

The Status and Role of Women in Mizo Society

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This paper examines the status and role of Mizo women in the traditional society and their changes at the present situation in Mizoram. The paper focuses on the trends and directions of transformations in their positions in light of their share and status in the family, their contribution to the economy, their participation in politics and their functions in religious affairs.

Keywords: Status, Role, Women, Mizo patriarchal society, gender

Introduction

Sociologists and anthropologists have long been interested in the study of women in tribal society. Different views have been expressed about the status of tribal women. Some scholars have opined that primitive societies generally assign high status to women, whereas the other view point proposes that in the tribal world women are generally a suppressed group, have low status and are under subjugation, oppression or under male dominance (Lodha 2003: 3).

The two concepts - status and role, are inseparable but they are two separate concepts. Status is a collection of rights and duties and can be expressed through a medium of an individual. Role represents the dynamic aspects of status. The individual occupy the status socially assigned to him. He does so with the relation to other statuses. Further the individual is said to perform the role when the rights and duties associated with status are put into effect. In practice there are no roles without statuses or statuses without roles (Roy 2010: 6). However, it was Ralph Linton who mentioned the concept of 'status' and 'role'. According to him a status, as distinct from individual who may occupy it, is simply a collection of rights and duties. A role represents the dynamic aspects of status (Turner 1987: 320). He also made a distinction in the concept of 'ascribed' and 'achieved' role. According to him, ascribed roles are those over which the individual has absolutely no choice while the roles about which the person has some choice, however much or little, are achieved roles (Sutherland, Woodward and Maxwell 1961: 75).

Linton (1947: 50) maintains that status is a position in the social system involving

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designated rights and obligations whereas role is the dynamic aspect of status. Statuses are ascribed to an individual on the basis of his age, sex, birth or marriage into a particular family unit and roles are learned on the basis of statuses, either current or anticipated. He further maintains that status and role may be universal or specialised, depending on whether they are shared by all members of a society or only by a segment of the society. Status is linked with a particular role, but the two things are by no means the same from the point of view of individuals.

Parsons (1949: 76) maintains that the status of any given individual in the system of stratification in a society may be regarded as a result of the common valuations underlying the attribution of status to him in each of these aspects, that is, membership in the kinship system, personal qualities, achievements, possessions, authority and power. Parsons argued that both the concept of status and role are the basic building blocks of the social system. For him, a social system is a network of statuses and their associated roles.

According to Young and Mack (1972: 139, 140) a status is an abstraction, a description of one's place in a social group relative to other positions in the group whereas a role is the function of a status. Young and Mack, for instance, maintained that when an individual occupies a given position, the placement of that position above some others and below still others will have consequences for his interaction in the group. The consequences of occupying that status are called his role. They have stated that like status, role is an abstraction; it remains the same even if the expectations are being met by different individuals.

The grounds of status vary significantly from society to society and from one historical period to another within the same society. In a few primitive communities where class lines have not formed, prestige is gained by personal achievements, while in others it rests upon some group-recognised status-giving factor. Status may be based upon differences of birth, wealth, occupation, political power and race. Frequently status is determined by a combination of two or more of these factors (MacIver and Page 1950: 353). According to Davis (2000: 86) status is our relative position within a group, while role is the part which society 'expects' us to play in a given status. Magil (1995: 1360) maintains that status and role are different aspects of the same idea. The word status differs from the way the word is commonly used. Most people used it to mean 'prestige'. To sociologists, however, a status is any particular position that an individual holds in a social structure.

The status and role of women in India, even after independence remains one of the major issues of discussion. It is a matter of concern not only in the Indian context but in almost every society of the world. In a deeply communitarian society like Mizoram where social life is free and men and women mixed together freely it is possible for an outside observer to think that there is no distinction between men and women. This judgement may not be entirely accurate in the sense that Mizo society is indeed free so far as the mixing up of men and women are concerned. But the fact remains that despite all their social freedom and their significant contributions in the family, women are not liberated and they are regarded as subordinate to men and they are discriminated against in various aspects of life (Lalhriatpuii 2010: 19).

In the traditional society, women were generally discriminated simply on the ground of sex. The Mizo society is a patriarchal and patrilineal society. They follow the patrilineal rule of residence after marriage. Inheritance is always on the paternal line. Women do not have any say in any decision making whether at home or outside. The history of the social background of Mizo women can be understood from the old saying, “Hmeichhe thu, thu ni suh, chakai sa, sa ni suh” which means “Crab’s meat is not a meat, a woman’s words is not a word”. In this old saying, she was compared to a crab, which was regarded as less than animal by the Mizos as it has no ears, head, stomach etc. Another saying, “Hmeichhe finin tuikhur ral a kai lo”, which means, “The wisdom of women does not reach/cross beyond the village spring” refers to the traditional belief that there is a limit to the wisdom of women. From these sayings alone one can understand the attitude of the men towards the women in Mizo society. It is obvious that women had no voice in social administration and even if she had, her words were never accepted. Not unlike other societies of India, women’s traditional role in Mizo society was characterised by obedience to and dependence on men.

When we look at the present situation Mizo women have been making significant marks in many aspects of life. So much so that one of the Mizo proverbs that previously ridiculed women has been dramatically reversed as ‘the wisdom of women has reached beyond the other side of the river’. Christianity and its entailing benefit of education have been observed to be the main conduit for the inclusion of modern ideas to such an extent that it opened doors for women outside the domestic sphere. However it has been argued that in spite of these developments the new social structure is yet far from driving home a status of equality for women. Doors have been opened for women but in a limited way (Gangte 2011: 139-140). Modernisation it is argued is largely in terms of material culture, whereas ‘traditionalism’ still influences the Mizo society at the level of consciousness and ideas (*Ibid*: 129).

Status and role of Mizo women in the family

One of the ways to analyse the status of women in a particular society is to ascertain it in terms of their mode of descent, inheritance and succession, authority and residence. Mizo society, as mentioned earlier, is a patriarchal and patrilineal society where women had no authoritative power in the family. The father was the head and in charge of all the family affairs. The attitude towards women is portrayed by an old saying: ‘A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree, the more you beat them the better they be’. As a patrilineal society, the rule of descent is strictly based on the male line only. In the traditional system, a woman was recognised even after marriage, by her patri-clan name. Thus all the children acquired membership in their father’s clan group which might be a localised group or might spread horizontally over many villages and could never acquire membership in their mother’s clan group. Recruitment to any clan among the Mizos has been strictly based on descent through the father’s line only. The pattern of inheritance, succession and residence closely followed the system of descent (Nunthara 1996: 84).

Among all clans, the rules of succession required that the youngest son should be the proper heir, although other male children also had a share in the family property. Women did not have any legal claim on the family property except a small share at the

time of marriage which they carried with them as a form of dowry. Even in the absence of a male child, a daughter could not claim, as a matter of right, the family property, but would normally go to the nearest male relative. Thus, among the Mizos women had a very low status and could not acquire true membership in the politico-jural field either in their natal home or in their husband's family. Even after the birth of the first child, they were referred to as '*monu*' (bride) in the conjugal family. In fact as long as the couple lived with the natal family of the husband, the wife would not, normally, acquire the status of full membership and she was always referred to as *monu* (Nunthara 1996: 85). Mizo women thus possessed nothing having no right in matters of succession and inheritance and a male heir was always sought for to succeed his father as the head of a clan or a lineage. It is observed that even though in recent times some families have on their own begun to think about a share of the inheritance for their daughters, a majority especially in rural areas, maintain the traditional practice (Colbert 2008: 343).

Monogamy is generally practiced but a Mizo woman in the traditional society had no freedom to choose her partner in marriage which was entirely in the hands of her parents. The power and authority of the patriarch over his children, young or adult, was often unlimited. The choice of marriage was governed by the cultural norms intrinsically connected with and attached to agricultural work and bravery. The girls greatest attributes were physical beauty, skill in the spinning wheels and looms and the ability to exert hard labour in agricultural work. Until recently, the ability to perform hard work had been the greatest single attribute a girl could use in the marriage market. Young men of marriageable age went about in the villages and started courting girls of their choice at the advice of the older people. If he became satisfied with the girl a go-between, an ambassador called '*palai*' would be sent to make the marriage proposal to the girl's family. In almost all cases, the girl was hardly in any position to make her own decision against the will of her parents (Nunthara 1996: 87).

Two customary practices which inevitably accompanied her marriage were *mo man* or bride price and *thuam* or dowry which tended to treat woman as a sort of commodity (Gangte 2011: 123). Women being purchased with a bride price of Rs. 400-500 can be divorced at the husbands wish with no claims for anything except her own property brought by her to her husband's house at the time of marriage, if the couple are still residing in the husbands house as everything belongs to the husband's father including those earned by both the husband and wife. In the traditional society a man could simply say to his wife "I divorce you" to be separated from his spouse. If the couple had not been settled in separate houses and the husband died before having children, the widow had to stay there for at least three months among her husband's family. After three months, she had to go back to her parent's house with the property that she brought on the day of her wedding. The widow however had the option of remarriage and she was free to have a new husband as there being no strict rules regarding remarriage in Mizo society (Zohmangaiha 2006: 29).

The husband-wife relationship in Mizo society was never mutual companionship but avoidance, even to talk to each other in public except in a dispassionate way. By convention the husband was not to show affection towards his wife, nor the wife towards the husband. In Mizo families, if a wife refused her husband even for a small thing, the

husband often resorted to beating her. Many Mizo men mistreat their wives as helpers, subordinates or as servants and do not think of them as partners. In traditional society, peaceful conversation between husband and wife was considered degrading for the man and till today, if a man is found helping his wife in household chores, he is dubbed as henpecked, not only by the males but also by the females themselves (Colbert 2008: 344).

In Mizo society a woman may lose her reputation if she commits adultery and she is termed as *Uire* meaning adulteress. In such instances, if her husband does not forgive her, she has to leave the house empty handed, with no claims of her own property and she was not even entitled to take her own children. Legitimate and illegitimate children in Mizo society belong to the father and the decision for their residing with their mother requires his prior permission. If a man had a child out of wedlock he has to pay a pittance of the bastard's price of Rs. 40. Such small amount does not hinder a person to commit such acts (Colbert 2008: 345). Moreover, the Mizos believed that a man could not commit adultery and that he would not be called an adulterer even if he had an extra-marital affair.

In traditional Mizo society women's place in the family in this sense was that they were under the autocratic dominance of men. Men could freely court the girls. If the girl was unpleasant to her admirer or if the parents of the girl's father refused entry in their houses, then immediately the males would convene a meeting in the *Zawlbuk* (bachelor's dormitory) collect his friends and tear down the veranda of the girl's house. Even the chief could not say anything in this matter. For forgiveness the girl's father had to give them a pitcher full of liquor to appease their anger. A man could clearly show his preference to any girl and even have a sexual relationship with her without the act being regarded as shameful or derogatory for him. More often than not it was believed to be manly and something to be proud of. But for a woman, if any man should have sexual relationship with her outside of wedlock she was spoken of badly and other men would shun her. The same man with whom she had the relationship would also often despise her. A popular belief was that when human beings died, on their way to the place of the dead, a certain man called *Pawla* would try to shoot anyone who passed by with a pellet. He however would not shoot anyone who had had a physical relationship with a woman, and a woman who was still a virgin. It can be known from these beliefs that the society expected women to be pure and chaste till she was married. Thus, woman's position in society would be a difficult one since men would always try to take advantage while the girls would try their best to remain chaste. Women therefore always had to follow the norms which the male values of the society expected of her (Lalrinchhiani 2004: 37).

With the coming of Christianity and education the exploitation of Mizo women was also brought to the fore front and although women at present are still marginalised on many aspects of life they have a much better place than in the traditional society. In recent years traditional values have been modified and a new value scale based on education assumes precedence in marriage choice. In the modern setting, clan division does not follow variation in educational level. Since education, Christianity and economic wealth represent the new scale of value and since no clan has a preponderant position over the others in the scale, there is a wide range of choice which cuts across clan mem-

bership. Marriage among the modern Mizos retains some of its traditional characteristics, although the distribution of bride-price as a means of reaffirmation of ties between clan members assumes less and less importance. This is because of the changing economic situation without a corresponding change in the amount of the bride-price. Bride-price and the distribution of it today becomes simply a kind of fulfilment of the marriage rituals on traditional lines (Nunthara 1996: 91). Sexual exploitation has greatly been reduced. Unlike in the past there is no more social stigma on widows or divorced women. Organisations such as the Mizo Hmeichhia Inzawmkhawm Pawl (MHIP) which have emerged in the present day have been trying to eradicate of the commercialisation of the bride price, the dowry system, sexual exploitation of women any kind apart from performing a whole host of other functions that seek to protect and promote women's rights (Gangte 2011: 125-126).

Status and role of Mizo women in the economy

Until recently the economic role of women did not attract much attention in Mizoram because much of women's work was done at home or outside the formal economy. Although women constitute a significant part of the workforce in Mizoram their participation in the process of economic development was not given due importance. In the traditional society and also in the present day remote villages women have been observed to be busier than men yet despite their significant contributions to the family they are regarded as subordinate to men and in the conception of what constitutes work there is an exclusion of a whole range of activities performed by them (Lalhriatpuii 2010: 19).

In the pre-British period, the entire population in the state were agriculturalists. Mizos live by agriculture and their daily routine is governed by the seasons and it is the women who performed a significant portion of the daily work to procure their necessities. Mizo women play a significant role in the traditional economy of their society. A description of the daily activities of Mizo women in the traditional society will bring to light the extent of their role in the economic structure. They had to begin right from clearing the jungle, sowing seeds, regularly cleaning the weeds, harvesting and transferring harvests from *jhum* to home. Apart from her contribution in agriculture women were engaged in fetching firewood and water, collection of vegetables, cooking, house-keeping, looking after children and older members of the family, storing grains, etc. Other activities such as weaving clothing for the whole family were also the duty of the women folk. In fact every household was something like a handloom industry. A girl who did not know how to weave had difficulty finding a good husband. Women were also responsible for the domesticating of animals which were used as food, for sacrificial purposes as well as a medium of exchange. A Mizo woman may always find herself engaged in some kind of household work but the reply that one would get if she was asked what she had been doing would always bear the strain that she has not done anything 'worthy' (Lalthangliana 2005: 59). The household chores, their contribution in the *jhum* field and the other works which they did for the family's survival were not considered as labour. They were regarded as things to be done by women and hence the time and the energy they spent were not considered at all. Though women were the ones who spent all their time in procuring the family's needs, it was only the men who were known

as bread-earners and who were the decision makers (Lalrinchhiani 2004: 39, 40).

As pointed out earlier, in the economic field one important discrimination faced by women in Mizo society is the right of inheritance. According to the customary law women are not entitled to any inheritance to the family or ancestral property. Even in the absence of a male child, a daughter could not claim the property as a matter of right and in such cases the family property would normally go to the nearest male relative. This is seen as an extreme case of deprivation for women (Lalthansangi 2005: 39).

Since the last few decades the traditional society of India and the status of women have been undergoing a series of changes. Urbanisation, education, migration and other socio-economic factors are changing the original arena of Indian society and female participation in different areas and employment pattern in India. With increased participation of women in the labour force, the economic role of women has improved over the years in India, as well as in Mizoram. However, they are concentrated heavily in agriculture, manual and casual work. Many women run small family business or micro enterprises which require very little initial capital and often involve the marketing of food articles and handicrafts produced under the domestic system. They are engaged in different kinds of business activities and small entrepreneurship - handloom and handicraft, floriculture, tailoring, beauty parlour etc. In all parts of Mizoram there are more females than males to be seen managing and running shops, tea stalls, restaurants and other variety stores. The main bazaar in Aizawl, the capital city looks like a women's market as in other markets of Mizoram. But being a patriarchal society, the father is the head of the household and most business is usually registered in his name (Colbert 2008: 349).

Lalhriatpuii (2010: 168) who in her work *Economic participation of Women in Mizoram* has attempted to evaluate the picture of women's participation in the economy in Mizoram in the 21st century and concludes that the productivity of women workers has not been harnessed in the true economic sense and that the percentage of employment of women in secured and stable employment such as the organised sector is much less than men of the region. Her comparison of the structure of occupational distribution of workers indicate that in Mizoram the primary sector still employs a large section of female population. Female participation in the work sphere in Mizoram continues to be concentrated in the primary sector, as cultivators and agricultural labourers. Not only is the percentage high but the concentration of female workers in agriculture has shown an increasing trend. The annual growth rate of female agricultural labourer is 11.59% which is almost double the male annual growth rate of 6.86% in 2001 (Lalthansangi 2005: 40). It is observed that the unbelievably low capital labour ratios confine women to low productivity undertakings. The argument is that women are pushed to the periphery in terms of their employment. Irrespective of differing rates of work participation there is a general agreement that women are subjected to labour market discrimination and are segregated to low paying jobs (Lalhriatpuii 2010: 25). She has also argued that there is a significant over-crowding of women workers towards the bottom ends of the informal sector which is associated with low status, low wages and weak bargaining power making the position of women all the more vulnerable.

A unique feature of the state of Mizoram is its high literacy rate. Mizoram has shown impressive figures in literacy percentages as compared to her neighbouring states

with a total literacy of 88.4% in 2001; male literacy being 90.69% and female literacy being 86.13% (Lalhriatpuii 2010: 169). Lalhriatpuii's study also makes the observation that women's participation is not rising in proportion to increase in their literacy. Although higher literary rate has raised the social status of women in the state it has not made entry into the labour market any easier. On the other hand in the rural areas it has been observed that with increased level of education women tend to shrink away from the labour market to avoid the probable decline in their status (*Ibid*).

Female workers in Mizoram, like the rest of India, are reduced to marginal status in the workforce and gender participation in home-based activities and traditional production processes. This description of women's employment has not changed over time from a macro perspective according to Lalhriatpuii. Even after four decades of development and planning a majority of women in Mizoram are still concentrated in a narrow range of occupations characterised by low level of skill thereby low wages and income. Though their contribution is substantial, it is a fact that the labour put in by women in discharging their economic and non economic activities do not get their due recognition (Lalthansangi 2005: 42).

Status and role of Mizo women in religion

Before the advent of Christianity the Mizos believed in the existence of a God called 'Pathian' who was good and never caused harm to them. It was believed that he was above the clouds in heaven and supplied rain and other daily essentials and human needs. He caused thunder and lightning. As the God was good and did not harm them, the Mizos did not feel necessary to propitiate Him in any way except in a way they pleased to do so as thanksgiving. Apart from the existence of God, the Mizos believed in the existence of powers beyond human control, the supernatural beings, some of which were good while others were bad. Thus, there was broadly a division between the God or Gods who live in heaven, and the other spirits of the world. This broad division manifested itself in the two forms of sacrifices, 'ramhuai bia' (sacrifices to the bad spirits) and the 'sakhaw bia' (sacrifices to God) (Nunthara 1996: 94, 95).

Besides these, they also believed in the existence of evil spirits or demons known as 'ramhuai', who they assumed to inhabit the streams, big trees, hills, caves and big rocks. The *ramhuais* are considered as bad spirits and were malevolent being in nature. They believed that these evil spirits or *ramhuai* were responsible for all the misfortunes and ills in this world. These malevolent spirits frequently create an array of difficulties and dilemmas to man in various ways. Hence, they have to be propitiated in order to escape from their evil influences. Without an appropriate rite to placate these evil spirits or *ramhuai*, there can be no escape from their evil afflictions. It was to appease these evil spirits that offerings and sacrifices were made whenever someone fell ill or was haunted by misfortune. Offerings and sacrifices were carried out according to specific types of illness. The village priest known as *Puithiam* was presumed to know which kind of evil spirit was responsible for a certain illness and how to placate him. Certain sacrifices and offerings to be made were laid down and performed by the *Puithiam* according to their traditional rites (Vanlaldika 2003: 73-77). The spirits of the victim (sacrificial offerings) slain was supposed to propitiate the evil spirits; and almost in all cases, the remains of

the victim were partaken by the priest and member of the subject's family barring women and children. The right to partake the sacrificial remains depended on the kinds of sacrifices, but women and children were normally excluded to share the sacrificial meat (Nunthara 1996: 95).

The Mizos also believed in the existence of souls and life after death. They had a clear conception about the next world and the land of the dead. According to the traditional belief there are two places where spirits of the dead go after death. They are the *Pialral* or Paradise and the *Mitthikhua* or the Deadman's village (Malsawma 2002: 141,142). *Pialral* was meant only for those who distinguished themselves during their lifetime in economic wealth by giving a number of prescribed ceremonies and feasts of honours or in bravery or in hunting skills by killing prescribed number of wild beasts. The prestigious position attainable in the Mizo social world was thus, intrinsically and intimately connected with the belief in the life after death (Nunthara 1996: 97).

In the traditional Mizo society women had no part in the religious ceremonies. In the three categories of priestly works, viz *Puithiam*, *Sadawt* and *Tlahpawi* not a single woman was known to have taken such jobs. They are not supposed to have any independent religious loyalty, but are required to follow the religion of their husbands. The popular saying of the Mizos, "Women and crabs do not have religion" clearly depicts the religious position of the Mizo women. Their condition was more pitiful because they were subjected to the authority of their men as well as traditional evil beliefs, prejudices and superstitions. Because of all these factors controlling them, Mizo women were badly in need of emancipation before Christianity came (Patnaik and Lalthakima 2008: 354,355). However, this early position that Mizo women occupied in their society has undergone tremendous changes. The factors responsible for the change of their status are numerous and varied. Of these factors, the coming of Christianity in their land in the late 19th century and the introduction of modern educational system are seen as the most profound. The introduction of modern educational system by the missionaries has also been one of the chief factors that changed the position of Mizo women (Malsawma 2002: 77, 80). The popular maxim 'when you educate woman you educate the whole household', is quite significant in the context of Mizoram. With the coming of Christianity and opening of more schools and colleges in villages life style of the Mizos has undergone significant changes. Attitude towards females and their education also witnessed striking differences as time went on. More and more women continued their study adding their educational qualifications and attainment (Lianzela 2009: 52, 53). Mizo women started theological education in 1968; and there are, as of now, almost 200 women who finished their courses of theological education successfully (Vanlaltlani 2009: 145).

The new religion threw open a new kind of relationship. With its teaching of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of all believers, all Christians regardless of sex, clan or village, could gather for common worship. Christianity has, therefore, brought about a profound change in the social relationship in the Mizo society. Women began to be counted and they began to play an important role in the church and in social life. Emancipation of women is one of the most remarkable changes that Christianity brought in the Mizo society (Malsawma 2002: 165).

In the early years of Christianity in Mizoram, there were women preachers, evan-

gelists and Bible women whose role was similar to those of men in the same positions. In the Baptist church women were ordained as elders from an early time. But as time passed, instead of seeing an increase in the number of women being as elders the trend has been in the opposite direction. Similarly, in the Presbyterian Church, the position of Bible woman has been completely abolished. Presbyterians do not allow women to be ordained as elders though there is no such rule in their constitution. Salvation Army allots ranks as their husbands after training and their headquarters permits ordination of women as pastors. United Pentecostal Church gives licence to women evangelists and only in the absence of pastors, they can perform rituals like christening of children, baptism and marriage, but they do not have women elders and pastors as such (Patnaik and Lalthakima 2008: 354,355). Although women play an important role in the church activities, they are excluded in all decision-making bodies in both social organisations and church life. While the condition of women has considerably improved in government sectors, there is no corresponding improvement so far as their status and placement in church is concerned. Ever since the coming of Christianity and establishment of the church in Mizoram women played an important role in evangelisation work and in various aspects of life. They continue to be the limbs of the church in various ways. Women continue to play assisting roles only and even trained women do not get their right job and responsibilities in the church. They are excluded from various decision-making bodies, ordination and other responsible positions (Lalhriatpuii 2010: 20). Change taking place in the life of Mizo women after Christianity is remarkable but needs more drastic change in certain areas of ministry in which participation of women need to be improved.

Status and role of Mizo women in politics

Mizo traditional political institution centred around the chieftainship to which all the legal authority was attached. The chief was the secular head of a village or cluster of villages. The chief was not only the traditional legal authority and administrative head. He had the power over life and death, ostracism, and the right to demand free labour for the construction of his own house which was usually bigger and better than the ordinary houses. He was, in short, the traditional village head in all spheres except purely ritual matters, having had the authority to enact laws and at the same time executed these laws at his discretion. The traditional convention required the chief to appoint elders to assist him in administration. Thus, the chief was always expected to have a team of elders headed by a chief elder, who were expert in traditional customs and rules and socially and economically in the upper ladder (Nunthara 1996: 66, 69). The whole political process was completely dominated by men in terms of village chief. The women folk did not have right to rule as rightful heirs. However, a woman had a chance to become a chief if her husband (who had been the village chief) had deceased. That means, when the reigning chief died, they acted as regents; and reigned on behalf of their minor sons and occupied the vacant throne left by their fathers on account of death. We find a number of such cases. This practice had been followed until the abolition of chiefship in Mizoram (Lalneihszovi 2009: 62).

The traditional political organisation of the Mizo shows that village political institutions like village council and its different political offices were exclusively occupied

by male member of the society. Practically there was no 'scope for a Mizo woman to participate in village administration'. They, therefore, did not have political status and their role was confined to domestic activities (Gangte 2011: 133). In all the administrative posts, they chose only men. Their contribution were usually neglected or relegated to the background and the whole history of politics and chieftainship, village administration etc were male-centred (Lalthansangi 2005: 44).

With the abolition of chiefship, the political functions of the chief were taken over by the District Council and the village councils. The lowest form in the administration set up is the village council. Each village is governed by this village council, the members of which are elected wherein women seldom have a chance to gain membership. In the village council election of 2002 out of 532 village councils, only 48 women were elected as members and only 2 out of them are selected as council president. The notion that women are not worthy to be a leader is still very strong, which in turn, strongly governs people's mindset. The state has a total of 6,11,124 electorates of which females constitute 3,08,84 outnumbering their male counterpart by 6,644 voters. Despite this, from the record of the election history of Mizoram only one Mizo lady had so far been elevated to the position of Minister of State in the Legislative Assembly (Lalhriatpuii 2010: 20, 21).

The current politics is virtually dominated by men. There are no women members in State Legislative Assembly. Even in the district level, there are very few women in the village council. In times of campaigns, political parties are usually generous in giving promises to women to better their future, but mostly such promises remain on paper. Women's entry into politics is necessary to help them in their struggle against injustice and to strengthen democracy. In spite of changes the Mizo women experienced and the level of consciousness they gained, they are yet to be politically empowered either in traditional or modern democratic political institutions. And despite the increasing numbers of educated women only few women hold important positions/portfolios in government jobs. All the political and village administrations are still controlled by men (Gangte 2011: 132-135).

Thus, it can be said that Mizo women continue to suffer discrimination in the field of politics as well as in decision making and occupy a lower position as compared to men. Women's equal participation in the decision making process, policy making, planning and administration is extremely important to ensure their equality while participating in the developmental process. It is therefore, necessary to do something so that women's participation in politics and decision making can be improved to cause women's development in the society (Lalnehzovi 2009: 68).

Conclusion

From the preceding observations it is apparent that the women in the traditional structure of Mizo society were discriminated in all spheres of social life. The rule of men prevailed at home as well as outside of it. Their status and role in the traditional social structure was that of a marginalised group where they were subservient to and lived at the behest of the male members of the society. At present there are many positive transformations in their position brought by the combined forces of Christianity, education

and developmental efforts in the state. However, despite the fact that women have seen a marked improvement in their status they still are subordinate to men in the patriarchal arrangement.

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