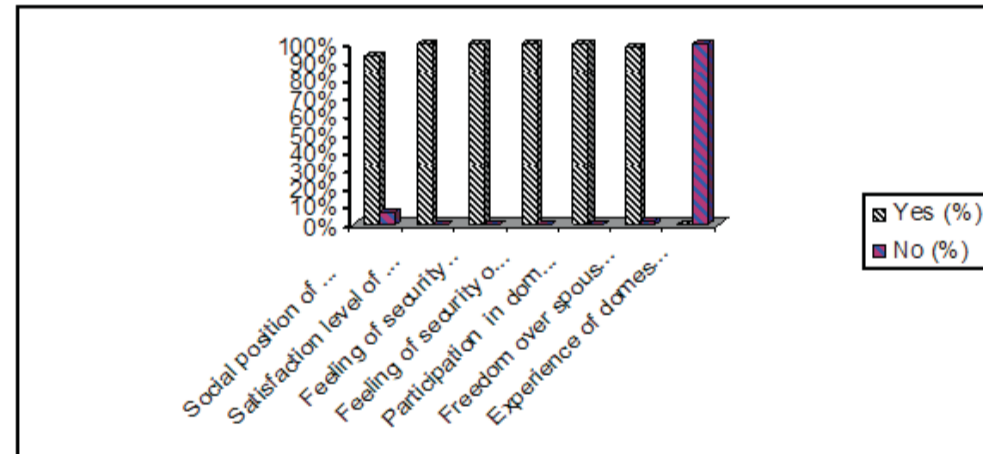
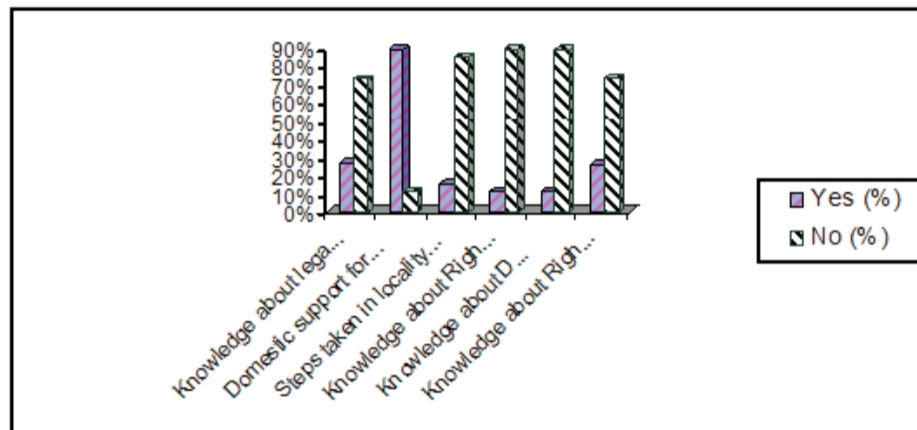


Fig.2- Data showing the percentage of Garo women in the dimension of socio-familial empowerment.



**Table:3** Data showing the percentage of Garo women in the dimension of legal empowerment.

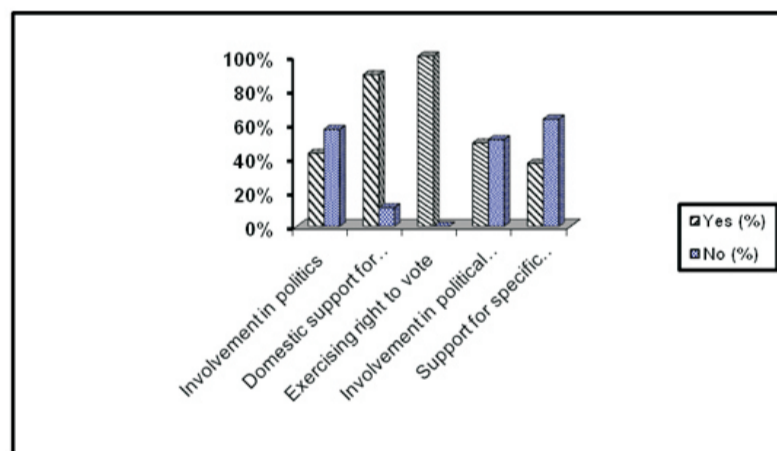
Sl. No.	Items	Yes (%)	No (%)
1	Knowledge about legal rights	27%	73%
2	Domestic support for exercising legal rights	89%	11%
3	Steps taken in locality for campaigns for awareness for rights.	15%	85%
4	Knowledge about Right to Information Act	11%	89%
5	Knowledge about Domestic Violence Act	11%	89%
6	Knowledge about Right to Education Act	26%	74%



**Fig.3-** Data showing the percentage of Garo women in the dimension of legal empowerment.

**Table:4** Data showing the percentage of Garo women in the dimension of political empowerment.

Sl. No.	Items	Yes (%)	No (%)
1	Involvement in politics	43%	57%
2	Domestic support for political engagement	89%	11%
3	Exercising right to vote	100%	0%
4	Involvement in political campaign	49%	51%
5	Support for specific political candidate	37%	63%



**Fig.4-** Data showing the percentage of Garo women in the dimension of political empowerment.

### MAJOR FINDINGS:

From the present study the following major findings may be inferred-

- It is found that the women of Garo community have satisfactory level of economic empowerment.
- It is revealed that all the women (100%) have control over income, contribution to family support and ownership of assets and land.
- It is also found that all the women (100%) have satisfaction over their social status.
- It is found that most of the women (98%) have freedom over their spouse selection.
- Regarding legal dimension, it is found that the women are less empowered.
- It is found that all the women (100%) have exercised right to vote which is quite a positive aspect of political involvement.
- It is revealed that the women of Garo community do not have the experience of any kind of domestic violence at home.

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

All human beings irrespective of their sex i.e. male and female have equal right and responsibilities to lead a prosperous life. No society can make progress without empowered women. To attain real development of a nation like India, it is very essential to make the women section empowered. So, it is the need of the time to empower the women section of the society. The women of Garo community are found to be empowered in all aspects of life than the women of the patriarchal societies. Throughout the investigation, no case of violence against women has been found. The good aspect of Garo community is that the women are highly respected and their abilities have been given priority. This should be an ideal for practice in the patriarchal society. Throughout the investigation it is found that the number of educated women is low and this may be the reason they are lagging behind in knowledge and information of various legal acts and policies of Government. So, necessary programmes should be organized to create awareness for education and literacy among the people specially women of Garo community.

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