# Women Employment in a Matrilineal Society of Meghalaya

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**Abstract:**

The status of women in a society is a significant reflection of the level of social justice in that society. Women's status is often described in terms of their income, employment, education, health, fertility, and roles within the family, the community, and society. In tribal communities, the role of women is substantial and crucial. They constitute about half the total population, but in tribal society, women are more important than other social groups because they work harder, and the family economy and management depend on them. Even after industrialization and the resultant commercialization swamped the tribal economy, women continued to play a significant role. Thus, this proposal seeks to provide new insight by underlining the basic fact that matrilineal society in Meghalaya is still robust. Although the emergence of new technological developments may modify the system at large, the founding principle is still embedded in society. Further on, the present study will accentuate the socio-economic conditions of the female counterpart; after that, a thorough analysis will focus on women's empowerment and work participation in all levels of occupational structure in general and in market places in particular.

**Keywords:** *participation, empowerment, tribal, matrilineal societies*.

**Introduction:**

The matrilineal culture of the State has resulted in greater women empowerment in Meghalaya. Socio-economic indicators revealed that compared to women from the other parts of the country, women from the State are in a more favourable position. At the same time, patriarchal tendencies within the matrilineal systems exist. This is true in terms of political access and when indicators relating to work participation are analysed. There is a gender gap in favour of the male regarding work participation and the embedded categories. In short, while men are likely to have regular and well-paid jobs, females have a higher possibility of ending up in uncertain and low-paying jobs. A higher proportion of women are, in fact, unemployed compared to men. This chapter will now go a step

forward and try to find out what happens when women are indeed able to get a job. Do they end the challenge, or do they persist in different forms?

Studies have shown that women continue to face problems even after they have got a job. As part of her Master's dissertation, Kumari (2014) studied the problems and issues faced by white-collared women in the city of Rourkela, India. She found that sexual harassment by male colleagues is a reality for many women. Male colleagues in high positions, because of their frustrations while behaving appropriately with junior employees in front of others, covertly harass the female employees. At the same time, mental harassment by female colleagues was also widely prevalent. This takes spreading rumours that cast aspersions on the women's character and family. Name-calling and ascribing derogatory names were the norms. This was on account of jealousy, rivalry, competition, etc. Both male and female colleagues would conclude women's character, sometimes without any basis. If a female gets a higher post, colleagues usually attribute it to favouritism and conclude her character rather than accepting her capability of achieving this kind of position.

Working women are forced to leave their small children at home as there is no proper system for child support at the workplace. Health issues also afflict many. All this is exacerbated by the fact that many are unaware of the Acts and Policies favouring women in the workplace. This leads to the perpetuation of their problems. The harassment is not only restricted to the workplace. Women fear for their safety not only from strangers in public transport but also from their relatives and neighbours. As a result, working women feel that they face more mental pressure and depression than non-working women. This is especially so for single parents who are especially facing greater challenges. Therefore, challenges for women do not end the moment they enter the job market. They persist. However, this study was conducted in a patriarchal society where some of the problems mentioned are expected. What will happen in a matrilineal society? Will the same problems be reported? Moreover, if yes, what is the intensity? Does the matrilineal society provide support and bring about positive outcomes? Or do the patriarchal tendencies emerge and create a new type of challenges for the women? This chapter will try to answer all these questions.

**Statement of the Problem:**

Women in Meghalaya, in general, and Shillong, in particular, have always played a significant role in the existence and administration of the State as a whole. Apart from their innate ability to reason and dispense wisdom, the matrilineal nature of society has been cited as an important reason for their relatively higher status. The role of women outside of their homes is highly influential and powerful, and they enjoy total security, unlike in the rest of the country. A successful career woman of the Khasi society feels her "their societal anomaly" has enabled her to be successful in every way. Women manage most small businesses. Thus, there is wide scope in such a society for women's participation and empowerment, which is evident in all aspects of development right from administration, politics, businesses, marketplaces, etc. However, many at the same time argue that the freedom and rights enjoyed by women in society are a mirage hiding patriarchal tendencies. On the surface, it may look that the society is highly egalitarian in terms of gender relations but dig deeper, and the picture

changes. Women in Meghalaya face the same problems that women elsewhere face, and similar challenges constrain their ability to live fulfilling lives. This is especially when it comes to working participation. Lack of financial Independence has always been a big stumbling in women's empowerment. It will be highly pertinent to understand the current work participation status within Meghalaya, a matrilineal state. Due to this scenario, the present work will explore the nature and characteristics of a matrilineal society that enabled women to full participation and empowerment in the society. It will further investigate women's participation and empowerment at different levels of occupational structures.

**Objective:**

To analyse the role of women empowerment and work participation in all levels of occupational structure in general.

**Database and methodology:**

The type of data required depends on the objectives of a study. The ones identified for this particular study necessitate that both the primary and secondary sources of data are utilized to get the requisite information. Among the primary data sources, two have been used in the study, viz., the Census of India and personal interviews. The India Census documents are part of the decennial survey, which began in 1872 under British Viceroy Lord Mayo in 1881. After Independence, the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India conducts these surveys under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. The other primary source was a personal interview of key stakeholders for women's empowerment. At the same time, Census data was utilized to understand the rate of women's work participation, data from these personal interviews were meant to understand the workplace environment and challenges female workers face. The challenge faced could, apart from gender, also stem from the nature of work and the designation held. Secondary data sources were in the form of books, research articles, newspaper items, etc., and were sourced from both online and offline sources. The data from this source was important for especially dealing with this objective, i.e., to examine the nature and characteristics of matrilineal society that enable women to have a dominant role in society.

**Literature Review:**

According to Roy (2017), all the three land tenure systems, i.e., Khasi-Jaintia and Garo, have commonalities in that a woman is merely the vehicle by which property descends from one generation to another. Hence, in the strict sense of the word, matriarchy does not exist among the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo. For the former, the basic principles are that control is in the hands of the male adults of the clan, the uncles, and the adult brothers. This becomes very when one looks at the rule regarding the self-acquired property. Regarding self-acquired property, the rules vary between males and females. A woman can give her self-acquired property to either her son or daughter during her lifetime. If, however she dies without giving any proper directive, the property goes to her youngest daughter. For a man, the property earned before marriage is called the 'earning of the clan' and would go to his mother and sister. If he earns the property after marriage, it is called 'earning of the children' and would go to his wife and

children. It is, however, important to note that the youngest daughter who inherits the ancestral property is the custodian of the family 31 property and not the full heir. Her rights are circumscribed by several controls (as actual management control lies in the hands of her brothers and uncles, and her father is to be consulted), making it fruitless for all practical purposes. She cannot sell the land without consent from the family (Mukhim, 2008; Roy, 2017).

Subba (2008), however, disagrees with this. According to him, the youngest daughter does make full use of the property and is more than a mere custodian. He also makes the point that when it comes to the inheritance of property, there are, in reality, significant variations among the various sub-tries in Meghalaya and even more with each sub-tribe. There are indeed four categories of inheritance among the Khasi themselves. These are as follows:

1. Families in which the children trace the descent from the mother's side and both sons and daughters inherit the ancestral property more or less equally.

2. Families in which the children trace the descent from the mother's side but sons do not inherit the ancestral property.

3. Families in which the children trace the descent from the mother's side but sons inherit the ancestral property.

4. Families in which the children trace the descent from the mother's side, but the youngest daughter inherits' the lion's share of the ancestral property, and the rest goes to the other daughters.

Gurdon (1907) in his seminal work 'The Khasis, where he mentioned that the Khynriam, Lyngngam, and Pnar laws of inheritance are similar but differ from the War and the Bhoi. In the former, the largest share of the property, jewellery, and the family house go to the youngest daughter, with the rest also getting an equal share of both ancestral and acquired property. In the case of the Bhoi, it was the son who got all the property. However, upon further examination, the group termed as Bhoi are Karbi and not Khasi. However, with both groups sharing a very close link and kinship across ethnic groups (Ramirez, 2014), some innovations in lineage did occur because of proximity. In the Bhoi region, there is a type of matrimonial alliance known as *shim-bhoi*. In case a family has only male children, to keep the property within the same clan, brides are sought from the Karbi clans (who follow the patrilineal system) rather than the matrilineal Bhoi clans. The children get the father's surname, and if they, in turn, have female children of their own, the matrilineal system is adopted (Mawroh, 2018). Subba (2018) also cites works done by a scholar like Dasgupta in the 1980s, which revealed that step-children and children borne out of extra-marital affairs might also inherit the parents' property. In Shella, which borders Bangladesh, if a man from outside the village marries someone from the village, his right to the property in the village is limited to his lifetime only, and if his children leave the village, they also lose the right over the property in the village. There is thus much stereotyping that has to be dismantled when it comes to matriliny in Meghalaya. In the meantime, stress and strains are emerging in the system.

In the wake of rapid socio-economic changes, the character of agriculture and the nature of ownership and control over land has undergone major changes in the State. The rapid shift from community to individual ownership of land has been eroding women's status about land ownership in the State – further exacerbated by their exclusion from traditional institutions involved in local governance (Roy, 2017). Men alone are chieftains who are called *Syiem*. In what can be called a surreptitious stratagem, the *Syiems*, *Sardar*, and *Rangbah Shnong* collaborated with other council members to convert large areas of land in their jurisdiction into privately owned land in their names. In such cases, the titleholders are male members. This phenomenon can become the basis for a complete overhaul of Khasi society. Men as heads of the *Dorbars* and Chieftainships are increasingly becoming not just owners of land but have also appropriated the right to exercise complete control over it.

What women will ultimately be left with is the lineage bit. These reversals are happening at a very rapid pace. Instead of giving the woman the right to the lineage, the law of inheritance makes her bear the heavy burden of the family. The system does not protect the woman and her children from the consequences of a divorce as she has to take care of them. With only a few clans having large properties, the right of lineage is actually of little significance (Mukhim, 2008). Subba (2008), however, reminded us that though the mother has to bring up the children, her clan members come to her rescue as far as possible. Matrilineage infants protect children from being called "illegitimate," a serious stigma in patriarchal societies. Since the children take the surnames of their mothers, who their fathers are is not important from the point of view of legitimacy, although for emotional and economic reasons, the presence of a father might be equally important. No one can appreciate the importance of Khasi society better than the illegitimate children from patrilineal societies. Of course, this is changing since matriarchy is not the opposite of patriarchy, i.e., it does not mean domination of women by men.

As characterized by Heidi Goettner-Abendroth (2012), *"non-domination of women even while they hold full economic and spiritual authority."* As such, gender equality is the hallmark of a matriarchal society, which is incomplete opposition to the emphasis on gender domination in patriarchy. As discussed above, the final refuge of authority lies with the female/matriarch. However, unlike in patriarchy, where a similar situation leads to hoarding power, it is shared here. The men are not sidelined but are given a chance to participate in political decision-making by acting as the surrogate for the women. In the end, the final decision is but a collective one.

Furthermore, another instance of gender equity is when a man gets married to a woman, he does not abandon his clan. This contrasts with patriarchy, where women are alienated from their families after marriage. He continues to carry his surname while the children get the mother's surname. The man's identity/lineage is not obliterated but allowed to exist along with his wife's. Here again, it is not domination but accommodation.

**Background Information:**

The study is based in Shillong, where the government is the biggest formal employment sector in Meghalaya. This feature has to do with the history of the city. Shillong came into prominence when the British made it headquarters of the newly formed province of Assam in 1872. This encouraged the migration of scores of Bengalis for jobs in clerical positions who gradually settled in different parts of the town. Like the town, many communities started arriving in search of livelihood opportunities both in the formal and informal sector, e.g., business. By 1931, Shillong became the number one town in Assam in population. The Indo-China War of 1962 led to a heavy influx of armed forces into the area and the establishment of various military centres, viz., BSF, Air Force, CRPF, etc., around the city. Shillong continued to expand after Meghalaya achieved statehood in 1972 with the expansion of the bureaucracy and establishment of Central Government institutions like the North Eastern Hill University, North Eastern Council, North Eastern Electrical Power Corporation, etc. (Gupta, 2003). The formal public sector thus became a very important source of employment in Shillong.

Almost half of the Superiors interviewed work in the Meghalaya (Civil) Secretariat Office. Some of the important institutions mentioned are the Meghalaya Police, State Institute of Rural Development, Meghalaya Energy Corporation Limited, and Meghalaya Transport Corporation. These are some major State Government undertakings where employment is highly sought after. Another one-fourth of the respondents reported working in a Government Undertaking but chose not to specify. Furthermore, as for designation, more than half were Superintendent and Undersecretary. The other important designations reported by the respondents are Accounts Officer, Assistant Engineer, Deputy Secretary, Functional Manager, Research Assistant, Scientific Officer, Data Entry Operator, Sub-Inspector, and Superintendent. Therefore, the Superiors are working in a very rewarding sector and are positioned in very favourable designations. With the job security and good remuneration, the Superiors can be stated to be in a very comfortable position. The institutions' nature and the portfolios' diversity also point to other aspects.

**Table 1.** Demographic profile of the Superiors

| Factors | Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age | No Reply | 3 | 6.0 |
| | 30 Or Less | 2 | 4.0 |
| | 31 to 40 | 33 | 66.0 |
| | More than 40 | 12 | 24.0 |
| Education | No Reply | 2 | 4.0 |
| | Under Graduate | 8 | 16.0 |
| | Graduate | 37 | 74.0 |
| | Post Graduate | 3 | 6.0 |

Source: Fieldwork

In patriarchal societies, women have been hindered from obtaining leadership positions (e.g., Hoyt, 2005). Indeed, family practice, religious myths, the social division of labour, sexual division of labour, marriage customs, the educational system, and civil laws combine to produce hierarchies, internalised beliefs, and expectations that constrain but are not contested (Stromquist, 1995). In such hierarchies' women are put at the bottom and not encouraged to take leadership positions. The fact that the respondents are found to be in positions of authority and responsibility in various institutions points

to the fact that this is not the case in Meghalaya. This small subset indicates that women's entry into leadership positions is not frowned upon. Other facts seem to bear that this is not a recent phenomenon of modernisation taking place in society.

The position of a Superior seems to be one where a good deal of experience is required. This is attested that more 2/3rd of the respondents was between 31 to 40 years of age (See Table 1). The younger, i.e., 30 years or lesser, constitute less than 5% of the respondents. Age brings a certain amount of authority that appears to be demanded by the position. Almost 3/4th of the superiors had attained a graduate-level education, with a few having completed their post-graduation. The assistant Engineer and the Sub-Inspector are the ones who have advanced degrees. While for the former, it is a requirement, for the latter, it is an over qualification hinting at underemployment to some extent. With an average length of service of 22 years, an early entry into the service with experience playing a part in getting the promotion explains their current designation. The ones who held the post of Deputy Secretary had the highest experience (35 years), followed by Office Superintendent (34 years). Because of the duration of the service, these women have a very good understanding of the institution's workings in which they are embedded. Furthermore, it appears that this will continue shortly as well.

From the duration of service and educational qualification, it becomes clear that women's empowerment is not a recent phenomenon in Meghalaya. Opportunity for higher education has been available to women for a long time. Many took advantage of this and improved their employability. This process confirms the theoretical framework governing work participation. It has been found that the relationship between female employment and education follows a U-curve. There is a tendency for employment to fall with education moving from illiteracy to middle levels and then rise (Olsen and Mehta, 2006). Once the female education level rises and opportunities for white-collar workers increase, higher wages and socially acceptable work led to higher female labour participation (Janneke and Stephan, 2011).

The Superiors belong to the latter stage of the U-curve, where work participation improves as highly educated women enter the job market looking for well-paid jobs. The various designations mentioned above are highly remunerative positions in very reputable institutions. Based on its women empowerment, thus seem to be well entrenched in the matrilineal society of Meghalaya. However, that case still has to be argued by looking at the relationship of the Superiors with their employees, male and female.

**Relationship with employees**

Almost 2/3rd of the Superiors manages between 1 to 20 employees under them (See Table 2). Those who hold the designation of Accounts Manager and Assistant Engineer are at the lower end of this scale, managing only one employee under them. On the other hand, Superintendent and Undersecretary manage more employees, more than up to 20. The latter positions are imbued with a higher degree of responsibility and, therefore, a higher number of employees. Another pattern noticed is that the range 1-20 remains the same whether the employees are male or female. In terms of proportion, there seems to be an equal number of men and women employees being allotted to a supervisor (5-10

employees, either male or female). This kind of parity reveals that there is no perceptive discrimination as to the allotment of employees based on gender. This points to two things: Firstly, male employees have no qualms working under female supervisors, and secondly, even if they were to harbour such misgivings, the institutions ensure gender parity. There are a few Superiors who have more than 40 employees. These are Office Superintendent, Undersecretary, and Stenographer General, all prestigious positions. However, their number is less than 10%, and they are probably much older and senior in position, allowing them to hold more responsibility. The majority, though, handle 1 to 20 employees only.

**Table: 2** Employees under a Superior

| Type Of Employee | Number Of Employee | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total | No Reply | 8 | 16.0 |
| | 1 to 20 | 32 | 64.0 |
| | 21 to 40 | 4 | 8.0 |
| | More than 41 | 6 | 12.0 |
| Female | No reply | 6 | 12.0 |
| | 5 to 10 | 29 | 58.0 |
| | 11 to 15 | 10 | 20.0 |
| | 16 to 20 | 1 | 2.0 |
| | More than 20 | 4 | 8.0 |
| Male | No reply | 10 | 20.0 |
| | 5 to 10 | 30 | 60.0 |
| | 11 to 15 | 1 | 2.0 |
| | 16 to 20 | 3 | 6.0 |
| | More than 20 | 6 | 12.0 |

Source: Fieldwork

A very important attribute that is highly desired for someone in positions of importance is the ability to think about the benefits of those that work under them. These builds trust and loyalty among the employees, who then can give their best for the organization. On the other hand, an increase in the workload, especially at the expense of other responsibilities, can be a big problem, especially for female employees. Women's participation in labour is highly complex as instead of the dichotomy of choice, i.e., labour vs. leisure, there is a trichotomy of choices, i.e., between paid work, unpaid family/homework, and leisure (Venkatanarayana, 2016). Duties like shifts can create problems for female employees who will have to be forced to compromise on their choices.

**Figure: 3** Relationship of Superiors with employees
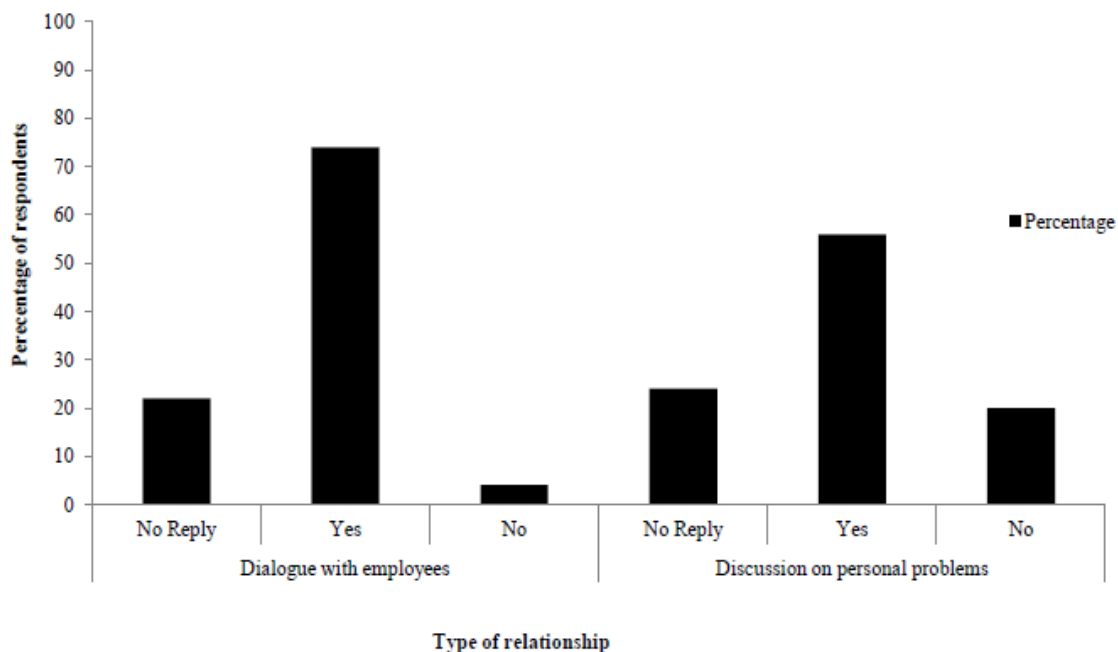
It was found that less than 20% of the supervisors make their employees work in shifts. The same applies to female employees as well. This means that almost 80% of the female employees do not have shift duties. This is important as the certainty of working hours is crucial for planning household-related activities. Working women still work at home as well. Outside employment does not reduce their household burden. Apart from working in the office, women are also required to do a lot of household chores. This happens before and after office hours. A routine is set, and any disturbance in that routine can create a lot of difficulties for the women. Not having shifts but only regular working hours is very useful. There is another aspect that is important when discussing the impact of shifts, exhaustion. Tiredness that comes with working multiple shifts and working during unnatural hours can also be avoided. Efficiency is also affected by exhaustion which because of shifts could be physical as well as mental. Therefore, not having shifts is not just very useful for the women employees but the entire organisation as well. The female Superiors seem to understand these difficulties very well and avoid giving shifts to the employees.

Building an atmosphere of support among the employees is also very important for improving the organization's productivity. At the same time, it reflects a cordial working environment. It is, therefore, very encouraging that, according to the Superiors, almost all the women employees are eager to help each other in times of need (see Figure 3). Although the nature of the problem is not specified, it is safe to assume that these would be work-related.

Those few who are not helpful could be put down to personal issues. Office rivalry and politics are an integral part of any workplace. However, it sours the whole organisation when it becomes too widespread and reduces efficiency. This does not seem to be the case here. In general, as reported by the Superiors, the working environment seems to be helpful where employees help each other. And the fact that almost 3/4th of the supervisor reported that their employees are educated and skilled makes it very useful for the former when work is allotted to them. There is a good chance that individual skills combined with helpful colleagues will get the work done efficiently.

Communication is a very important part of being a good Superior. One has to communicate their ideas clearly and precisely to their employees to ensure the work is properly implemented. Ambiguity can create confusion and instigate a blame game, leading to a loss of trust. A breakdown in a relationship can then affect the functioning of the organization. There are many benefits of proper and clear communication. Communication becomes very effective when the juniors' employees feel that the superiors are interested in them and consider their views. In this, it is very heartening to note that almost 3/4th of the supervisors is in constant dialogue with their employees. This includes personal problems reported by more than 50% of the superiors. Work in the office can be affected by problems faced by employees back at home. Solving them leads to an increase in a relationship of trust and improvement in productivity of works done in the office. A friendly working environment and good relationship between staffs are very important. A lot of it has to do with the rapport between the superiors and their junior staff. In this case, Superior's eagerness to have a dialogue and ability to listen to problems other than work is a very good sign of a healthy working environment created by skilful

management. Female Superiors, therefore, appear to be quite efficient in their job and have showcased good leadership qualities.

**Measures to Improve Work Ethics for Women Employees**

Good communication skills and concern for the employees from their Superiors are very important. However, the latter themselves are constrained by the organisation's policies in their effort to help their employees. These policies again reflect the general debate regarding empowerment in society. At the same time, progressive policies can go a great way in improving the workforce's efficiency. For female workers, two important needs are maternity leave and the availability of crèches in the workplace.

*Maternity leave* is a facility that has been mentioned in the Indian Constitution itself. Article 42 of the Directive Principles of State Policy states that "the State shall make provision for securing just and humane conditions to working and for maternity relief." Important laws in this regard are Maternity Benefit Act 1961, the Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948 (ESIA), Central Civil Services Rules, 1972, and the Maternity (Amendment) Bill 2017, which has become an Act. Maternity leave is available to all eligible female employees in the office. According to the Government of India, every female employee is eligible for maternity leave of 6 months. This is the law, and it is good to know that this law has been reported to be working in the institutions visited in this study. Almost all the female employees have been given maternity leave, with a few not responding presumably because no one under such Superiors had applied for it.

The facility of crèches in the workplace is something for which there is a lot of support regarding its importance—having a crèche in the workplace allows women to be close to their children. A great deal of mental stress that every working woman must endure by being far from their children can be removed. Removal of that stress improves work productivity which is very good for the organization. It is, therefore, quite disappointing that this facility is not provided in the institutions surveyed. In the Maternity (Amendment) Bill 2017, which was passed, provisions were made where companies with more than 50 workers must set up crèches within office premises. However, this is a very recent development, and many may not know the provision. As such, there has not been a large-scale demand in the state of Meghalaya. As such, the institutions have decided to avoid implementing the provision. More awareness can go a long way in bringing about this change. The Superiors can play a constructive role in this by making the employees aware of their rights. However, that would conflict with their superiors, which may be against it because of costs considerations. It would appear that the Superiors have therefore decided to avoid that situation. Demand from the employees themselves can be the way to put pressure. And when the facility is finally provided, it will be a very good thing not just for the female employees but also for the organisation.

A very important form of gender discrimination in wage disparity. A common theme across many studies on women's work participation is that women are grossly underpaid compared to their male counterparts (e.g., Gadre and Mahalle, 1985; Diwan, 1995; Sobha and Reddy, 2003; Singh et al., 2005). It is, therefore, very heartening to see that in this particular study, equal wages and other

allowances are given to the male and female employees. Gender discrimination in terms of wages is thus absent in this study.

As for the actual performance of their duties, the Superiors are quite satisfied with their female employees. According to almost 80% of the superiors' female employees don't make excuses for not doing their work. Delay in submitting the work/missing deadlines is a common feature. It is also a source of frustration for Superiors whose own deadlines get pushed because of a delay from those under them. This is made worse when excuses are peddled for delays. Thus, the employees are upfront about it is a good sign of their commitment and dedication to the work. Hence, there is satisfaction.

**Table: 4** Performance of women vis-à-vis men

| Women performance vis-à-vis men | Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Do Women employees achieve their target well in time than men? | No Reply | 1 | 2.0 |
| | Always | 13 | 29.0 |
| | Sometimes | 16 | 36.0 |
| | Mostly | 15 | 33.0 |
| Are women employees are more dedicated and committed than men? | Definitely True | 9 | 18.0 |
| | Mostly True | 31 | 62.0 |
| | Sometimes True | 8 | 16.0 |
| | False | 2 | 4.0 |

Source: Fieldwork

At the same time, female employees are on par with their male employees in terms of performance. Whether in terms of achievement of targets or dedication and commitment to their work, female employees consistently outperform males in more than half of the cases (see Table 4). In 30% of the cases, females always outperform their male counterparts. These are what one can call star employees. These generally are working under a Superintendent or an Under Secretary. In the remaining cases, female employees perform better from time to time than their male employees except in a couple of cases as reported by an SDO (Sub Divisional Officer) and a Sub-Inspector. This feature is reflected in the female employee's dedication and commitment to the organization and work, which, except for a few employees, is always more than the male employees. Thus, when any work is given to female employees, they put in extra effort to get it done. Motivation among the female employees does seem to be very high. When work does not get completed on time, it is mostly because of family problems. This already discussed earlier is a common feature: employees are not averse to bringing such problems to the Superiors. Such openness is very good to find solutions to problems, again revealing the safe environment in which the female employees find themselves.

**Gender differences**

Dissatisfaction in the workplace is a common occurrence. The case in the institutions taken in this study is demonstrated by the fact that more than one-third of the superiors admitted that they find it difficult to handle different categories of employees. As has already been shown above, there is a discrepancy in terms of the benefits that staffs of different categories receive. Those who are non-regular appear not to enjoy the benefits, whether in terms of retirement, career advancement, or loan facility. Another 20% of the employees gave no reply, which is a good indicator of reluctance to admit their inability to manage the difficulties. This raises two important points: not all Superiors are adept at

managing the problems that arise in the workplace, and there are underlying grievances in the workplace itself. Both the situations are not desirable. The problems seem to come from the female employees since almost 2/3rd of the Superiors believe that men are mostly more efficient than their women counterparts. However, difficulties in the workplace could be for other reasons. As already mentioned, benefits and facilities are not provided to all. This could be the source of the difficulties. In this case, it is the different categories of workers rather than gender itself, creating discontentment and difficulties for the Superiors.

When asked about their opinion on male employees, almost 1/3rd of the Superiors had no response. Those that did respond cited hardworking (26%), dedicated (12%), and cooperative (6%) as the positive attributes of male employees. When it comes to women employees, almost half of the Superiors had no response on the positive attributes of the female employees. The attributes that did get mentioned were in descending order are efficient (12%), hardworking (10%), and energetic (4%). There is a difference in attributes based on gender: men are hardworking, and women are efficient. An interesting thing to note is that efficiency is not mentioned among male workers, while hardworking is mentioned among both males and females. Therefore, additional attributes are found among female employees compared to males and may give them an edge over their counterparts.

Thus, while Superiors can maintain a cordial relationship with all employees in the workplace, challenges persist. These challenges have less to do with their leadership skills than structural issues. Nevertheless, it demonstrates women's capacity to take leadership positions and fulfil their responsibilities. More support from the policy initiatives will only be strengthened further.

**Problems faced by women employees**

Almost 2/3rd of the women employees has not received an opportunity to define the long-term objectives and direction of the company. This must be to do with employees' positions and a very rigid work structure. However, apart from that, there do not seem to be many complaints from employees. Less than 20% reported facing any problem in the workplace, whether it was harassment from superiors or colleagues, gender inequality, low wages for women, or lack of training facilities. There is also adequate security, which is crucial, especially for female employees, as reported by almost 70%. The only problem mentioned by 20% of the women employees is no promotion for women (See Table 3.11).

Gender inequality was not found to be a major problem in the study. However, women employees have reported that performance and promotion are not linked. The issue is, therefore, systemic rather than gender-specific. However, since the number of women employees mentioning the lack of promotion specifically for women is less, this seems to be a personal issue rather than a generic one. Performance could be an issue for these employees who are unhappy with a lack of promotion.

The issue of sexual harassment is particularly a sensitive one for female employees. In the study done by Kumari (2014) in Rourkela, India, it was a very serious concern. Various reports have also revealed that sexual harassment is a concern in Meghalaya. Therefore, it is very heartening to note that almost all have not experienced any sexual harassment. There are though two female employees who

revealed that they had faced sexual harassment. This is a very serious issue, and with the Internal Complaints Committee being mandatory in every institution, hopefully, that has been reported. The rest, fortunately, have not gone through such an ordeal.

**Table: 4** Problem faced by women employees

| Factor | Response | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Any problem faced by women employees | No response | 37 | 37.0 |
| | Yes | 21 | 21.0 |
| | No | 42 | 42.0 |
| Harassment by superiors | No response | 100 | 100.0 |
| | Yes | 0 | 0.0 |
| | No | 0 | 0.0 |
| Harassment by colleagues | No response | 100 | 100.0 |
| | Yes | 0 | 0.0 |
| | No | 0 | 0.0 |
| Lack of training facilities for women | No response | 100 | 100.0 |
| | Yes | 0 | 0.0 |
| | No | 0 | 0.0 |
| Gender inequality | No response | 100 | 100.0 |
| | Yes | 0 | 0.0 |
| | No | 0 | 0.0 |
| No promotion of women | No response | 79 | 79.0 |
| | Yes | 21 | 21.0 |
| | No | 0 | 0.0 |
| Low wages for women | No response | 100 | 100.0 |
| | Yes | 0 | 0.0 |
| | No | 0 | 0.0 |

Source: Fieldwork

It is not surprising that 90% of the female employees stated that they felt proud to be part of the organisation. Moreover, almost 80% felt that their situation after the last two years of service has remained the same or improved. Less than 10% feel that it has got worse. For these few, personal satisfaction regarding certain aspects of the work or organisation may be an issue. The rest, though, do not share the sentiments.

Finally, when the female employees were asked about their superiors, very few had complaints about their superiors. Most of them had good opinions about their superiors and described them as approachable, helpful, understanding, good, cooperative, compassionate, hardworking, and warm. Of these helpful is the one who got mentioned a lot with other positive attributes. The same was for the subordinates. None had any complaints about their subordinates and described them as cooperative and friendly.

In terms of personal relationships, the women employees seem to have built a good working environment with their superiors and subordinates. What is lacking is an incentive system and career advancement linked to that. That will help in the growth and development of the female employees and bring immense benefit to the organisation.

**Conclusion:**

Formal sector employment, especially in the public sector, is highly sought after because of job security and good pay. Women employees are a conspicuous feature in this sector, whether it is the capacity of a Superior or working under them. The fact that many have been working in this sector for a very long time indicates the long-standing traditions of women empowerment that are present in society. Entry into the workforce, however, is half the battle won. Many challenges exist in the workplace itself. In this particular case, it seems that the challenges are more systemic rather than gender-specific. Job security, benefits, and other facilities like the constitution of ICC, Grievance Redress Committee, etc., are lacking for many women employees. There is no link between performance and promotion, creating an attitude of apathy among many. This is, however, not because of gender discrimination but the increasing informalisation of the public sector. For women looking to join the formal sector, the challenges brought out by this will be immense in the future.

Regarding women's empowerment, the situation appears to be quite satisfactory for those working in the formal sector. The situation for those working in the informal sector may differ as the women found in this sector belong to the weaker socio-economic sections of society. Women empowerment is not complete if it is concentrated only in the upper strata of society. Therefore, the next chapter will analyse the situation of women working in the informal sector.

**Finding:**

The findings on women in formal employment can again be divided into those from the responses of Superiors and those from Employees.

*Superiors*

1. Superiors are experienced and well-educated. Both these factors have helped them develop a good understanding of the workings of the institutions in which they are embedded. Supervisors manage between 1 to 20 employees at any single point in time. There are a few supervisors who have more than 40 employees. However, their number is less, and they are probably much older and senior in position, allowing them to hold more responsibility. In either case, the number of male and female employees under a given supervisor is almost equal, demonstrating that male employees have no qualms working under female supervisors. Even if they were to harbour such misgivings, the institutions would ensure gender parity.

2. The Superiors seem to be acutely aware of the special difficulties that female employees face. Very few Superiors make their female employees take shifts. They are also in constant dialogue with their employees. Moreover, the employees seem to be responding in return. The performance of the female was reported to be satisfactory, and in some instances, they outperformed their male counterparts. They are eager to support each other, and when they have issues, they are not to bring such problems to their superiors. Such openness is very good to find solutions to problems, again revealing the safe environment in which the female employees find themselves. However, female employees are reticent when it comes to taking career opportunities. A possible reason could be that taking such opportunities might entail some

sacrifices on the personal front. The expectations to conform to gender roles seem to be quite strong. Though, provisions are in place to ensure gender parity: equal wages and other allowances are given to male and female employees. Not all the needs, though, are provided by the institution.

3.  The female employees can avail maternity leave, but crèches are still not in place. Safety measures are not in place for all female employees. The job is not available to everyone in health facilities and is limited to those under the monthly wage category (regular employees). There seems to be reluctance on the part of the institution to reward and provide incentives for the employees in general and women employees in particular. The career development program is offered to only a very few. Employees are also not offered opportunities to use their knowledge and skill in the production process or an opportunity to participate in management's decisions. Initiatives for improving the living standard of its employees are limited to loans for housing loans and vehicles, which is just a form of engendering indebtedness. Incentives and promotions are also not available to many. This has the effect of restricting the career advancement opportunities of certain employees who may be better than their current positions. Career advancement, in that case, depends more on seniority than on any other measure.

4.  Despite all the shortcomings, female employees are very cooperative with the management. However, instead of indicating a cordial working atmosphere, this could be attributed to the organization's lack of a grievance redress mechanism. Thus, there seems to be a paradoxical situation in the institutions surveyed. There appears to exist in the workplace a good working environment between employees and superiors who are very helpful. At the same time, there is a lack of benefits for many, and that are available are only for regular staff. Shortcomings among Superiors are not absent, with the inability to manage difficulties being one of them.

5.  As for the positive attributes of male and female employees, there is a difference in terms of attributes based on gender: while men are hardworking, women are efficient. An interesting thing to note is that efficiency is not mentioned among male workers, while hardworking gets mentioned among both males and females. Therefore, additional attributes are found among female employees compared to males and may give them an edge over their counterparts. So, while institutionally they are restricted, supervisors try their best to look after the female employees. More policy and institutional level changes are required to bring in further improvements in the working conditions of the employees, especially women.

*Women Employee*

1.  The important designations held by the women employees were UDA, LDA, peon, assistant superintendent, casual, typist, etc. They are quite senior, above 40 years, and have worked in their institution for a long time (the average length of service is 16 years). They are mostly graduates, which seem to be the minimum requirements for getting a job, and are married. Women employees are educationally and economically better off than their spouses and live in nuclear families. The big size of the family, more than 5 members, is an issue. In terms of

preference of work or family, women employees choose the latter, making them vulnerable and economically dependent on their husbands.

2. Women employees have a good relationship with their superiors and colleagues. Ass revealed by the discussion on superiors, again, institutional constraints appear here. The freedom to try out new methods, i.e., any new method or technique that can improve efficiency, is not available. Also, the Superiors are not very receptive when it comes to the employees' suggestions. Crèche is also not available; at grievance redress committee is absent in the institution. However, on the brighter side, material left is a general policy; superiors are helpful regarding work-related problems, few employees have shifted, and many have no issues in terms of transport, children, home, or any other.

3. As for problems in the workplace, very few women employees had experienced any problem, whether it was harassment from superiors or colleagues, gender inequality, low wages for women, or lack of training facilities. They had very few complaints about their superiors as well. Most of them had good opinions about their superiors and described them as approachable, helpful, understanding, good, cooperative, compassionate, hardworking, and warm, among others. The same was for the subordinates. None had any complaints about their subordinates and described them as cooperative and friendly. In terms of personal relationships, the women employees seem to have built a good working environment with their superiors and subordinates.

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