CHAPTER – III

Status of women in Karbi Anglong

3.1. Social status of Karbi women:

According to the book on “Sociology of Karbis” Authored by Bhattacharjee (1986). No society is more male dominated than that of the Karbis. The female occupies an inferior status. She has no share in administration.\(^{140}\)

It is true that the Karbi women have struggles and obstacles as they function in a strong patriarchal, male dominated traditional cultural social set-up. The fact that, the Karbi society is still backward, in its outlook and in practice, women suffer a lot under the dominant practice of patriarchy culture, as discrimination, sexual abuse of all kind, domestic violence and to the extent of considering women only for pleasure and procreations, the evil practices has degraded the rise of women status.

The Karbis has a patriarchal culture in which women has no say over inheritance of property nor considered the head of the family. The basis of Karbi society is the village or a part of the village which is under the control of the chief. This indicates that all activities undertaken by women in the traditional Karbi society though significant were always under men’s control. The traditional Karbi society attributed great value to motherhood implicitly, expecting women to play the role of child bearing, rearing and looking after the comforts of husbands and managing the households. In almost all the spheres of life, men were regarded as the backbone of the society and women in general remains in the background with regards to family, social, public, religion and political life.

The inferior status of women in Karbi society was so deplorable in earlier times which were realized by dynamic and young lad, Semsonsing Ingti who has done so much in the reformation of the Karbi society and for his sacrificial and remarkable contribution to the people of Karbis he was accorded as the father of the Karbis. To quote the inferior status of women as seen and tried to do away with it, was compiled and paper circulated, by Mrs. Kabeen Teronpi, Assistant Professor of Diphu government college, Department of English, during the seminar held on 08\(^{th}\) Feb’2011 in commemorating the 101\(^{st}\) Birth Anniversary of Ru Semsonsing Ingti, organized by

\(^{140}\)Bhathacharjee 1986, the sociology of the Karbis p.28
the Semsonsing Ingti Birth centenary celebration committee, Diphu. In accordance with the status of Karbi women which was not at par with man in socio-economic and political sphere. As Teronpi continues that, the restrictions imposed on women during that time as highlighted by Semsonsing Ingti as he invoke the hearts of the traditional rulers for the better policy and liberation of women were the following:

1. Women were debarred from using the umbrella to protect themselves from rain and heat
2. Women were not permitted to serve meal without the ‘Vamkok’ (girdle) tied to their waist.
3. Women were prohibited from wearing shoes and sandals.
4. Women were also prohibited from wearing gold rings.
5. While walking on the roads, women were not permitted to use fan.
6. Women were not permitted to walk parallel to a man.

Semsonsing Ingti did so much to wipe away the ill-treatment and injustice meted out towards women. It was because of his efforts, women of today are permitted to enjoy a dignified position in the society.141

Generally, if we talk about status of women, it includes the totality of human Endeavour, her all round development in the participation of socio-cultural, religious, economy and political field. As to whether there are any restrictions in the process of her participation and roles, whether she has all the rights to perform task as her man counterparts be it in households works, agricultural related works, worshipping, financial power, governance of village and most of all education which will help her to imbibe the qualities of rights and equality in any forward looking society.142

Social Status of women is also about her faring better, advancement in the enrolment to schools and also passed percentage and scoring later marks. So, as her well being and materialism of any modern living. Along with the ever rising development and imbibe to many modern thing, Teronpi, has to say that as material gain and prosperity is the way of life of the time, a few selected young nubile Karbi girls have fallen prey to this mechanism. She referred to the words of Donald teron

142Lily Aye Terangpi 2009 M.Phil dissertation, “A study of Karbi working women and attitude towards women empowerment.”
having said that the greatest social evils faced by the Karbi society in the contemporary times is prostitution, affecting all groups, from a young teenage girl from a village to a school going, college going, university going, a few so called ladies and widows.\textsuperscript{143}

Stating about the status of Karbi women, Evans Pritchard (2009) has to say, “Looking at her socio position from outside and from our point of view, we may say that she has an inferior position and she is not resentful on account of it, she sees herself as different from man and as having a social status different from him, but if we may state her attitude in our own way of speaking, it is for her less a matter of level than of difference of status. Primitive women do not see themselves as under privilege class against a class of men with whom they seek to gain social equality. They also never heard of social equality and also they do not want to be like men.”\textsuperscript{144}

The coming of modern education has loosened some traditional restraints on few Karbi women. But, Karbi society having low economy, many a family struggles for two morsels a day, in such situation education; modernization is yet to take shape. This is not to forget lucky few of those privileged ones, who are well educated, quite equipped with modern things, and going on par with the rest of the people of the world.

However, it may be stated in general that despite the developments of women education and the subsequent improvement of their position and status, they still practice traditional value system and roles. There-by, remaining subordinate to men. So, Karbi women still receives secondary status in a society.

\textbf{3.2. The status of Karbi women in village administration:}

The Karbis are from North eastern part of India. Their abode is Karbi-Anglong. The Karbis are found in the entire seven sisters State. But their concentration is more in Assam, being their home land. Ethnically, they are Mongoloid and speak a local dialect belonging to the Tibeto- Burmese particularly

\textsuperscript{143}Teronpi Kabeen, 2011, 37th KYF Lokhimo Semson sing Engti. p.112
\textsuperscript{144}http://wn.com/Dositej_Obradovic.E.E. Evans-Pritchard .Ethnographicalblog on Karbis earning rave reviews globally 14 Nov 2009
Kuki-chin sub-group of languages. Further they are believed to have migrated from the Kuki-chin area, in and around the Chindwin river valley in western Burma.\textsuperscript{145}

Karbi Anglong can be divided into three subdivision: Eastern part Diphu and Bokajan. Western represents single subdivision as Hamren. The western region is traditionally divided into three territorial regions as Rongbong. They are Rongkhang, Chingthong and Amri. Each Rongbong has a well-established traditional or social institutions comprising of selected social dignitaries known as ‘Pinpo’ and headed by their chiefs known as ‘LINDOKPO.’ The Pinpo looks after social and cultural practices of their respective territory. For historical reasons, Ronghang Lindokpo is regarded as the king of the Karbis; infact he is only a social chief and has no soldiers or weapons at his disposal. Each Rongbong is further divided into Long; ri or blocks comprising of a few villages. Socio-cultural practices of the Long; ri is looked after by another dignitary (ies) called Habe,’ who is duly appointed by the Lingdokpo of the concerned rongbong. The latter communicates with his Habe through an indigenously developed symbol called ‘Lam Kido.’ At the village level, socio-cultural as well as administrative matters are under the jurisdiction of Rong asar; Sarthe or village headman and his assistants namely Riso Basa and Barika or Pherangki. The youth organization is headed by the Klengsarpo and his assistant Klengdun. Social institutions, the parent body of Karbi traditions and culture exist only in Hamren subdivision for which the region is still considered as the seat of Karbi culture.\textsuperscript{146}

However, there is no history of Karbi women being a member of village administration, or decision making in Karbi Anglong. They are never selected or chosen for the village council (Mei).

**3.3. Karbi women and prevailing customary laws of the Karbi social institutions:**

There are many customary laws and traditions existing among Karbi society. All these customary laws are un-codified. Usually in rural areas, people are fully dependent upon the community leaders or Goan bura, Sarthe or village headmen or any official within the range of down from the village headman up to the HABE KETHE or HABEKONG who is the chief official within the territorial division, in the aspects of legal awareness, awareness regarding the status of the male and female in

\textsuperscript{145} Phangcho 2003, The Karbis of the North Eastern India p.47
\textsuperscript{146} Bey p.13
society, marriage and family bindings, succession and inheritance, the grounds of divorce and maintenance, adoption etc.\footnote{Law Research Institute. (2007). The customary of the Karbis of Assam P.1}

3.4. Family:

The child is born in a family and family is regarded as primary social group.\footnote{Rao Shankar C.N. 1997, Sociology. Published by S.chand & company Ltd., Ram Nagar, New Delhi - 110055. p.9} The family is the most important institution of which women constitute a vital part. It involves matters relating to marital relationship such as marriage and divorce and also certain rights and obligations which arise from marital relationships. Thus, there are family laws like, maintenance, custody of children, inheritance and succession, minority, guardianship, etc.

In Karbi society, families or households are bound together by ties of kinship of the members and controlled by rules of marriage. Couple who are not socially recognized as a married couple to form a family is never allowed to live in their community. Therefore, marriage upon which the family is based unites a man and a woman as husband and wife. The Karbi family follows the patriarchal system, tracing their descent in the male line only. A woman would almost completely break away from her natal family, while the male offspring do not, as a general rule; leave their family of birth following marriage.\footnote{Law Research Institutes.p.2}

In a Karbi family, authority is vested in the senior-most male member. During his lifetime, he usually exerts power and authority without ignoring the views of other adult male members of the family. The authority of the senior most male member is accepted and is obeyed and respected by all the members of the family. The guardianship of children always rests with the head of the family. When he dies, his eldest son attains the headship of the family but decision on various family matters are taken in consultation with his mother. He is responsible for the maintenance of his aged parents. He also becomes the owner of his father’s property, agricultural land and has the obligations to perform various rites and rituals.

In a family both the husband and wife play an important roles in the management of the households. There is economic co-operation as well as the division of labor among the members of the family based on age and sex. Usually, a
man and his adult sons are responsible for earning livelihood. Hard tasks like preparation of jhum fields, hoeing and ploughing the field for cultivation, construction of houses etc., are done by the adult male members of the household. The role of the women in a family is to carry out the domestic chores like cooking, cleaning the house, washing utensils and clothes, planting of saplings in the jhum as well as settled land, harvesting of crops, collection of firewood, weaving, preparation of Horlang (homemade liquor), hoeing etc. Both the men and women engage themselves in fishing. Grown ups girls help their mothers while the boys help their fathers in day-to-day activities.\textsuperscript{150}

3.5. Marriage laws:

So far as the marriage laws are concerned, marriage within the clan is strictly prohibited as the members of a clan are regarded as brothers and sisters. Violation of this rule leads to excommunication from the society. Monogamy or marriage with one person is the general rule but a few instances of polygamy are not rare. Widow remarriage is permissible among the Karbis. The marriage is never made against the will of a girl; she has freedom to choose her life partner. The Karbis have the tradition of marrying the elder brother’s wife by the younger brother after the expiry of the elder brother, which is called ‘Pateng paju’. Divorce is possible among the Karbis, while the widows of those devoured by the tiger are not allowed to remarry. Such a widow is known as ‘me-ang.’\textsuperscript{151} Generally, marriage among the Karbis can be classified into two types.

i) \textbf{Marriage by negotiation:}

The first one is by negotiations where the parent plays important roles. Marriage by service or bride earning known as Peso-Kemeng is not separated with marriage by negotiations. The Karbis have the practice of working in the father-in-laws house for a year or more depending on the agreement. It happens if the marriage proposals is ‘akemen’ (literally, ripe, pakka). Here, parents and a few elderly relatives take active part in the marriage negotiation. There may not be any active role for the boy or the girl. In some cases they even remain unknown to each other till marriage.

\textsuperscript{150} Law Research Institutes, 2007. The customary law of the Karbis of Assam, p.2
\textsuperscript{151} Law Research Institutes, p.11
In negotiated marriage, the boy’s parents indirectly try to know the view of girl’s parents. If they get a positive response, then, on a stipulated date, the boys’ father, accompanied by a few elderly relatives proceeds to the girl’s house. This is followed by a series of formal and informal visits of both the parties till the marriage date is finalized. This type of marriage is known as Aron in Karbi language. Traditional marriages are recognized as valid marriages provided they complete all the six stages. The six stages are Nengpinengso (female visit), Piso- Kehang (asking for bride), Kapatini (finalization), Ajo-arni-kepha (fixation of date), Kapangri (marriage), Pesoricho – Kachethon (returning of bride and bridegroom).

II) **Marriage by mutual consent or elopment:**

The second one is by elopement where the actual marriage does not take place; where they do not return to their parents till the acceptance of the union, this type of marriage is not recognized by the society. There is a custom which is a must among the Karbis to legalize the marriage later even after the birth of children, which is known as “Burha Biya” or “Besar- cheap.” Here, the couple has to go through the whole procedure of a negotiated marriage from placing proposal to the bride’s parents till the consummation of the marriage takes place. Legalization of marriage among the Karbis is compulsory for all. It is because at the time of death, of the wife the society does not allow her to be cremated in a clan’s cremation ground known as ‘Tipit’. Another reason is that maternal uncle who plays a pivotal role in Karbi society refuses to co-operate in some rare traditionally abnormal disease and sickness of the niece, if the relationship of his sister with his brother in law is not legalized.\(^\text{153}\) It is this uncle who can heal all the abnormalities (Believed to be traditional sickness in Karbi Society) of the niece by performing some traditional rituals.

III) **Divorce:**

Divorce is permissible among the Karbis. Any of the grounds like adultery or extra-marital affairs, cruelty and womb barrenness, etc excuses available to a husband may lead to divorce. A wife can also seek divorce from her husband on grounds of extra-marital affairs, drunkenness, physical abuse and non-maintenance of the family. But, most of the time women are made to tolerate and forgive the men for

\(^{152}\)Bhattacharjee, 1986, the sociology of the Karbis 1986 p.42

\(^{153}\)Law Research Institute. (2007). The customary law of the Karbis P .1
his wrong doings. In case the couple mutually agrees to separate, there is no trial. If there is a rift between the husbands and the wife, the matter is to be informed to the village headman (gaonbura). Accordingly, all the relatives from both sides are invited as witnesses and the issue gets settled. If the gaonbura cannot take the final decision, he can refer the case to the sarkari gaonbura. The sarkari gaonbura can impose fine upon the husband and the wife if they are found guilty. According to the customary law an amount of Rs.100/- and Rs.50/- are to be paid by the husband and the wife respectively as a fine or compensation fee.154

After divorce, women are generally looked down upon in the community, irrespective of the grounds of divorce. Following the divorce, the husband gets the custody of grown children and the wife may be asked to take care of their minor children. They can also stay with the mother if she does not remarry. If she marries all her children are bound to go back to the father. If the child is a male, after maturity, he can inherit the property of his father; there is no history of a girl child of inheritance of father’s property, especially after divorce. Even after divorce, the children have to assume the surname of the father. As per the decision of the village headman, sometimes onetime payment for maintenance of the children and half the share of the property of the husbands are to be paid to the divorced wife. However, no compensation is paid for taking care of the children.155

IV) Widow remarriage:

The Karbis have a good system of widow remarriage. The widow of the deceased may marry her brother-in-law. This is called ‘the patengparju.’156

Widow Remarriage is accepted in Karbi society. In general the younger sister of the deceased wife is preferred for such marriage. However, for this, her consent is essential. Junior levirate (marriage of a widow to her deceased husband’s younger brother) and junior sorority (marriage of a widower to his wife’s younger sister) The widow loses the right to property if she marries outside her deceased husband’s clan. But she has the right over deceased’s husband’s personal earnings only if she resides in her former in-laws’ house. If a widow marries outside

154Law Research Institute. (2007). The customary law of the Karbis of Assam P.1
155Law Research Institute. (2007). P.1
156Bhathacharjee 1986, The sociology of the Karbis p.41
the prescribed categories, then they have to pay a fine fixed by the village headman for their social acceptance and recognition. The widows of those devoured by the tiger are not allowed to remarry. Such a widow is known as ‘me-ang.’\textsuperscript{157}

3.6. Karbi women in religious rites and rituals:

So, far as religious matters are concerned among the Karbis, the male as the head of the household, performs the rituals on all religious occasions, and teaches his sons of the religious performance. Rites and rituals play a very important role in the life of Karbi people. The Karbis have a unique system of performing death rites. They firmly believe the concept of rebirth. Therefore, it is obligatory for every Karbi family to perform the death ceremony of the deceased, which is called ‘Chomkan.’ Here, some experienced women cooks for the dead person. She also composes and sings the life history of the deceased in a very tragic tune. In the song, she also guides the deceased the path to the abode of the dead. A professional weeper who sings is called ‘Lunchepi’ and this song is called ‘Kacharhe.’ This is the most expensive and elaborates socio-religious ceremony which continues for four days and four nights at stretch.

In the religious front the concept of ‘Sibon Alun’ or the Karbi Ramayan is intricately woven into the religious beliefs of the Karbis from time unknown. This is derived from an oral folk song of the tribe which is said to be composed of five hundred and sixty couplets. In the Karbi Ramayan, king Dasarath is known as ‘Dohoram,’ Sita as ‘Sinta Kungri,’ King Janak as ‘Bomonpo’ and Ram- Lakshman as ‘Ram-Lokhon.’\textsuperscript{158} It is interesting to note that all the events of Karbi Ramayan are depicted in a familiar topographical background and in Karbi social set-up.

In a Karbi society, without rites and rituals festival of the Karbis is not complete. Their festival mostly revolves around agriculture, as agriculture is the chief activities of the Karbis. The main festivals celebrated by the Karbis are ‘Kekan’ and ‘Ronker.’ Hacha Kekan is observed after the harvest of paddy. After harvesting, the people worship ‘Longle ahi; i.e. the malevolent deity. It takes a fowl and rice beer to appease the benevolent deity. Then, they pray and invoke upon the deity for the protection of the harvest from pests/insects etc. After this ritual, the harvest is carried

\textsuperscript{157} Law Research institutes 2007, The customary law of the Karbis of Assam p.13
\textsuperscript{158} Anam Nazmeen 2000, “The enchanting hills of the Karbis” p.19
home. People dance all the way from the field i.e., ‘ing; long arit’ to their granary with thrashed grains at their back. By dancing and singing the young and old, men and women accompany the community festivity.

Another important festival is ‘Rongker’ which is celebrated annually in the village on community basis. There is no hard and fast rule regarding the date of observance of the festival, yet it has become a usual practice of celebrating after harvesting of crops. The expenditure of the ritual is done on the basis of contribution by the whole village members. The main purpose of ‘Rongker is to appease the territorial deity for the welfare of the village and to ward off diseases and other natural calamities. The actual ritual is performed in the daytime with the first ritual of the festival been observed in the previous evening in the house of the village headman ‘rong Asarthe’ during this stage, the village priest or ‘Kurusar’ performs ‘sadi’ where deities are invited for gracing the occasion. He pours a little rice beer (Horlang) in a leaf mat basket and offers to the deities in chanting hymns.\(^{159}\)

The second phase of the festival ‘karkli’ is performed. In Karbim ‘karkli’ means to worship of deities. There are two ways of observing ‘Karkli’ – one is by offering betel nut and leaf, which is called ‘Banta-Kebat’ and other is by offering meals to the deities, which are called ‘Kebo-Kebat.’ The important features to be noted here is the restriction of womenfolk.\(^{160}\)

Women are debared from active participation in religious ceremony of feasting and worshipping. The word ‘chilongle,’ meaning unmatched is applied here. In spite of all this inequalities, Karbi women never complain, they are immune to it. They are simply happy and contented.

3.7. Inheritance rights and the status of Karbi women:

Another important customary law is in relation to property rights. It is found that women have no say over ancestral property, it is the sons who share among themselves equally or otherwise, the eldest son inherits the parental property. With each passing day we find some family especially in rich homes that Parents are giving some property to their daughters in good proportion. In which ever case, it is the son

\(^{159}\) Anam Nazmeen 2000. The enchanting hill p.20
\(^{160}\) Nazmeen said participation of womenfolk in the feastival is restricted p.21
who gets the maximum share of property through inheritance. In case of the death of the father, the mother gets a share of her husband’s property which is very nominal, if there is no son, the nearest male relatives inherits the ancestral property to keep and uphold the name of the family.\textsuperscript{161}

Dr. Jeuti Barooah (2007), Customary laws of the Karbis of Karbi Anglong in Assam, states that the Karbis have well-formulated customary laws of inheritance of property and succession to office. The Karbis follow the rules of paternal inheritance. If there is no son to inherit family property, the daughter or daughters can inherit property under certain circumstances. If there is no heir to inherit ancestral land and other property, the rights of inheritance passes on to one’s brothers and brothers’ children and to the patri-kin, in the given order. The prime considerations which governed the rule of inheritance are fulfillment of obligatory duties and responsibilities by the sons or their substitutes towards their parents. A daughter or an adopted son acts as a substitute for the son born of lawful wedlock. It is customary among the Karbis that the eldest son gets the largest share of land. The younger sons also receive shares of land. The son who looks after the aged parents sometimes gets the largest share of property.\textsuperscript{162}

The sons have the first right of inheritance of property after the death of the father. As a general rule, the son whether by the same or different wives equally shares the inherited property. After the death of the head of the family, the ancestral property as well as self-acquired property is inherited by all his males’ children who held it jointly.

There are certain movable properties e.g., ornaments, cloths, utensils, etc. owned by the women which are exclusively inherited by the daughters from their mother. She can dispose female property only by way of gift. A woman cannot dispose of her personal valuable property during her husband’s lifetime. The consent of her husband is always necessary.\textsuperscript{163}

A widow has the right to enjoy her deceased husband’s share of joint property and self – acquired property, with certain limited powers. She cannot sell valuable

\textsuperscript{161}Law Research Institute 2007, The customary law of the Karbis of Assam P. 14
\textsuperscript{162}Law Research Institute. (2007). P. 14
\textsuperscript{163}Law Research Institute. (2007). P. 14
property like land without the consent of her deceased husband’s other family members or near kin. A widow loses the rights over any inheritance if she remarries or if she is unchaste at the time when question of inheritance arises.164

3.8. Karbi women and economy:

The most important activity in Karbi Anglong is agriculture. Phangcho 2003 says, The Karbi economy is basically agricultural.165 People also engage themselves in small scale industries like weaving, handloom, crafting, blacksmithing and other handicrafts to meet their daily needs. The second important activity is salaried job.

3. 9. Karbi women are good weavers:

![Photo: 3.1. Karbi women are good weavers]

The majority of the Karbi women are good weavers. Weaving has been an integral part of Karbi society and Karbi women have been using this ‘deceptively simple-looking piece of technology built of little more than sticks and strings.166 They weave all types of human needs, including shawls, muffler, Mekhela, bags and even bed sheets, doormats. The things are in great demand among the people which goes to great commercial and cultural attractions both inside and outside Assam even to India and erstwhile country.

Usually, when a girl child is born to a family, the first thing that comes to the mother is to teach her house-keeping, cleaning and all the households’ burden. It is a tradition that every girl-child istaught knitting and weaving whether interested or not. It is for which the Karbi women folk are known for their expertise in making

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165 Phangcho 2003, The Karbis of the North East p.123
166 Teron Dharamsing 2011, Lokhimo, Karbi Loom: Weaving a tradition, clothing a culture and fashioning an identity p 95
garments of high grade and attractive quality for both male and female. The Karbi women since ancient times played a vital role, in the household’s managements; they also participated in the outdoor life as circumstances demanded. Women are found to be working side by side with men in the fields as the main occupation of Karbi is agricultural. Though, there are certain things like ‘leveler wooden’ which women are forbidden to work with while ploughing the fields, this is based on division of works.\textsuperscript{167}

Economy today is in transitional state, with the shift from traditional forms of agriculture and production in households industries to an increasingly capitalist economy characterized by large scale and organized economic activities. Labor has ceased to be organized by family units and instead has become more competitive and individualized. As, the scope for employment for Karbi people on the whole and particularly for women is very less, because, there is not much institutions, offices and industries, jobs become scarcer and more technical, women find themselves handicapped by their lack of education and limited opportunity to acquire new skills and are left behind in the labor market. In this regards towards equality strongly criticizes governments’ inattention to this particular and terrible problems, which modernization has brought to women. Again, the exploitation of women in terms of more works or equal works with men and less wages is a serious thing, to think about.

\textbf{Table No. 3.1: Distribution of main worker, marginal workers and non-workers in Assam (2001)}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total workers</td>
<td>330480</td>
<td>206808</td>
<td>123672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main workers</td>
<td>231638</td>
<td>173045</td>
<td>58593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal workers</td>
<td>98842</td>
<td>33763</td>
<td>65079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-workers</td>
<td>48283</td>
<td>215442</td>
<td>267389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivators</td>
<td>193879</td>
<td>122555</td>
<td>71324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural labourer</td>
<td>45462</td>
<td>20550</td>
<td>24912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households Industries Workers</td>
<td>12275</td>
<td>3521</td>
<td>8754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other workers</td>
<td>788664</td>
<td>60182</td>
<td>18682</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textit{Source: Statistical Handbook Assam 2007.}

\textsuperscript{167} Personal Experience and interview Dated: 17 july 2009
3.10. Karbi working women

Education has come to be not only a way of training people to work in different fields but also a qualification for jobs in certain fields. It fits people for increasingly specialized roles. With the spread of education and modernization Karbi women are trying to be both housewives and career women. This is not easy. It is difficult to carry on with career after marriage. Men with ambivalent attitudes accept the trends towards relative economic independence of women. She is economically helping the family, she is also a social asset to the husband, but at no cost must she neglect her traditional duties.

Majority of the Karbi women have occupied themselves with traditional jobs like teaching, nursing, and social work with the beginning of professional consciousness they are now seeking various positions in the occupational hierarchy. There has been a gradual switchover in employment of women from traditional occupations to more remunerative and higher status jobs. They are now taking up such professions as administration, education, doctors, engineers, journalists/journalism, and officers, in community development projects and in many other professions.

It is indeed a healthy trend that educated women today aspire for a professional career. The increased opportunities for training and education have

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enhanced their employability. But the opportunities for entering an occupation and progressing in it have not increased proportionately.

Mostly women work to supplement their family's income or work to develop their talents and raise their own status. But, much has to be achieved so far as working women's role in society and their total fulfillment, as professional individuals are concerned. As there is still a wide gap in opportunities and facilities available in general to women compared with men. Since, nineteen fifties, the name of the Karbis was held high and has a National and International touch by a Karbi women, having been a Member of Parliament and has represented India in U.N. in 1957. It was none other then KABNILI TIMUNGPI an honourable Karbi women, now called herself as Bonily Khongmen after her marriage with Khongmen a Jaintia Men. She has done numerous remarkable tasks for humanity in general and for the Karbis in particular especially for the Karbi women. To cite here, she was the chairperson of Union Public Service Commission from 1957 to 1960, she continued to be a member of U.P.S.C. upto 1973.169

That was not an end, a great laurel has been brought to the community of the Karbis, particularly for the women, with the recent achievement of Priyangka Ingtipi, who has added another new chapter in the history of Karbi Anglong to be the first women among the Karbis who came out with flying colours as IAS at 50th position under, West Bengal cadre. She is the granddaughter of political stalwart Samsong Sing Ingti.170

According to 2001 census the percentage of working population to total of the district were 40.57 against 42.8 in 1991 census. The worker population ratio for male was 49.02 against 31.42 for female. It is striking to note that more than half of the populations have registered as non-workers and about 69% of female population were found to be not engaged in economy activity. Among the total workers main workers i.e., those who work for 183 or more days of the year constitute 30.40%. As high as 53.75% of total female workers were registered as marginal workers.171

Table No.3.2: Workers and non-workers in Karbi Anglong. Male/ female wise.

169 Anam Nazmeen 2000, The sociology of the Karbis P.40
170 The daily news parer of Assam, Assam tribune, dated 03/03/2009. P.2
171 Statistics and economics of Karbi Anglong
While agricultural labours constitute 13.94% of the total main workers. Sizeable cultivators amongst all the main workers in the Karbi Anglong district was 59.26%. While agricultural labours constitute 13.94% of the total main workers. Sizeable populations of female workers (20.76%) were found to be engaged as agricultural labour.

Table No.3.3:
Economic classification of main workers in Karbi Anglong (Male/Female wise)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex Wise</th>
<th>Tot.wrkers</th>
<th>Cltvtrs.</th>
<th>Agri. Labour</th>
<th>Household And other wrkrs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person</td>
<td>329595</td>
<td>195323 (59.26%)</td>
<td>45970 (13.94%)</td>
<td>88302 (29.79%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>207149</td>
<td>124805 (60.25%)</td>
<td>20549 (9.92%)</td>
<td>61795 (29.83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>122446</td>
<td>70516 (57.59%)</td>
<td>25421 (20.75%)</td>
<td>26507 (21.65%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.4: Difference in numbers of workers between 1991 and 2001 census:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Main Worker</th>
<th>Cultivators</th>
<th>Agri. labour</th>
<th>Other Worker</th>
<th>Marginal wrkrs</th>
<th>Non wrkrs</th>
<th>Tot. wrkrs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>175189</td>
<td>125920</td>
<td>10515</td>
<td>38754</td>
<td>2358</td>
<td>170060</td>
<td>177547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>172764</td>
<td>124805</td>
<td>20549</td>
<td>59391</td>
<td>34385</td>
<td>215450</td>
<td>207149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diff.</td>
<td></td>
<td>2425 (1.38)</td>
<td>1115 (0.89)</td>
<td>10034 (95.43)</td>
<td>20637 (53.25)</td>
<td>32027 (1358.22)</td>
<td>45390 (26.69)</td>
<td>29602 (16.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16934</td>
<td>64584</td>
<td>5954</td>
<td>6296</td>
<td>29048</td>
<td>209134</td>
<td>45982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>56626</td>
<td>70516</td>
<td>25421</td>
<td>17980</td>
<td>65820</td>
<td>267275</td>
<td>122446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diff.</td>
<td></td>
<td>39692 (234.39)</td>
<td>5832 (9.07)</td>
<td>19467 (326.9)</td>
<td>11684 (185.5)</td>
<td>36772 (126.5)</td>
<td>58141 (27.80)</td>
<td>76464 (166.29)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Office of the Joint Director of Economics and Statistics (Hills), Diphu, Karbi Anglong.

Fig. 3.3. Economic classification of main workers in Karbi Anglong (Male/Female wise)

Source - Directorate of economics and statistics, Assam, Dispur: Guwahati-6) (Development Scenario of Karbi Anglong District -2004)
At the end of December 1999 the employment of women in organized sector was 1,8691 thousand. It increased to 19769 thousand at the end of December 2000, which account an increase of 5%. It is observed that women employment marginally declined during Dec’2001. It was 19399 thousand. The table below shows the employment of women in organized sector.

**Table No. 3.5: Employment of women in organized sectors:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Public Sector</th>
<th>Private Sector</th>
<th>Public &amp; Private Sector</th>
<th>% of women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>2447</td>
<td>16054</td>
<td>1204</td>
<td>2637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2703</td>
<td>17400</td>
<td>1252</td>
<td>2369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2795</td>
<td>17206</td>
<td>1023</td>
<td>2193</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source - Directorate of economics and statistics, Assam, Dispur: Guwahati- 6) (Development Scenerio of Karbi Anglong District -2004)*
Table No. 3.6: Wages of labour for quarter ending June ‘2002 (urban area)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of workers</th>
<th>Average rate per day (Rs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mason 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; class</td>
<td>120.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mason 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; class</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; class</td>
<td>110.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; class</td>
<td>80.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled workers(M)</td>
<td>75.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled workers (F)</td>
<td>65.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Deputy Director of Economics & Statistics, Diphu.

3.11. The problems of women:

3.11.1. Women are mostly illiterate and less educated:

Women and girls receive far less education than men, due both to social norms and fears of violence. India has the largest population of non-school-going working girls, which is even more in north-eastern part and back home in Karbi Anglong, Assam. If we look at India's constitution, it guarantees free primary school education for both boys and girls up to age 14. This goal has been repeatedly reconfirmed, but primary education in India is not universal. Overall, the literacy rate for women in
Karbi Anglong is 48.65 percent versus 68.11 percent for men according to 2001 census which stands at 58.83 percentages.¹⁷²

Undoubtedly, substantial progress has been achieved after independence in 1947, when less than 8 percent of females were literate; the gains have not been rapid enough to keep pace with population growth: there were 16 million more illiterate females in 1991 than in 1981. In 2001 the figure of females in India is indicated at 53.63 percentages, out of the 65.42%.

Looking back at the scenario of our own it has 48.65 percentages of female literates in Karbi Anglong according to 2001 records because it has a different history. Before Independence the educational development of Karbi Anglong district was totally at zero level. It was only after Independence that some initiatives had been taken for the development of education in the district. It was only after the formation of Karbi Anglong District in 1952, a number of schools had been established in the district by the state government and District Council. If we glance at the literacy rate of Karbi Anglong, it goes this way, in 1951, the literacy rate was only 5.65%, in 1961 it was 16.92%, in 1971 it became 19.17%, in 1991 it increased up to 45.57% and now it is 58.83% according to 2001 census.¹⁷³

Desai (1994) in Gender Inequalities and Demographic Behavior asserts that "parents' reluctance to educate daughters has its roots in the social situation of women. Parents have several incentives for not educating their daughters. Foremost is the view that education of girls brings no returns to parents and that their future roles, being mainly reproductive and perhaps including agricultural labor, require no formal education. As more and more boys are engaged in education, there is a growing reliance on the labor of girls. Girls are increasingly replacing their brothers on the farm while carrying on their usual responsibilities in housework. A large proportion of the roughly 40 million "nonworking" girls who are not in school are kept at home because of responsibilities in housework."¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² National census of Karbi Anglong 2011 (Provisional)
The role of parents is to deliver a chaste daughter to her husband's family. Desai goes on to point out that "another disincentive for sending daughters to school is a concern for the protection of their virginity. When schools are located at a distance, when teachers are male, and when girls are expected to study along with boys, parents are often unwilling to expose their daughters to the potential assault on their virginity."175

3.11.2. Mostly Women Are Overworked:

The fact that women work longer hours and their work is more arduous than men's. Still, men report that "women, like children, eat and do nothing." If we are observant we will agree that, women work roughly twice as many as many hours as men. Women's contribution to agriculture - whether it be subsistence farming or commercial agriculture, from cleaning, clearing, seedlings, transplanting, reaping, harvesting - when measured in terms of the number of tasks performed and time spent, is greater than men. "The extent of women's contribution is aptly highlighted by a micro study conducted in the Indian Himalayas which found that on a one-hectare farm, a pair of bullocks' works 1,064 hours, a man 1,212 hours and a woman 3,485 hours in a year."176

In Andhra Pradesh, (Mies, 1986) found that the work day of an woman agricultural laborer during the agricultural season lasts for 15 hours, from 4 am to 8 pm, with an hour's rest in between. Her male counterpart works for seven to eight hours, from 5 am to 10 am or 11 am and from 3 pm to 5 pm.177

Another study on time and energy spent by men and women on agricultural work (Batliwala, 1982) found that 53 percent of the total human hours per household are contributed by women as compared to 31 percent by men. The remaining contribution comes from children.178

The anxiety of man to monopolize his skill in plough culture is reflected in the 
taboo that is observed almost all over India, against the women's handling the plough. 
In many societies, she is not even allowed to touch it. Even, as we see it in Karbi 
society, many are practicing it. I had an experience in Engleng Village, which is 
situated in the eastern side of Karbi Anglong, where I have a paddy field, that a 
particular ‘wooden leveler’ known as ‘Mou’ is strictly prohibited for women to do it, 
in the process of ploughing, as I have to confirmed from the Village headman Mr. 
Dhonsing Engleng. And, that Work is done according to the strict division of Male 
activity and female activity. In this connection, I have asked to so many women as 
well as man of the Karbi society in both eastern and western side including my in 
laws which has supported me to note down. (Interview by the investigator to Gaon 
Bura Dhonsing Engleng, from Engleng Rong (Village).179

Mies (1986) further observed that "whereas operations performed by men 
were those that entailed the use of machinery and draught animals, thereby using 
animal, hydraulic, mechanical or electrical energy, women almost always relied on 
manual labour, using only their own energy." Rice transplantations, the most arduous 
and labor intensive task in rice cultivation, is carried out entirely by women without 
the help of any tools.180

It has always been the practice that "Girls learn to assist their mothers in 
almost all tasks, and from the age of 10 years participate fully in the agricultural work 
done by women. Mies cites the case of Laxmi, a three-year-old infant who, along with 
her mother, pulled seedlings for transplanting. Boys on the other hand were seldom 
seen transplanting or weeding though they did help out in ploughing or watering the 
fields."181

To note, "Not only do women perform more tasks, their work is also more 
arduous than that undertaken by men. Both transplantation and weeding require 
women to spend the whole day and work in muddy soil with their hands. Moreover,

179 Personal interview with G.B. Engleng, Enleng village dated 08/08/09
they work the entire day under the intensely hot sun while men's work, such as ploughing and watering the fields, is invariably carried out early in the morning before the sun gets too hot. Mies argues that because women's work, unlike men's, does not involve implements and is based largely on human energy, it is considered unskilled and hence less productive. On this basis, women are invariably paid lower wages, despite the fact that they work harder and for longer hours than do men.”

3.11.3. The Invisibility of Women’s Work:

It is true that women's work is rarely recognized, that every single women will agree. Many maintain that women's economic dependence on men impacts their power within the family. With increased participation in income-earning activities, not only will there be more income for the family, but gender inequality should be reduced. This issue is particularly salient in India because studies show a very low level of female participation in the labor force. This under-reporting is attributed to the frequently held view that women's work is not economically productive.

In a report of the National Commission on Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector, the director of social welfare in one state said, "There are no women in any unorganized sector in our state." When the Commission probed and asked, "Are there any women who go to the forest to collect firewood? Do any of the women in rural areas have cattle?" the director responded with, "Of course, there are many women doing that type of work." Working women are invisible to most of the population.

To be realistic, if all activities - including maintenance of kitchen, gardens and poultry, cleaning, clearing, tilling, husking wheats, 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 as economically productive.

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Again, women's employment in family farms or businesses is rarely recognized as economically productive, either by men or women. And, any income generated from this work is generally controlled by the men. Such work is unlikely to increase women's participation in allocating family finances. In a 1992 study of family-based textile workers, male children who helped in a home-based handloom mill were given pocket money, but the adult women and girls were not.\textsuperscript{184}

\textbf{3.11.4. The Negative Impact of Technology on Women:}

The negative impact on women is the shift from subsistence to a market economy, which needs to be reviewed. With the invention of Power tiller, Tractor, dumper etc., women are very much sidelined, as women hardly gets time to go for training, or learning as it is defined as muscular Mens job. According to Venkateswaran, (1995) citing Shiva, the Green Revolution, which focused on increasing yields of rice and wheat, entailed a shift in inputs from human to technical. Women's participation, knowledge and inputs were marginalized, and their role shift from being "primary producers to subsidiary workers."\textsuperscript{185}

Where technology has been introduced in areas where women worked, women laborers have often been displaced by men. Thrashing of grain was almost exclusively a female task, and with the introduction of automatic grain threshers - which are only operated by men, as women hardly try to learn. Women have lost an important source of income.

It is greatly felt that the more technology, the more women inclined to depend on Men, until she herself follows up. As, "Commercialization and the consequent focus on cash crops have led to a situation where food is lifted straight from the farm to the market. The income accrued is controlled by men. Earlier, most of the produce was brought home and stored, and the women exchanged it for other commodities. Such a system vested more control with the women."\textsuperscript{186}

\textbf{3.11.5. Majority women Are Unskilled:}

\textsuperscript{185}http://www.impact on technology on women, p.1
\textsuperscript{186}http://www.impact on technology on women, p.1
Since time immemorial, the world is thought of having division of work between men and women. 187 Where women are to work confined to home and men is to work outside. It has been a practice some where or every where, which greatly hampers women’s career. At times, women hardly get time to go out for training and orientation courses. In the process, Extension services tend to reach only men, which perpetuate the existing division of work, with women continuing to perform unskilled tasks. A World Bank study in 1991 reveals that the assumption made by extension workers is that information within a family will be transmitted to the women by the men, which in actual practice seldom happens. "The male dominated extension system tends to overlook women's role in agriculture and proves ineffective in providing technical information to women farmers." 188

A number of factors perpetuate women's (especially married women) limited job skills: if training women for economic activities requires them to leave their home especially their village or town, this is usually a problem for them. Unequal access to education restricts women's abilities to learn skills that require even functional levels of literacy. In terms of skill development, women are impeded by their lack of mobility, low literacy levels and prejudiced attitudes toward women. When women negotiate with banks and government officials, they are often ostracized by other men and women in their community for being ‘too forward.’ Government and bank officials have preconceived ideas of what women are capable of, and stereotypes of what is considered women's work. 189

3.11.6. Women are mistreated in varying degree:

The very term ‘Violence’ against women and girls is the most pervasive human rights violation in the world today. Opening the door on the subject of violence against the world's females is like standing at the threshold of an immense dark chamber vibrating with collective anguish, but with the sounds of protest throttled back to a murmur. Where there should be outrage aimed at an intolerable

188 The problems of India http://www.mapsofindia.com/culture/indian_women.html
status quo there is instead denial, and the largely passive acceptance of ‘the way
things are.’

The violence by men against women is a worldwide phenomenon. Although,
not every woman has experienced it, and many expect not to, fear of violence is an
important factor in the lives of most women. It determines what they do, when they
do it, where they do it, and with whom. Fear of violence is a cause of women's lack of
participation in activities beyond the home, as well as inside it. Within the home,
women and girls may be subjected to physical and sexual abuse as punishment or as
culturally justified assaults. These acts shape their attitude to life, and their
expectations of themselves.

The all time insecurity outside the household is the greatest obstacle in the
path of women. Conscious that, compared to the atrocities outside the house,
atrocities within the house are endurable, women not only continued to accept their
inferiority in the house and society, but even called it sweet and natural.

In recent years, there has been an alarming rise in atrocities against women in
India. Every 26 minutes a woman is molested. Every 34 minutes a rape takes place.
Every 42 minutes a sexual harassment incident occurs. Every 43 minutes a woman is
kidnapped. And every 93 minutes a woman is burnt to death over dowry.

One-quarter of the reported rapes involve girls under the age of 16 but the vast
majority are never reported. Although the penalty is severe, convictions are rare.

3.11.7. Women Are Powerless in manifold:

Legal protection of women’s rights has little effect in the face of prevailing
patriarchal traditions. Women are subordinate in most marriages. Exposure to and
interactions with the outside world are instrumental in determining the possibilities
available to women in their daily lives. The situation of women is affected by the

degree of their autonomy or capacity to make decisions both inside and outside their own household.\textsuperscript{193}

In Karbi Anglong, it is said that women has equal status, but, if we look at the position of women in traditional political system or governance of village, it did not prove. Many educated Karbi women said, it’s a men’s job, which did not affect her lives.

In the inheritance rights, daughter does not have a right to claim ancestral property. Although, some rich and wealthy parents do give movable property to her in marriage, it does not cover up for the fact that it is customary law that women has no rights to inherit parental properties, even in the absence of sons in the family, it is passed on to father’s first cousin where there is a sons. In the religious front, certain rituals are prohibited for women from participation as worshipping is meant for man only according to the Karbis, especially in relation to the beliefs of traditional religion.

Sonalde Desai (1994) points out that the perception that sons are the major source of economic security in old age is so strong in the North of Indiathat "many parents, while visiting their married daughters, do not accept food or other hospitality from them. However, given women's low independent incomes and lack of control over their earnings, few can provide economic support to their parents even if parents were willing to accept it."\textsuperscript{194}

\textbf{3.11.8. Inheritance rights:}

Women's rights to inheritance are limited and frequently violated. If we look at the position of women in northeastern part, it seems better, indeed it is more or less nothing to say, because women never complains or try to be equal with men. Instructions and teachings at home often sounds like, do not be so smart and rough like men, be more feminine, sooner you will betroth to good family. If we look at the situation of Karbi Homes, daughter does not have a right to claim ancestral property.

\textsuperscript{193} Status of Indian women and the role of legislation- Jayaprakash Devarebdah\url{http://www.ourkarnataka.com/articles/Indian_womenlaw.html}
Although, some rich and wealthy parents do give movable property to her in marriage, it does not cover up for the fact that it is customary law that women has no rights to inherit parental properties, even in the absence of sons in the family, it is passed on to father’s first cousin where there is a sons.

In the mid-1950s the Hindu personal laws, which apply to all Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains, were overhauled, banning polygamy and giving women rights to inheritance, adoption and divorce. The Muslim personal laws differ considerably from that of the Hindus, and permit polygamy. Despite various laws protecting women's rights, traditional patriarchal attitudes still prevail and are strengthened and perpetuated in the home.195

Under Hindu law, sons have an independent share in the ancestral property. However, daughters' shares are based on the share received by their father. Hence, a father can effectively disinherit a daughter by renouncing his share of the ancestral property, but the son will continue to have a share in his own right. Additionally, married daughters, even those facing marital harassment, have no residential rights in the ancestral home.196

Even the weak laws protecting women have not been adequately enforced. As a result, in practice, women continue to have little access to land and property, a major source of income and long-term economic security. Under the pretext of preventing fragmentation of agricultural holdings, several states have successfully excluded widows and daughters from inheriting agricultural land.197

3.11.9. Women in political System:

In Karbi Anglong, it is said that women has equal status, but, if we look at the position of women in traditional political system and governance of village, it did not prove. There is not a single women representative in the administration of village, because women have no rights. Undoubtedly, women status is measured in terms of her husband positions. Which have no future guarantee, because after the death of her

husband she cannot inherit the respect and honor, the fact that she has no rights in the participation of Village governance.

Education which has been instrumental over the ages has brought so many changes in human lives which have also touch the Karbi society. The Karbi people are no more confined to traditional political system only but side by side, have also adopted themselves for a more modernized political system along with the strides of Indian Independence which has earmarked the district as Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council. There is no more restriction as such, political power depends on competitions. But, to really come to the conclusion that women in general and particularly in Karbi society no more suffers is of things to ponder.

*The highest national priority must be the unleashing of woman power in governance. That is the single most important source of societal energy that we have kept corked for half a century.* -Mani Shankar Aiyar, journalist, Politician/technocrat, India Today.(2009)\(^{198}\)

Be it governance of village or local self government. The role put up by women is worth mentioning. By the experience of the Indian Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI) 1 million women have actively entered political life in India. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, which guarantee that all local elected bodies reserve one-third of their seats for women, have spearheaded an unprecedented social experiment which is playing itself out in more than 500,000 villages that are home to more than 600 million people. Since the creation of the quota system, local women—the vast majority of them illiterate and poor—have come to occupy as much as 43% of the seats, are spurring the election of increasing numbers of women at the district, provincial and national levels. Since the onset of PRI, the percentages of women in various levels of political activity have risen from 4-5% to 25-40%.\(^{199}\)

According, to Indian writer and activist Devaki Jain (2010)"the positive discrimination of PRI has initiated a momentum of change. Women's entry into local government in such large numbers, often more than the required 33.3 %, and their success in campaigning, including the defeat of male candidates, has shattered the

\(^{198}\)Panchayat Raj. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mani_Shankar_Aiyar
\(^{199}\)women and education http://www.oppapers.com/essays/women_education/411820?topic
myth that women are not interested in politics, and have no time to go to meetings or to undertake all the other work that is required in political party processes...PRI reminds us of a central truth: power is not something people give away. It has to be negotiated, and sometimes wrested from the powerful.\textsuperscript{200}

Contrary to fears that the elected women would be rubber stamp leaders, the success stories that have arisen from PRI are impressive. A government-financed study, based on field work in 180 villages in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, and coordinated by the Center for Women's Development Studies in New Delhi, has found that a full two-thirds of elected women leaders are actively engaged in learning the ropes and exercising power. Says Noeleen Heyzer (2004/2007), Executive director of UNIFEM, "This is one of the best innovations in grass-roots democracy in the world."\textsuperscript{201}

Women leaders in the Panchayati Raj are transforming local governance by sensitizing the State to issues of poverty, inequality and gender injustice. Through the PRI, they are tackling issues that had previously gone virtually unacknowledged, including water, alcohol abuse, education, health and domestic violence. According to Sudha Murali, UNICEF Communications Officer in Andhra Pradesh, women are seeing this power as a chance for a real change for them and for their children and are using it to demand basic facilities like primary schools and health care centres.\textsuperscript{202}

The PRI has also brought about significant transformations in the lives of women themselves, who have become empowered, and have gained self-confidence, political awareness and affirmation of their own identity. The panchayat villages have become political training grounds to women, many of them illiterate, who are now leaders in the village panchayats. Says Sudha Pillai (2010), joint secretary in India's Ministry for Rural Development, "It has given something to people who were absolute nobodies and had no way of making it on their own. Power has become the source of their growth."\textsuperscript{203}
By asserting control over resources and officials and by challenging men, women are discovering a personal and collective power that was previously unimaginable. This includes women who are not themselves panchayat leaders, but who have been inspired by the work of their sisters; "We will not bear it," says one woman. Once we acquire some position and power, we will fight it out...The fact that the Panchayats will have a minimum number of women [will be used] for mobilizing women at large." It is this critical mass of unified and empowered women which will push forward policies that enforce gender equity into the future.

An observation by Deepak Tiwari in This Week (oct’ 2010) India’s No.1 Weekly News Magazine, displays the promising future made possible by the PRI. He notes, "‘Learning politics’ is the latest fad for young village girls, who dream of joining the growing band of women panchayat representatives, 164,060 at last count, in the state.”

3.12. Problems of working women:

Invariable, working women face some problems, which are common to all classes. At the family level, women are expected to do their routine domestic chores, along with their jobs. Even, the educated and professionally qualified women in our society often find it difficult to escape the disadvantages of womanhood at the place of work. The dual responsibilities-as earners and as house-wives leave them with no free time for thought and action that their male counterparts enjoy in our society. Women have to work harder to keep a balance among organizational commitment, job commitment, interpersonal commitment and family commitment.

Women also face problems while dealing with co-workers since time immemorial they have been regarded as naturally inferior. They have to work harder to prove themselves to be "equal" to her co-workers. Being, in a position lower than women on a job hurts men's self-esteem. For women promotions comparatively are hard to come and words of praise are rare, some women might feel uncomfortable in an all male dominated work environment.

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205 Tiwari in this week (oct’2010) India’s No.1 weekly News magazines
Another difficult problem is her ambivalence and sense of guilt of womanhood. Not only does she try to work harder, but also tries to prove herself as a good mother, wife and a daughter. Moreover, often family provides little help to rationalize her role.

Reports of the Fourth world conference on women at Beijing 1995 states that making women equal partners in the national development processes and equipping them to make choice in order to actualize their self worth through empowerment are goals to which the government is committed.\textsuperscript{206}

\textsuperscript{206}http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/fourth_world_conference_on_women