

Research article

Participation of Nyishi Women of Arunachal Pradesh in Panchayati Raj Institution

Yora Bathey*

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Anthropology, Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar.

Abstract: Since time immemorial the Nyishi women has been barred from making or taking any political or social decision related to public sphere. In the matter of decision making in Nyishi society it has always been seen as the man's job and women were not allowed to take decision, especially in the public sphere. The consequence of this was that women were seen as inferior gender than man in Nyishi Society. The women though sometime in some cases ruled the house internally, it was believed that though the male took all the decision but it was the women who were governing the decision in real sense. The paper attempts to explore the status of women participation in Panchayati Raj.

Keywords: Nyishi Women, Panchayati Raj Institution, Political Participation, Patriarchy, Polygyny.

Introduction

In the Nyishi mythology, the women have a high status. In fact, the highest deity of Nyishi is *Ane Donyi*, the mother Sun, who is goddesses. Traditionally, the women do the most of the work of farming which was the main source of livelihood in the past. But since the male folk did the most of the prestige ritual and public sphere activity like going war, delivering during Nyeda (marriage), Nyele, etc. male had much higher position than women. So the decision making has been a status for men to be performed and women were barred from it.

Since time immemorial the Nyishi women has been barred from making or taking any political or social decision related to household or public sphere. In the matter of decision making in Nyishi society it has always been seen as the man's job and women were not allowed to take decision, especially in the public sphere. The consequence of this was that women were seen as inferior gender then man in Nyishi Society. The women though sometime in some cases ruled the house internally, it was believed that though the male took all the decision but it was the women who were governing the decision in real sense.

The statuses of women were so bad that the women were sometime considered nothing more than just a property. The Nyishi proverb goes on to say that, "Sebey gela Nyeme ge lingku aking nge", meaning the women

*Corresponding Author: yorabathey1994@gmail.com

Received on: 16.08.2019, Accepted on: 23.11.2019

Cite as: **Bathey, Y. 2019. Participation of Nyishi Women of Arunachal Pradesh in Panchayati Raj Institution, Dera Natung Government College Research Journal, 4, 41-51.**

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56405/dngcrj.2019.04.01.06>

and *Sebey* (*Bos Frontalis*) have origin from same place and they have equal value. During marriage time also the bridegroom family has to pay a fixed number of Mithuns to the family of the bride as the replacement of the bride.

But the scenario seems to be changing in the present context. Much has changed with the coming of modernisation to the Nyishi belt, especially the Education, which is a very recent phenomenon. One of the most important elements in giving the opportunity to women in participates in decision making in the Panchayat Raj Institution. The proper Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) was introduced to Arunachal Pradesh in the year 2003, though it was introduced to rest part of India in 1997. With the introduction of PRI and with the 33% reservation for women, the women section started participating in the decision making. The PRI has opened the door for women to get themselves involve in the decision in the public sphere too.

The Indian constitution is trying its best to bring equilibrium in every aspect of the society be it among different social groups or between the different gender. In the process to empower the women section Govt. has came up with various policies to uplift the women section. In one such effort the govt. of India in the year 2000, 33% reservation for women in Panchayat Raj was made compulsory in PRI and in the decision making in the Political sphere as a whole. But it's very difficult to say whether the govt has succeeded in their attempt or not. So to find out the ground reality I have taken up this topic. To find out either the women section is really able to take the advantage given to them. The paper also attempts to find out the various factors that are affecting the efficient participation of women in PR.

Literature Review

Nupur Tiwari in his article, "Women and Panchayati Raj: Women's empowerment "(2012) stated that, decision making processes in Panchayats need to be better defined, to diminish the possibility of elite capture, male dominant, with giving the female section equal participation in being elected to and in the decision making after being elected. Simmi Agnihotri and Vijay Singh in their report, "Women empowerment through Reservation in Panchayati Raj Institution in Himachal Pradesh "(2014) noted the feudal attitudes of looking down upon the abilities of women and not promoting them is still continuing in different degrees at various levels of our society. Vikas Nandal, M.D. University, Rohtak, Haryana, in his study "Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions" (2013) conducted on the sample of 50 women respondents from village Anwali District Sonipat, Haryana, India. Analysis revealed that the awareness and constitutional knowledge of women was not satisfactory.

Shashi Kaul and Shradha Sahni on their paper "Study on the Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institution "(2009) stated that, the findings of the study revealed that neither the reservation for women or their

actual presence in the Panchayat have become any more sensitive to the problems related to the village women. The women who are elected are not always treated with due respect. Nabam Tadar Rikam in his article "Status of Women and Education in Nyishi Society" (2003) noted Nyishi women- Changtum Ane or Dene, were believed to be sign prosperity. The most powerful deity in Nyishi Tribe is Ane Donyi (mother Sun), the Sun Goddess. R.C. Chutia in his book "Arunachal Pradesh: Land of Rising Sun" (2001) stated that in his stay of 25 years in Arunachal Pradesh he felt that Arunachal is a land where no women demand any special freedom. For a good girl there is no restriction in her society. He observed "the state where even widow remarriage is granted, how can I say a woman has no good status in the state of Arunachal Pradesh". V. M. Rao in his book "Tribal Women of Arunachal" (2003) stated that women took decision related to child care, children education, and type of feast to be prepared, purchase of utensils and clothes and agricultural activities. Thus, decision related to major issues is taken by husbands, while decision on activities within the house is dominated by women. Jayantha Kumar Ray and Rakhee Bhattacharya in book "Development Dynamics in NE India" (2008) stated that Arunachal has lower literacy rate than National Literacy rate and the female literacy rate is much lower than that of male. This impact in almost every aspect in women related issues in the region. The lower literacy rate has caused to the lacking behind of women section in many field.

Objectives of the paper

1. To compare and understand the participation of Female and Male PRI Representatives.
2. To find out the factors which act as barriers in the participation of Nyishi women in PRI.
3. To find out how the participation of Nyishi women in PRI brought changes in their Socio-Economic and Political Status.

The Nyishi tribe

The Nyishis is one of the largest populated tribe of the state. The total population of the Nyishis are over 2, 76,622. Out of the total 1, 42,049 of them are male and 1, 34,573 of them are female; the number is though increasing very rapidly annually. The Nyishi inhabit in as many as seven districts viz- Lower Subansiri, Kurung Kumey, Papum Pare, East Kameng, Kra Daadi, Kamle Pakke-Kesang and there are some number of Nyishi also found in the parts of west Kameng in Arunachal and in Sonitpur and North Lakhimpur districts of Assam.

"The Nyishi believes that they are the descendents of Abo Tani. The People call themselves Nyesang, Nishi or more appropriately as Nyishi since the time immemorial. As per their Mythology, the term 'Nyishis 'or

'Nyeshang 'is derived from two words i.e, Nyi or Nyia- means man or human race that descended from Atu Nyia (first real man on earth) and Eshang or Ishi- means high hills or highlands. Therefore, a compound word 'Nyishi ' denotes the descendent of Atu Nyia who dwells in the highlands'' (Rikam 2005:5).

Women in Nyishi

It is extremely difficult to formulate any definite rule for the position of the Nyishi woman departing from normal customary practices. The women of the Nyishi families are expected to share almost every privilege with man. Though the polygyny is practiced among the Nyishi tribe but the latest trend shows that polygyny is practiced on a limited scale. According to Nyishi having wife does not mean only union of the sexual access but seen as an honour and high dignity in the patrilineal and egalitarian society. The practice of polyandry is unknown to the Nyishi women.

In the Nyishi economic life, women hold a vital position. In all economic sphere of the Nyishi, the role of the women remains crucial and indispensable. She can be seen from hearth to field and jungle. Besides, the bringing up to the children and rearing; the caring of foals and domesticating animals are some other jobs, she is to perform. In the cultivation also women perform the maximum parts of the work in the field and men only perform limited work like felling of trees, construction of house and *Sulung* (the fence) and the rest of the agriculture work are done by the women, which is the 80% of the work in the field.

In village administration and political matters, women are not debarred. The participation of women in the village council and polity large depends on the status and the capability of individual woman. Some woman partakes in crucial village administration play equal role with man and sometime their presence in negligible, depending upon the ability. Evidently, the Nyishi woman are well treated and able to influence the masculine decision regardless of all theory claiming women to be inferior or impure.

Clan exogamy and tribe endogamy was the law of marriage in the past. The Polygyny was very much in practice few decades ago in the Nyishi Society. The acquiring of more than one woman as wives was need of that time. Acquiring of wife was considered prestigious and acquiring more than one further uplifted the social status of that particular person. The other main reason for the polygyny was for the economic purpose. The Nyishis were originally practiced Jhum cultivation and more 80% of the farming activity was done by the female member of the house, so more hand in the field was always a welcomed. That is also a reason why the other wives did not have problem with his husband marrying more than one. The first wife acted with the major role in guiding the household activity and looking after the needs of the house. Subsequently, the women had a low contribution in the decision making and always had to obey the command of the husband.

Comparison of the participation of male and female PRI Representatives:

The field observation from my study reveals that the majority of my respondents submit to the notion that the performance of male is indeed better than that of female when it comes to Panchayat and leadership as a whole. No doubt, there were some people who think it other way round- that is both are equally performing. The view of the electorates can be summarized below:

1. Views of Male Electorate:

Most of them had the view that male was better PRI member than that of female. They believed that male was naturally more active, both physically and mentally, and women are naturally fragile, afraid of giving opinion and taking risk, always dependent to other. Most of them agreed with the point that most of the female PRI representative have performed much less in compared to male. They said that women have not done much work worth mentioning though they are very much sincere to their work but are not creative or intelligent enough to bring new Schemes and Development policy and programmes. They reasoned it by saying that male have much free time and are more active to run around the offices to look for schemes from different Department. But few of them also said that in future the women might be able to compete with the male section.

2. Views of Female Electorate:

The women electorate had mix attitudes about the performance of the women's performance. Most of them agreed that yes at present the male representatives are indeed performing better than that of the female that is also because the male section has abundant of time and less barrier, to run for and to carry out PRI activity. They believed that women section has more barriers than that of male that is the only reason why the male are performing better than female. They also said that, here it should be mentioned that the participation and performance are improving at a very convenient speed. When it comes to poor performance it is also that women are less knowledgeable about various schemes of the govt. They also don't have much knowledge about the offices that they are supposed to looking for development schemes.

However, some section of women who believed that the women are performing equally with the male section. The women are also as capable as the male. They said that women section with the time can do well in PRI, the present poor scenario of women performance was only because the women participation in Panchayat is of women recent phenomenon, which started with the 2/3 reservation policy of the govt. So, according to them, after few decades there is chance that the women will rule the grass root level politics, overtaking the male section.

3. Views of Administrator:

According to the administrator, the performance of the female PRI members were very poor than that compared to the male PRI member. They are of the opinion that the women PRI members were less dedicated and did not have the leadership zeal in them. On the other hand, the Male members were more leader oriented, they have the determination and will to become leader. But the main factor, according to the member secretary is because of the low literacy among female member they were performing less than the male member. He stated that the most of the elected female PRI members were illiterate and very few of them only could read and write. To the contrast, most of the male PRI members could read and write and some of them were very educated too.

The factors acting as barriers in the participation of Nyishi women in PRI

1. Patriarchy:

Patriarchy is a social arrangement in which males hold more social, economic and political power compared to female. Patriarchy is seen as the one of the most prominent barriers in the successful participation of women in Panchayat. Almost all the women rely on to the decision of their husband weather he is a PRI member or a simple housewife. The participation of a woman is also determined by her husband. In fact, the women either participate in politics when her husband tells her to or if she wants to participate, she has to have her husband's permission.

The Nyishi women are so deeply culturally groom that the give their husband the position as high as equivalent to God. For them husband is the ultimate head and the women are nothing without their husband. The women though may become PRI member or even MLA, she still has to have the consult of her husband in taking any decision in matter of private or public sector.

Some of my female subject also told me that though they are PRI member they still have to serve their husband during meal and the husband also find it reluctant to the serving of his food by another member of the household. Though the wife also does this practice willing, they believe it to be gesture of respect and love toward her husband.

The female member has found to be giving her personnel live more important than that of her professional life as PRI member. They are of this concept that her PRI leadership is a temporary but her role as a wife, a mother, a daughter in law and relation is for lifetime. That is why she gives her personal life more important than that of her professional life of PRI member.

2. Lack of Education:

According to my observation, I have found the education as the main factor behind the failure of the women as a PRI member. The most of the female PRI members that I interviewed were mostly illiterate. With the highest educated one as matriculate pass. The 80% of the female that I interviewed were illiterate to extend that could not even read or write.

In the words of Member secretary, "it is not the patriarchy that put women behind but it is the lack of education." The Circle Officer had the view that though there is presence of patriarchy in Nyishi Society but the women section is still quite living quite independently, but the poor performance of women was only because of their poor literacy status in compared to the male PRI members most of whom are educationally enough qualified for PRI member. He also believed that women can perform better only if they are given good education, and educated women can perform as efficiently as any male PRI member.

3. Occupation:

In the rural Nyishi villages 'women do the most of earning for the family. The women mostly perform Jhum cultivation. The Jhum cultivation needs huge amount of time and care, starting from the slash and burn to the clearing of weeds, unwanted plants from the field in every week. In fact, the Jhuming, takes away the 7-8 months of the year. The women can hardly distract his mind from the field or she has to face the consequence with a low productivity of harvest. Beside the slash and burn, the women do take care of the 80-90% of the agricultural activity. The women even after becoming the PRI member like Gram Member still has to do the farming and hence giving a very little time to the PRI related works, which leads to her poor performance in the PRI.

The women have also to look after the cattle like pig, chicken, goat, etc. that are being reared in the house. The rearing of pig is highly practiced in the Nyishi community. The preparing of food for pig also takes time. The rearing of cattle which is the responsibility of women also becomes sometimes a barrier in the PRI work.

The Nyishi women are also very much engaged in small business such small grocery, vegetable vendor, selling various kind of meats, etc. for earning the living. The women are seen as the bread winner of her family. These economical activities also have the influence over the women's participation and performance in PRI. Because of the said reasons the women also some are not able to give sufficient time to her PRI work that is why sometime they are less performing than that compared to the male member. Since the male has less such activity to perform, they have ample of time to give time to their PRI related activity.

4. House hold work:

Almost all the household activities are the duty of the wife to be done. Indeed, women are very multi task talented, especially in the interior rural places. They will wake up early in the house and cleanup the house and prepare the morning meal for the family and then leave for work in the field the whole day and after coming back from the field she would also cook the evening meal before cleaning the utensils. These days only few of the privileged and rich people keep maid for doing the household activity but in most of the houses the wife still does the most of the household works. These activities also hampered the efficient functioning of women as the PRI member. The women have to adjust the time for her personal household work with her professional work as a PRI member.

5. Child Caring:

One of the most prominent responsibilities of the women in every society of the world is child caring. This has been the tradition that the women have the responsibility to take care of the child. Women, especially when their children are young, have to always give extra time to their children. During the period of their breast feeding of their child the mother hardly can leave behind her children in house to do her PRI work. This sometime become as an obstacle in the performance of women as PRI members.

Changes in the Socio-Political Status of women with the participation in PRI

1. Socio-Political status of women:

With the introduction of Panchayat in the state, the socio-political state of women has changed. The female PRI members told me that they have strong sense of self renaissance and self-actualization within themselves both internally and externally. The Panchayat system has given them a chance to have a say upon the political system of her own society. According to women they are now getting more recognize in the public sphere with their participation in the Panchayat. The women are now stepping out of their traditionally destined jurisdiction, where they were considered to be naturally only made for the private sphere.

The male section has the different notion about the changes in the political status of women. There are some sections who belief that the women have indeed improved in the political sphere as they now are more contributing to this sphere with the coming of Panchayat. The other holds that though women are participating in the Panchayat that too out of compulsion but are not contributing to the political sphere in any sense. Though the women might not be performing as efficiently as the male section but we can safely say that they are very improving from their former socio-political status.

2. Economic status of women:

With the coming of Panchayat system, the mentality of Nyishi women has broadened to a great extent. Many ladies has gained not only the political knowledge from the institution but also has gained self-confident, experience and openness from the Panchayat. This element has have helped to the women section gained their economic independence. The women are now exploring the different available economic choice. Earlier they were only dependent on Jhuming as the only economic choice. But with the wider knowledge they are now switching to other economic activity like vegetable vendors, running grocery and even becoming small scale business and entrepreneurship. The women are now very much encouraging and practicing the Self Help Group, to develop themselves and supplement their economic condition.

Summary and Conclusion

Traditionally, the women use to do household work and farming which was the main source of livelihood. Since, the husband did the most of the prestige ritual and public sphere activities such as going war, delivering during Nyeda (marriage), Nyele, etc. male had much higher position than women. Now with the coming of Panchayat system they have also become the member of decision-making body.

Initially, it was very difficult for me in many ways to carry out fieldwork on the topic, since the Nyishi tribe was so psychologically filled up with the patriarchy culture. Some of my subjects were also not very much responsive in the beginning. The male subjects spoke out very courageously to what they wanted to say but the female subjects were less vocal and silent. The women at their consciousness were also not able to say what they think right. Even the women who wanted to say against their husband were hesitant and were so much engulfed by the patriarchy that they felt that the honor of their husband were their honor and the insult to their husband was also their own insult. Infact, they always looked for a reason or chance to glorify their husband as their husband's glory was theirs.

When compare between the performance of the male and female PRI representatives, most of the respondent believed that the performance of the male was better than that of the female. The male electorate were very critical about the performance of the female PRI members. The women electorate were also not much impressed with the performance of the female either.

The reasons behind the poor performance of the female PRI members are no doubt numerous; the male member mostly considered that it was natural that the women were weak and underperformer. The other reasons behind their inefficient performance were child caring, looking after home, family duty, less independence in economic activity and so on and so forth. No doubt, it was the low literacy rate among women and very late involvement of women in PRI, which mainly affects their poor performance.

Whatever the performance may be but the PRI has brought many changes to the traditional functioning of the society. With the coming of PRI, the women are getting much social and political status than before. The women are now given equal status and position in the society especially to the women who are PRI Representatives. After the coming of PRI, economic lifestyle has also changed. The women hardly do any Jhum cultivation now. The women have switch to many other economic resources.

Education is indeed the most important element missing in the women PRI members which affecting their performance. Without education they always have to depend upon someone for their each and every small paper work and this delays their work in a very huge amount. Besides, the 33% reservation for women in PRI is of very recent origin before this reservation women hardly participated in the traditional political set up, that is why women have less knowledge about it and hence poor performance. Nevertheless, now women have equal right to take decision. Thus, in the field of politics the position of women is raised. Now they have also become the member of decision-making body.

References

- Aier, Anungla. (2004).** *The cultural change among the Nagas- festivals and the ornaments.* In Venuh, V. (Ed), Naga Society- Continuity and change, New Delhi: Shipra Publication, pp 49-60
- Chaudhuri, Buddhadeb. (1992).** *Changing religion and festivals cycle of the Munda,* in Chaudhuri, Buddhadeb (Ed) *Tribal Transformation in India*, New Delhi: Inter-India Publications, pp 219-233
- Chutia, R.C. (2001).** *Arunachal Pradesh: land of Rising sun.* Guwahati: Spectrum Publications
- Deogaonkar, Shailaja S. (1992).** *Tribal religion and festivals,* in Chaudhuri, Buddhadeb, (Ed) *Tribal Transformation in India*, New Delhi: Inter-India Publications, Pp 131-138
- Deuri, R. K. (1983).** *Festivals of kameng- A few selected,* Itanagar, Director of Research, Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh, pp 26-29.
- Gohain, Birindra Kumer. (1993).** *The Hill Lalungs,* Assam: Anundoram Borooh Institute of Language, Art and Culture
- Haldar, A.K and Arora, Sushil. (1992).** *The Religious observances and the Festivals of the Artisan Tribal of Chotanagpur,* in Bhuddhadeb Chaudhuri, (Ed) *Tribal Transformation in India*, New Delhi: Inter-India Publications
- Hina, Nabam Nakha. (2016).** *The Nyishi Social and Political Movement in Search of Identity,* New Delhi: Authors Press
- Hina, N. Nakha. (2012).** *The Customary laws of Nyishi Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh,* New Delhi: Authors Press
- Horam, M. (1988).** *“Nagas the old ways and new trends”*, New Delhi: Cosmo Publications
- Joshi, H.G. (2010).** *Arunachal Pradesh: Past and Present,* New Delhi: Mittal Publications

-
- Kurup, A. M. (1992).** *Tribal festivals of central India*, in Chaudhuri, Buddhadeb (Ed) *Tribal Transformation in India*, New Delhi: Inter-India Publications, Pp -119-126
- Pandey, B.B. (1981).** *The festivals of the Subansiri*. Itanagar: Director of Research, Arunachal Pradesh, Pp -12-21
- Rao, V. M. (2003).** *Tribal women of Arunachal Pradesh: Socio-Economic status*. New Delhi: Mittal Publication
- Ray, A.K. (2004).** *Change- the Law of Life in Venuh*, V. (Ed) *Naga Society- Continuity and change*, New Delhi: Shipra Publications, pp -13-36
- Ray J.K. (2008).** *Development dynamics in North East India*. Delhi: Anshah Publishing House
- Rikam, Nabam Tadar. (2005).** *Emerging Religious Identity of Arunachal Pradesh- A study of Nyishi Tribe*, New Delhi: Mittal Publication
- Robertson, Noel. (1992).** *Festivals and legends: the formation of Greek cities in the light of public ritual*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp: 11-15