



# STATUS OF WOMEN IN EAST SIANG DISTRICT

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**Abstract:** Across the globe of human society, despite the women plays a very significant role in all walks of life, their status has remained pathetic and critical. The society speaks in favor of giving equal rights and freedom to women to empower them but in actual practice it is undoubtedly indifferent. And the tribal woman of Arunachal Pradesh has been the worst victim of all this process. Although the entire region is free from social evils like Sati Pratha, dowry, female feticide and infanticide. Yet the practices of polygamy and domestic violence are still prevalent with few cases of child marriages. Such happening owes its credit to the prevalence of indigenous patriarchal norms embedded in the deep rooted traditional ethos of the tribal societies in the state.

**Key words:** status, women empowerment, patriarchy.

## I. INTRODUCTION

United Nations defines the status of women as the conjunction of position a women occupies as worker, student, wife, mother...of the power and prestige attached to these positions and of the right and duties she is expected to exercise. It denotes the position of an individual in a social system and encompasses in itself the notion of various rights and obligation in term of authority, power and grading. In this paper an attempt has been made to unearth and examine the status of women of East Siang. The people of the district mostly live in villages. Their life revolves around the local administrative set up that runs in accordance to customary laws. Families are the first basic structure of the tribal society. It is the smallest unit of the clan hierarchy. The element that brings solidarity in the clan is the legal obligation of the eldest male member of the family.

In an Adi society, women's social and economic roles are being internalized within the household. The society is patrilineal hence its generation has to continue through the male blood line. Therefore, the desire of male child is a priority. The girl child is brought up in such a socio-cultural environment, which later moulds her to take up the activities within the boundary of the household. Monogamy is the general rule of marriage but the practice of polygamy is a socially accepted too. The Adi customary law allows the husband to divorce his wife in case of adultery or some other serious offences easily. It may be for barrenness, adultery or any slightest hint of infidelity. The traditional village council gives its verdict, in accordance to the customary law and so is binding to both the parties. Also when all the wives accept to live together under the same roof, the eldest wife holds a superior position. However, this system is regarded as diminishing the status of a woman in the society. Thus, the practice depicts the superiority of men over the women.

In relation to acquiring inheritance of the immovable property which is occasioned by events such as death and cause discontinuation of the possession, no ancestry property can be given to the daughter even if she happened to be the only child of the deceased. In such cases the property goes to the nearest kin among the clan. Only male member can inherit the family property. However the widow can maintain the property as long as she remains attached to the family, but if she marries she loses the right of keeping the property. Thus, wife cannot inherit her husband's property. However, a woman enjoys considerable freedom in the matters of widow re-marriage. She is free to remarry and start a new life. On the death of a woman, the widower is traditionally allowed to marry his deceased wife's sister, if any, depending on her acceptance. The rule is intended to preserve the blood relationship as well as to protect the children from a strange new woman, and also to prevent the property of the deceased from being alienated to a stranger. If a husband dies, any one of his surviving unmarried brother has the right to marry the widow of the deceased. This is intended to provide protection to the woman, as well as for the benefit of the children of the deceased. There is no dowry system and brides price among the Adi community.

The traditional village council is known as Kebang. It is pertinent for all the members of the village to participate in its assembly. However, the women's do not generally participate. Although nowhere in the customary laws among the Adi prescribes any restrictions on the participation of the women but due to several reasons it has been restricted. Traditionally it was a taboo for a woman to enter in the assembly of Kebang during their unclean periods and also at the time of child birth. Also they are considered as a temporary member because after their marriage, the girls move away to other clans or other villages. Also the females find it inconvenient to attend the meetings due to the inherent household chores. However, it does not restrict those who are active and willing to participate in the proceedings of Kebang especially when they themselves were involved in the case.

## Review of literature

Tai Nyori in his work “History and Culture of Adi’s” (1993) gives a descriptive analysis of the history and culture of almost all the sub-tribes of Adi. It discusses about the village councils of the Adi tribe and found that there was no restriction on the participation of women in village council of Kebang but they usually do not take part.

Tamo Mibang writes in his book “Arunachal Women and Education” (2003) about the constraints faced by women in their education. There is also a mention of women empowerment through education but the study is silent on the role of women in politics.

Subhasini Mahapatra’s study on “Status of Women towards Empowerment” (2006) is an attempt in the direction of highlighting the status of women in historical perspective. It deals about the status of ancient women, medieval era and provides a conceptual framework of women and development in India. It serves an ideal book for gender based study where it throws light on the social justice of women.

## Objective of the study

1. To study the status of Adi women in patriarchal society.
2. To analyze status of Adi women in decision-making process.

## Research Question

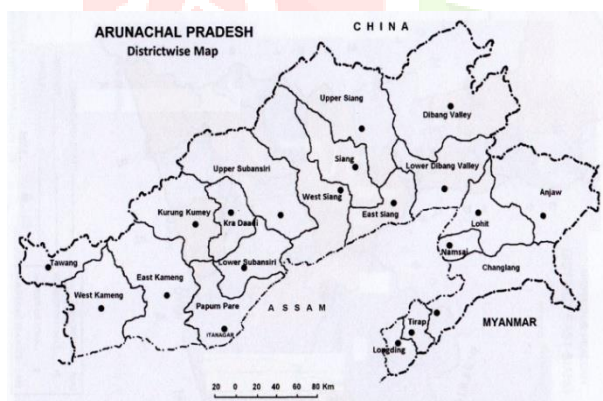
1. What is the status of Adi women in patriarchal Adi society?
2. What is the status of Adi women in decision-making process?

## Methodology

The nature of the study is mainly empirical and analytical and data’s were collected through intensive field works, oral tradition and observation to address the research questions. Also participant observation method was implemented. Primary data were collected via interview-schedule and the secondary data’s from the Offices of State Election Commission, Office of Panchayat etc. Other relevant data’s were collected from books, reports, journals, newspapers and other publications. The questionnaires were structured with both open-ended and closed-ended questions.

According to 2011 Census report, East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh has total population of 99,214 persons out of which 50,116 are male and 49,098 are female. The literacy rate is 72.54 percent. The sex ratio of the district is 980 females per one thousand male. And the work participation rate is 40.4 percent. It has six CD blocks with 15 Circles and 151 villages. In this paper an attempt has been made to unearth and examine the status of Adi women in East Siang in historical perspective trough some generally accepted indicators such as sex ratio, literacy rate, participation in workforce and share in power.

## District map of East Siang



## Educational Status

**Table 1.1**  
**Literacy rate of East Siang (2011 census)**

Sex	Literate	percentage
Male	34,210	78.47
Female	28,366	66.49
total	62,576	72.54

Sources: District Census Handbook of East Siang, of Directorate of Census Operations, Arunachal Pradesh. 2011

The literacy rate has improved and increased from that of 2001 Census report. Especially the literacy rate of female both in rural and urban areas are improving. Now, the district ranks third in the state but the bitter truth is that it is still very low compared to other parts of the country which leads to low rate of WPR in the district.

**Table 1.2**  
**Stage-wise number of male-female students enrollments of East Siang (2014-2015)**

Stages	total	male	female
Pre-primary	2212	1097	1115
Primary	114263	5098	5555
Middle	7254	3550	3704
Secondary	4414	2255	2159
Higher Secondary	3357	1705	1652
College	6188	3111	3077
University	322	254	68
total	138010	17880	17330

Sources: Statistical Abstract of Arunachal Pradesh-2015, Directorate of Economics and Statistics.

The enrollment of female is highest in pre-primary stages and slightly lower in primary stage. It records quite a high rate of enrollment in middle stages and then decreases as the level of stages increases. Yet it shows a tremendous increase in the enrolment of female in all the levels of education as compared to previous 2001 census.

**Table 1.3**  
**Work Participation Rate (WPR) of East Siang (2011 Census)**

Sex	Total worker	Main worker	Marginal worker	Non-worker
Male	40,222	33,578	6644	58,992
Female	23,591	20,309	3282	26,525
total	16,631	13,269	3362	32,467

Source: District Census Handbook of East Siang, of Directorate of Census Operations, Arunachal Pradesh. 2011

The WPR among the female main worker compared to male is just 27.03 percent which is very low compared to other parts of the country.

**Table 1.4**  
**Elected Male-Female members of 2013 Panchayat election in East Siang District**

Sex	Gram Panchayat	Anchal Samiti	Zilla Parishad	total	percentage
Male	327	99	11	437	58.26
Female	251	57	5	313	41.74
total	578	156	16	750	100.00

Source: Office of the District Election Officer, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Pasighat

The table shows that the participation of women in PRI is just 41.74 percent. In the office of Gram Panchayat out of 33 percent reserved seats 43.42 percent seats were captured by the women candidates. In the Anchal Samiti, the representation of women was 36.53 percent and 31.25 percent in the office of Zila Parishad and male constituted the remaining seats with 68.75 percent.

### Summary and findings

The following can be drawn in the light of the objective of the study on the basis of empirical analysis:

1. Women still largely perform all household duties with not much help from other male members.
2. Society is still characterized by unequal division of household works based on unequal division in power relations.
3. Adi women cannot inherit family property and a daughter can't claim right over patrimony.
4. Widow has only usufructuary rights over deceased husband's property.
5. When women initiate a divorce, she can neither claim husband's property nor could ask for compensation.
6. There is disparity in sex ratio with 980 female per one thousand male though it has increased from the previous Census.
7. The female literacy rate in the district is lower than the male counterparts with just 66.49 percent,
8. The female enrollment decreases with the level of education, it proves that high drop out of female students are associated with higher level of education in the district compared to male. Yet it shows a tremendous increase in the enrolment of female student in all the levels of education as compared to previous 2001 census.
9. It is observed that there is relative disadvantage of women in the district in respect of employment with just 27.03 percent in WPR.
10. The record further shows that 58.95 percent of women are cultivators, 9.67 percent are agricultural labourers, 1.6 percent is engaged in household industries and 30.21 percent are other workers. Hence, 2011 census shows a relatively disappointing picture of women employment status in the district.
11. It is found that more than 33 percent of the seats in various levels in PRIs are currently held by the women sections in both the Anchal Samiti and Gram Panchayat level but it is quite discouraging to see that in the office of Zila Parishad it is lower than 33 percent reservation as prescribed by the Government.
12. The policy of reservation of seats for the women through the implementation of 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 has proved a boon to this marginalized section of the society. It has involved large number of women as voters, participants, members, activists of different political parties and as candidates. Although the numbers of elected women representatives are quite limited but its increasing and therefore it is encouraging and leading towards women empowerment.

### Conclusion

We can conclude that the status of women in East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh is a transitional phase. On one hand, she's at the peak of the ladder of success, and on the other she is still mutely reeling under the violence afflicted to her due to traditional patriarchal norm of the tribal society. Yet, compared to the past, today Adi women have achieved a lot in their path full of hurdles. They have left the secured domain of home just being home-makers are now in the battlefield of life, fully armored with talent. They have proven themselves that they are capable. But they are yet to get their proper dues in the real sense of term.

Secondly, the Adi women are experiencing the power of self governance and have reached such a position in which they can now assert their authority and inspire other women too. Now the elected women representatives armed with political rights are quite respected by the men folks in the society. Time is near when the gender biasness will be eliminated from the minds of the people in these tribal male dominated societies.

Thirdly, the reservation policy has opened new avenues for the rural tribal women to empower themselves, hopefully this political power would enable the women folk to improve their socio-economic condition which in not in favour of them. This will definitely help in the abolition of inequalities and unjust customs and social practices in the tribal societies and bring up status of women and empower them at par with the men.

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