Gender dynamics in Manipur

Dr Lakshmi Elangbam
Department of Political Science, Imphal College, Manipur University

ABSTRACT: *Discussions on Gender is huge and multi-dimensional. It is invariably influenced by social structures such as caste,class,race,traditions and culture. Society plays a significant role in Gender and the process of socialization, people have internalised the beliefs and trends which are associated with Gender. Feminity and masculinity determines the roles played by men and women in the society and thus are assigned with gender specific roles. Such conception of the difference between men and women often leads to gender inequality the society. Manipur society has mixed characteristics with people belonging to various religions, economic status, culture, castes,tribe, etc. and the society is at the crossroads between traditionality and modernity. In such a transitional phase, women face multiple challenges and shortcomings.In this study, the various aspects of women's participation and status in the work force, education, politics and health are analysed inorder to understand the status of women in Manipur. They are no doubt industrious and politically active. They openly show their concern and take part in many social issues and problems. History is abound with instances of women's protests and agitations. However, the study find that the women of Manipur face many challenges in lieu of being women and they are the disadvantaged section of the society as compared to their male counterpart.*
KEY WORDS: Gender, society,roles, Inequality.
Objectives:
1.   *To understand the status of women in Manipur.*
2.   *To suggest ways to improve the conditions of*

I.   INTRODUCTION

The complexities on the discussion of Gender is huge and endless and have various dimensions. It cannot be merely focussed on the concepts of Gender, but must consider numerous social structures like caste, class, race, traditions and culture. Gender is embedded in these social structures and is influenced by these factors while constructing a basis for the study. Society plays a significant role in developing and strengthening the concept of Gender. Through the process, there have been many social constructions on the concept of gender and along with it; there are various dictates of the society on the people. When people fail to abide by them, they fear of being segregated or failing to attain acceptance by the society. Feminity and masculinity are born out of the concept of gender and are a way of defining the roles to be played by the men and women. By virtue of being masculine or feminine, men are considered to be tough, strong and stable and women are considered to be fragile, weak and vulnerable. When women and men are tagged with such qualities, their roles in the society have been defined in accordance with this. [1]Thus women and men are assigned with gender specific roles, thereby endorsing yet again the fact that men and women are indeed different.Such conception of the difference between man and women often leads to gender inequality in the society. In the recent past, there has been an unprecedented upheaval in the position of women in the society and the differences between men and women are diminishing, leading to a lesser gendered society. Women have crossed barriers and entered into areas which were earlier confined only to women. There have been, in a way switching of roles between men and women. With such reduction in Gender differences, there is lesser gender inequality and there is a gradual process of the decline of the concept of Gendered beings. This is illustrative of a better position of women in the society. The subordination of one sex by the other should be put to an end and the social relations between the two sexes should be based on equality. However, inequality still prevails in the society; leading to a conflict in the Gender relations.

II.   METHODOLOGY

The research paper is an analytical and descriptive study while trying to understand the concept of Gender. It has been based on Descriptive research, Exploratory research as well as Correlational study since it provides information, studies the problem and explains the phenomena also. Tools of different disciplines were used to find adequate data for the study. The study is interdisciplinary in its approach, borrowing concepts

mostly from Economics, History, Sociology and Psychology. This broadened the base of the study, incorporating methods and phenomena from various disciplines.

III.   DISCUSSION

Women of Manipur were accounted by the British as very industrious and "most of the work, except the heaviest, are performed by them. It would be difficult to find more industrious women in India than the Manipuri"[2]. Since earlier times, women were involved in supporting the family financially by way of selling what they produced at home at the market place.They were apt in weaving and took part in the production of food-grains for household consumption. The women in Manipur enjoyed the freedom of mobility and has contributed in the social and political fronts. There have been commendable roles played by the Queens and royal women in safeguarding the kingdom in the absence of their kings. In the recent past, Manipur witnessed two very significant women's movements. The agitations were mostly against the policies of the government and the deteriorating economic condition in the state. The first movement took place in the year 1904 against the feudal policies of the British and for the protection of their menfolk[3]. The immediate cause of the second movement in 1939 was the deplorable economic condition in the state generated by the cumulative effect of the harsh policies of the government. In both the movements, women obviously took the centre-stage and fought fearlessly for the welfare of the state as a whole.It is to be noted that these protests have brought the women together and fight for a cause which is of a common concern[4]. In thelate period, the statehood movement brought the women together yet again and its significant feature was that it managed to bring the newly educated women into the mainstream of women's movement. The Nisha Bandh movement gained importance during the 1970s due to the deteriorating condition because the men-folk were led astray by intoxicants. The women were the ones who bore the burden and joined hands together to fight against it to protect their families and children from the ill-effects of alcoholism. It had engulfed such a large number of men and had gone to such a large extent that it had become a social problem. There was a realization that it was not possible to fight for its eradication at the at the individual level and could be tackled only by incorporating a large number of women. Such a struggle was given an organizational base with the formation of the All Manipur Women's Social Reformation Samaj.However, the Nisha Bandh movement could not last for long and could not fulfil the basic task for which it was established. The reason was that women did not have a concrete organizational base or foundation through which they could function systematically and also lacked the motivation to work towards their goal. Inspite of its fundamental failure, it could reach women at the individual level and penetrated to almost every locality. It consequently formulated into which is today known as the MeiraPaibi or the Torch Bearer's movement. A unique feature of the MeiraPaibi is that every woman becomes its member even without active participation. Even though it was established basically to provide a sense of security in the minds of the people, it became a platform in which women could come together and mobilize themselves to protest against any issues which affect them either directly or indirectly. In the contemporary times, they are involved in all issues ranging from individual issues to state issues. A feature which is common to the women's movements in Manipur is that the women are not particularly concerned about only the Gender issues or fight for their equality with the men. Rather they fought for the welfare of the state and against the deplorable economic, political or social conditions of the state.The close-knit nature of the society has contributed to the easier mobilization of the women. There are many grounds where the women meet each other, and the most glaring example is the Ima Keithel or the Mother's market, which is an all-women's market. The women's market is not only a place for economic activities, but also is a prominent place where women are mobilized for any political protests or agitations. This is a place where many spontaneous movements originate and when the women join together they become a force to reckon with.

IV.   FINDINGS

Inspite of all these active participations of women and being in the forefront in protests and agitations, yet when it comes to political representation, it is very less. Considering the level of women's high rate of participation or awareness of the issues happening around them, thereought to be more representation of women in the political arena. But it is not so and could possibly lead to non-inclusion of women's issues in the policy making and implementation processes. In the Panchayat level Elections, women's representation is quite fair, in the sense that there are more women elected candidates mainly due to women's one third reservation of seats.As in other parts of India, elected women candidates do not function independently and their decisions are influenced by the male members of the family or of the locality. Thus, even when they get elected, their independence and their moves are influenced by the men.The main hurdle for women seems to be their lack of expertise in political affairs, since they lack exposure in the field.

The society of Manipur has mixed characteristics, in the sense that it is a state with people belonging to various religion, economic status, culture, class, tribe, etc. and the society is grappled in between traditionalism and modernity. In such a transitional phase, women are faced with multiple challenges and short-comings. There

is still segregation of roles existing in the society, where there are well-defined categories which are considered to be women's domain or men's domain. These are social constructions which had been re-enforced by years of practice. The submissive sides of Manipuri women are mostvisible in this context. There is a need to reduce such gaps in Gender roles in order to emancipate the position of women in the society.

Crime, health and education are other parameters which defines the position of women in the society. In Manipur, there is an urgent need to look into matters of HIV-AIDS because it is not merely a health issue but also a social issue[5]. Women suffering from HIV have to bear the double responsibility of sustaining themselves as well as bearing huge medical expenses.They cannot do any arduous work as their health does not permit them to do so and yet they have to earn their living. HIV-AIDS widows again bear double stigma in the society, one for being a widow and other for being infected by HIV-AIDS.

Gender is always associated with Patriarchy and it is the root cause for male domination and male centredness. Men dominate in all positions of authority such as politics, economics, legal, educational, military and domestic areas. This is so because the power relations is always favourable towards men and the societal norms have been constructed in such a fashion that it has almost become a known fact that men are indeed superior to women. Patriarchy justifies subordination of women and this has been further deepened by agents like schools, places of worship, work places and such other social gatherings[6]. How and why Patriarchy came about is not much important, the fact of the matter is that the major consequence of patriarchy is that it leads to oppression of women. With this there came about a lot of inequality in the society[7]. There is a need to pay attention to maximum inequalities which have come about on the basis of sex. Patriarchy does not only increase inequalities against women but also amongst men, where they face inequalities on the basis of race, class, place, age, and other hierarchical pattern existing in the society[8].Patriarchy is thus associated with negativities and there is a need to reduce Patriarchy. This can be done by starting with family, which is the basic unit and equal participation of both men and women in the household chores, equal participation in the decision-making process at home, eliminating barriers which subordinate women and placing them at the same footing as men. These are small steps which could contribute to the larger aim of uplifting the women.

Although women take the centre-stage in many movements and agitations and they take active part in the economic activities of the state. However, women are bound by traditions and the belief-systems which have been followed since time immemorial. Women perform maximum of the house-hold chores and even though these worksconsume maximum of their time, they are termed as non-economic activities[9]. This makes the women's work un-recognized and institutionalizes the inequality between men and women. Even the working women must balance between home and work, doing all the house-hold work and at the same time compete with their male counterparts in the work places. This creates a gender role conflict among the women.

V. CONCLUSSION

Various steps could be taken to improve the status of women in the society. It is essential to have more representation of women in politics so that governmental policies and programmes will be more responsive to their needs and requirements. Imparting training to the elected women representatives would make them more self-reliant and boost their confidence while performing the political activities, especially for the elected women representative at the panchayat level. This would generate in them the enthusiasm to function independently without influences from other male members of the family or of the society. Increased level of participation in the decision making at home would lead to a larger perspective of increased participation in the decision making at the political level. Female education should be more focussed on technical education and encourage them to opt for professional courses. Also, there is a need to encourage female students to continue higher studies. When these are incorporated in the education system of Manipur, then only there would be equitable distribution of resources and at the same time reduce the hierarchical pattern of employment based on gender. There is a need to feminize employment and increase the number of women employees or women workers. There are still huge differences in the number of women workers and also female participation in the State Government is very less as compared to that of men. When there is equal participation between men and women in the workforce, there would be a society based on equality. The women would hold an overall better status and would have a better say in the political and social issues. Only when they enjoy economic independence, and participate in the economic activities, there would be more participation of women in the political sphere as well as in the decision-making. Thus, there is a vicious cycle between being economically self-reliant, increased political participation and a better status in the society. It is for the women to bring about positive changes in various fields and it is for the men to provide assistance and support in their efforts. Women should not merely rely on the welfare measures but they themselves should become agents of change as Amartya Sen emphasised[10]. Emancipation of women requires efforts from both men and women and work towards reforming social normswhich are detrimental in nature. Such concerted efforts by both men and women would lead to a society based on equality and a harmonious balance in the relationship between men and women can be brought about.

REFERENCES

[1]. Seema Puri, (1999) Women, Body, Desire in the post -colonial India,Narratives of Gender and Sexuality, London, Routledge,1999,p4-5.
[2]. EW Dun,(1957) Gazetteer of Manipur, Delhi, Vivek Publishing House,1957,p17.
[3]. Karam ManimohonSingh,(2006)Nupi Lan, Imphal, Published by K Premlata,2006, p41.
[4]. N. JoykumarSingh,(2005) Social movements in Manipur,Delhi,Mittal publications,first ed.2005,p72.
[5]. ShyamalaShweshwarkar,(2013) HIV and women in North East, New Delhi,Zubaan,first published,2010,second ed. 2013.
[6]. N. Vijayalakshmi Brar,"(2005) The seen"and "The unseen",Sociological Dimensions to Violence Against Women in Manipur,in H.Sudhir,JubitaHajarimayum(ed.),Delhi,Akansha Publishing House,2005,p84-85.
[7]. Sylvia Walby,(1996) The declining significance on the changing forms of Patiarchy?,in, Valentine M Moghadam,(ed.),Patriarchy and economic development;women's position in the end of the 20th century,London Clarandon Press Oxford,1996,pp25-26.
[8]. Allan G Johnson,(1997) The Gender Knot-unravelling our patriarchal legacy,Philadelphia,Temple Union Press,1997,p-5.
[9]. Simone De Beauvoir,(2009)The second sex,London,Vintage,first published,1949,translated into English,2009,p585.
[10]. Parthasarathi Mandal,Sen,Rawls and Wittgenstein(2009):Liberal development thinking and Gender,in,K R Gupta,ed.,Gender:Problems and policies, New Delhi,Atlantic Publications,2009,p55.