

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH EDUCATION IN RURAL AREAS OF MANIPUR: A CASE STUDY OF IRENGBAM VILLAGE

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ABSTRACT

The paper tries to bring out the positive impact of Education on the employment status of Women in rural areas of Manipur. The study attempts to show that the increase in the level of women's education has led to increase in their employment level which in turn leads to improvement in the economic conditions of their families as well as their overall status in the society. The paper is based on a field study conducted in Irengbam Village of Bishnupur District in Manipur.

Keywords: Education, Women, Empowerment, Employment, Rural.

Introduction

Education has been a significant tool in the empowerment of Women in the society. Increase in the level of Women's education facilitates them to maximize their potential which in turn leads to the development of their personality, Social mobility, Occupational change and Social Awareness. Women's education has assumed special importance in the context of India's Developmental Programmes too. Some of the steps taken up by the central as well as state government in India such as Universalisation of Elementary Education, increasing the enrolment rate of girls in schools, increasing the number of schools and Colleges of all discipline, Adult Education Programme etc. have played a significant role in uplifting the status of women in India in general and of rural women in particular in the recent year. The National Literacy Mission in India is also another significant step taken up by the government of India to eradicate illiteracy in the age group of 15-35 years. This shows that the need was felt for the significant role of Education in bringing about overall development of the country. Female Education refers to every form of education that aims at improving the knowledge and skill of women and girls. It includes general education of schools and colleges, vocational and technical, professional, health education etc. (Lalit,2021). Education has been considered as a key instrument for women empowerment, prosperity, development and welfare (Sandhya,2015). Their empowerment and capacity building provides them an avenue to acquire practical information and knowledge to improve their conditions and livelihoods (Singh, 2016). In this context, promoting women's education particularly in a rural set up is pertinent to make them empowered and self-reliant (Kaur,2017).

The study is based on a field survey conducted in Irengbam Village of Bishnupur District in Manipur. The state of Manipur lies in the extreme north-eastern corner of India. The total population of Manipur according to census 2011, is 28,55,794, out of which the number of male population is 14,38,586 and that of female is 14,17,208(Statistical Yearbook,2015). Total Literacy rate of Manipur according to census 2011 is 76.94 percent and out of which male literacy rate is 83.58 per cent and female literacy rate is 70.26 per cent (Census of India,2011).

Broad Picture of the Village under Study

The village that has been chosen for the field study namely Irengbam is located in Nambol sub-division of Bishnupur District and comes under the Oinam assembly constituency of the inner Manipur parliamentary constituency. As per the population census 2011, the total households in Irengbam village

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is 702 with a population of 3384 out of which 1660 are males and 1724 are females. Children population (age group of 0-6 years) constitutes 13 per cent of the total population of the village. As regards literacy rate, in 2011, the village has higher literacy rate as compared to the average literacy rate of Manipur, that is, literacy rate of Irengbam village was 79.77 per cent as compared to 76.94 per cent of Manipur. In Irengbam, male literacy rate stands at 90.73 per cent while female literacy rate was 69.27 per cent. The village is situated at about eighteen kilo meters from Imphal and lies on the western side of tiddim road connected through an inter village road. The village of Oinam is situated on the east of Irengbam, Yumnamkhunou on the south, Heinoubok on the north, Aimol village of Kangpokpi district on the west of Irengbam. The settlement area of the village is divided into four leikais- Irengbam Awang Mamang Leikai, Irengbam Awang Maning leikai, Irengbam Makha Mamang Leikai and Irengbam Makha Maning leikai. Each *leikai* has a local club with office bearers from the respective *leikai* for taking up developmental activities in the village. The village is surrounded by paddy fields. The village has a post office and a primary health sub-centre. There are four government schools in the village (3 primary schools and one government high school).

Limitation of the Study

It has been mentioned that the settlement area of Irengbam village has been divided into four *leikais* (division of settlement area), however, the present study is confined to Irengbam Awang Mamang Leikai only. This is due to the vastness of the area and the time constraint while undertaking the census survey. It was considered appropriate to choose Irengbam Awang Mamang Leikai only for the study so that a thorough analysis can be done.

Detailed interview of only educated working women was conducted to examine their improved status in their families as well as in the society.

Objectives of the Study

- To find out the level of literacy of male and female population in the village
- To find out the occupational profile of the village.
- To identify the educated working women in the village.
- To examine the role of the educated working women in improving the status of their families as well as the society.

Methodology

- The study is based on a census survey. Information was collected in three rounds of survey.
- The first round of survey was a preliminary round where no structured questionnaire was used and only informal conversation with the villagers was carried out.
- An ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) worker, a multipurpose health worker (an employee under the State Health Mission) and some active members of the village club namely *Chumandharam* Young Star Club of Irengbam Awang Mamang Leikai were contacted to get their assistance. The preliminary survey was conducted in the month of 2023 March.
- In the second round, a census survey of Irengbam Awang Mamang Leikai was conducted in the first week of April 2023. Each household was visited to find out a broad picture of the education level and the occupational profile and also to identify the educated working women in Irengbam Awang Mamang Leikai. Educated working women here refer to full time educated working women. The total household of Irengbam Awang Mamang Leikai is 142 and 15 educated working women were identified from the census survey.
- The third round of survey was conducted immediately after completion of the census survey (in April 2023). In this survey, a total of 15 educated working women (full time working women) identified during the census survey were interviewed to find out their role and status in their families and the society as well. Out of the 15 (fifteen) respondents, 6 (six) are government school teachers, 1 (one) government college teacher, 1 (one) works as assistant in a government office, 2 (two) private sector employee, 5 (fives) health care workers (nurses).

Findings of the Study

Table 1 shows the structure of Education level of both male and female population of Irengbam Awang Mamang Leikai. The table shows that the total population of Irengbam Awang Mamang Leikai is 667, out of which male population is 348 (52.2%) and that of female population is 319 (47.8%). As

regards education level, male illiteracy rate is only 4 per cent while female illiteracy constitutes 16.6 per cent of the total female population. The proportion of male literates, that is, those who can simply read and write is 7.7 percent, 17.3 per cent of the male population have passed 10th standard, 23.6 per cent have passed 12th standard, 12.9 per cent are graduates, 3.2 per cent are technical graduates and 5 (1.4 per cent) post graduate degree holders while female literates (who can read and write only) constitute 19.7 per cent, 15.7 percent have passed 10th standard, 11.9 per cent have passed 12th standard, 6.3 per cent are graduates, 3.5 per cent technical graduates, 2 (0.6 per cent) post graduates. A striking feature noted with regard to educational qualification is there are no Ph.D degree holders among male population during the survey period and on the other hand, among the female population there is 1 Ph.D degree holders. This shows that even in a rural society, there has been a significant improvement in women's education in the recent years.

Table 1: Structure of Education Level

Education Level	Male	Female	Total
Illiterate	14(4.0%)	53(16.6%)	67(10.04%)
Read and write (Literate)	27(7.7%)	63(19.7%)	90(13.5%)
10 th passed	60(17.3%)	50(15.7%)	110(16.5%)
12 th passed	82(23.6%)	38(11.9%)	120(18.0%)
Graduate	45(12.9%)	20(6.3%)	65(9.8%)
Graduate (technical)	11(3.2%)	11(3.5%)	22(3.3%)
Post graduate	5(1.4%)	2(0.6%)	7(1.04%)
Ph.D	-	1(0.3%)	1(0.1%)
Students	66(19.0%)	57(17.9%)	123(18.4%)
Children (0-6 years)	38(10.9%)	24(7.5%)	62(9.3%)
Total	348(100%)	319(100%)	667(100%)

Source-census survey

Note:i) The number of children and student population has been included to show the complete picture of population in the surveyed area.

ii) figure in the parenthesis indicate percentage.

Table 2 shows the distribution of main occupation of female population of Irengbam Awang Mamang Leikai.

Table 2: Distribution of Main Occupation of female population of Irengbam Awang Mamang Leikai

Type of Occupation	Female
1.Cultivators	43(13.5%)
2.Agricultural Labour	23(7.2%)
3. Garden Horticulture	43(13.5%)
4.Handloom	84(26.3%)
5.Govt. school teacher	06(1.8%)
6. Govt. College teacher	01(0.3%)
7. Govt employee (excluding teachers)	01(0.3%)
8. Kabok making Business (traditional puffed rice making)	01(0.3%)
9. Business	01(0.3%)
10. Private Sector employee	02(0.5%)
11. Grocery shop	06(1.8%)
12.tailor	05(1.5%)
13. home tutor	05(1.5%)
14.Female health Worker (Nurse)	05(1.5%)
15.Children(0-6years)	24(7.5%)
16. Student	57(17.8%)
17.Old aged (75+, 80+)	12 (3.7%)
Total	319(100%)

Source-census survey

Note: The number of old aged, children and students population have been included to show the picture of total population.

The table shows that out of the 319 female population, there are 15 educated working women who are working in government and private sector, where 6(six) are government school teachers, 1(one) government college teacher, 1(one) works as assistant in a government office, 2(two) private sector

employee, 5(five) health care workers (nurses). Government employee including government school teachers and government college teacher constitute only 2.5 per cent of the total population. The remaining 7 educated working women includes two private sector employee and five health care workers.

Cultivators, agricultural labour and garden horticulture together constitute only 34.2 per cent of the total female population. Apart from this, there are other non-farm employment ranging from, *kaboksaabi**, traditional handloom weavers, tailor, vegetable seller etc. This shows that even though Irengbamis an agrarian village, many women have taken up these non-farm activities as their main source of income.

Detailed interview with each educated working women was done during the survey. The respondents revealed that as a responsible member of their families they are taking active role in enhancing the economic condition of their families. These working women helps financially in their families for various purposes such as house construction, education of their siblings, repayment of debt, siblings marriage, health check up of their family members and also takes part in major decision makings of their families. To sum up, the findings of the field study gives a clear picture that the rural society is witnessing positive changes on the role and status of women by giving greater emphasis on female education.

Conclusion

It is reflected in the findings that there is a strong positive correlation between the level of education of rural women and their status in the society. The spread of education among women in the rural society leads to improvement of their status within their families which further leads to overall social and economic development in the society. For the speedy development of a rural society, women's education act as a significant contributor as it leads them to increase their knowledge, participate in decision making, self-confidence, awareness about their rights and financial independence which in turn helps them to participate fully in the developmental process of the society. Thus, an educated women is a torch bearer of her family, society and the nation as well.

*kaboksaabi** *kabok* is an indigenous snack made with puffed rice, one who prepares this snack is known as *kaboksaabi*

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