

## **GENDER INEQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY**

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### **Abstract**

Women are an integral part in every society. The status of women in society is directly linked with social and cultural traditions, stages of economic development achieved, educational levels, attitude of the society towards women, social and religious taboos, women's own awareness and political attainments for women in society. Such factors affect the national and also regional characteristics of the status of women. The economic status of women is determined by the role played by them in carrying on economic and non-economic activities in society. The nature and type of economic and non-economic role played by women have undergone continued transformation in accordance with the changes in socio-economic factors, education levels and technological developments and with the changing concepts regarding the extent to which women's contribution is desirable and necessary. The necessity of improvement of status of women has been recognized all over the world as an important aspect of national progress and development. It is also felt that the problem of poverty cannot be tackled without providing opportunities of productive employment to women. Productive employment to women would provide necessary economic base and improve their social status. But it is still a fact that women in many countries of the world are facing discriminatory attitude in varying degrees on ground of sex in employment and working conditions. Even after several years of planned development in India, the status of women in our country is low and their socio-economic conditions are much more depressed than that of men. Women's empowerment and their full participating on the basis of equality in all spheres of society are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace (IV World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995).

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### **Introduction**

Women are the nucleus of our civilization. They have different roles to play in the ever changing social set-up. Women's development is directly related with the nation development. With the dawn of independence our constitution guaranteed gender equality and a large number of schemes and programmes have been initiated for women's development. But the Indian women have to survive in a complex area of socio-cultural, historical, political economic realities.

The International recognition of the status and the problems of women all over the world have resulted in the United Nations declaring 1975 as the international Women's year and the period between 1975 and 1985 as Women's Decade. These are recommendation of the United Nations World Conference (Mexico, 1975) to initiate plans for raising the status of women and for ensuring their full involvement and integration in the process of development at all levels. In India, the appointment of the National Committee on the status of women in 1972 and the publication of its report in 1975 marked the first official attempt to study and recommended changes to improve women's position in society. Declaring 1975 as "Year of women" by the United Nations, since then there is increased concern of women's sufferings and their empowerment in the society (Medel-Anonuevo: 1995). Very recently the UNDP has brought out its human Development Report 2003, which speaks about the millennium development goals. It lists eight goals out of which the third goal to be achieved is gender equality and empowerment of women. In the budget presented before the parliament for the 2004-05, the Union Finance Minister has spoken about "gender budgeting".

### **Concept of Women Empowerment**

In India for the first time in 19<sup>th</sup> century women empowerment movement began under the auspices of Brahma Samaj. Between 1910 and 1920 the number of social organizations for women increased rapidly. Mahila Samities, Women Clubs, Ladies Societies, etc., were formed in different parts of the country linking together women all over India. Activities of these organizations were centred on three fronts namely, health, education and employment. **Swami Vivekananda** summed up the national problems in India in two words: the women and the people. He traced the downfall of India to the continued because of neglecting our women.

Women empowerment came to be associated with social justice and equality. This was real barrier for the feminists and women's movement to grab and thrash the government, law makers, and implementers of laws and point out lacunae in social and political structure which were responsible for women being so powerless. The women groups started evolving strategies to achieve the two goals i.e., equality and social justice. Without further digressing into the issue of empowerment of women whether considered in absolute term or in comparison to men, it is concluded that women's fight is not against men but against the system of patriarchy and all its manifestations. Equality in social systems is a necessary condition for empowerment of women; however it is not sufficient for their development; as development and empowerment are not synonymous. Development refers to "progress of an individual/group in economic, social, political and cultural context" whereas empowerment is defined as "distribution of social power and resources in favour of women".

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people to gain control over their own lives and communities in their society. Empowerment occurs within sociological, psychological, economic spheres and at various levels, such as individual, group, and community and challenges our assumptions about the status quo, asymmetrical power relationships and social dynamics.

Women empowerment is a global issue, which has gained momentum in recent decades. In India, besides ratification of international conventions, there are provisions in the constitution and several Legislative Acts have been passed to ensure women empowerment. It however, appears that on this front the situation on ground is far from satisfactory. The position of women and their status in any society is an index of its civilization. Women are to be considered as equal partners in the process of development. But, because of centuries of exploitation and subjugation, Indian women have remained at the receiving end. In this context, in order to provide a big push, Institutional support is necessary to empower Indian women in general and rural women in particular. Women empowerment demands a "Life-cycle" approach where empowerment is viewed as a process and not as an event, which challenges traditional power equations and relations. Empowerment in its simplest form means redistribution of power that challenges the male dominance. This does not, however, mean that the empowerment process adopts an antagonists approach. It is only to enable women to supplement and coordinate with men. Empowerment is an active process of enabling women to realize their identity, potentiality and power in all spheres of their lives (Sharma: 1992).

### **Indicators of Empowerment**

There are several indicators of empowerment. At the individual level, participation in crucial decision-making process, ability to prevent violence, self-confidence and self esteem, improved health and nutrition conditions and at the community level, existence of women's organizations, increased number of women leaders, involvement of women in designing development tools and application of appropriate technology, etc. are very crucial. At national level the indicators are, for example, awareness of her social and political rights, adequate representation in legislative bodies, and integration of women in particular in national development plans, etc.

### **Types of Empowerment**

Therefore, the empowerment of women may be divided into following types: (i) Economic Empowerment, (ii) Social Empowerment (iii) Political Empowerment (iv) Personal Dimension of Empowerment, (v) Familial Empowerment (vi) Organisational Empowerment and (vii) Political Empowerment. Improvement in economic status is a more visible indicator of women empowerment. This naturally gets reflected in improved social, political and cultural status of women. Self-confidence and self-esteem of women proceed simultaneously with their empowerment. The political empowerment can be defined as the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in shaping and sharing of power and in the value given by society to this role of women. The recognition of women's political equality in the Indian constitution was a radical departure, not only from the inherited norms of traditional Indian Society, but also from the political norms of most advanced countries at that time.

### **Components of Women Empowerment**

Empowerment of women involves many things- economic opportunity, property rights, political representation, social equality, personal rights and so on. The Indian society is a patriarchal system in which women's position within the structure and duties towards the family precede their rights as individuals. Many who argue for empowerment of women do so either with or without a full understanding of the conflicts between the historical and contemporary status of women in the patriarchy and the goals of empowerment. Certainly we may track a great many changes that have occurred in the direction of change in the status of women in India but women have yet to achieve or realize many of the ideal stages of social, psychological, economic and political empowerment. Hence, it is certainly more appropriate to define empowerment as a process rather than an end-point. Empowerment by means of education, literacy or modest income-generating projects is clearly insufficient to ameliorate the prospects for a higher quality of life for women. The process of empowerment is taking place at so many levels that it is quite difficult to gauge the actual nature and extent of empowerment in improving status of women. Certainly the process is entangled in the struggles of civil society against the state, and under the weight of historical practice and on going debates over the appropriate role of ideologies. Women constitute 48% of the Indian population, but when we often sermonize human rights, we often forget that women as human beings are also entitled to fundamental human rights. We have denied and continue to deny them basic human rights. Even after 70 years of independence these women continue to live in a state of neglect and exploitation. The concept of women empowerment was introduced at the International Women's Conference at Nairobi in 1985. The term empowerment was defined as "a distribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women". Empowerment is not something which could be made available in the form of a capsule to those whom we think is in need of it. It is not just a concept that could be defined with the help of some universally accepted parameters. Empowerment is a process and includes the following components:

- I. Equal access to opportunities for using society's resources.
- II. Prohibition of gender discrimination in thought and practice.
- III. Freedom from violence.
- IV. Economic independence.
- V. Participation in all decision-making bodies.
- VI. Freedom of choice in matters relating to one's life.

### **Objectives of Women Empowerment**

Empowerment actually is a process that addresses all sources and structures of power. It is not enough to provide only education to women but they require access to the labour market and employment also. It will however not transform any gender and caste relations. The process has to work on an individual as well as on a collective level. Women have to be organized and acknowledged as a political force also. The process has to challenge both gender and social power relations. It is a process that is much about education, it does not come out of school books. It is a knowledge which has to be expanded. More importantly people should start thinking critically and question it. It generates new notions about power itself. Otherwise when women enter the public structures, given

the existing ideology, they operate with the so-called male notions of power which is presented as domination, patronage etc. The question that needs to be answered is that in a society where men control the destiny of women how is it possible to empower women? Before we discuss practical measures and associated difficulties in the process of empowerment of women, let us look at what does the national policy for empowerment of women in India do?

The national policy of empowerment of women has set certain clear cut goals and objectives: The goal of this policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The policy will be widely disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals. Specifically, the objectives of this policy include:

- (i) Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.
- (ii) The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres- political, economic, social, cultural and civil.
- (iii) Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation.
- (iv) Equal access to women to healthcare, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational, safety, social security and public office, etc.
- (v) Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.
- (vi) Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- (vii) Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
- (viii) Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child.
- (ix) Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

The social welfare policies are built on the premise that women lack power, they are denied on basic rights as individuals, limited income and access to resources. It is clear that efforts to improve income and living conditions (the basis of the early social welfare approach) are insufficient in empowering women unless considerations of the basic patriarchal features of society are brought into the equation and the responsibility of states to address its negative effects. Policy makers must also take note of the resistance that women have faced in their entry into public space, and coordinate vigorous efforts to continue legal reform and enhance women's participation in social, economic and political spheres. As we see the discrimination is deep rooted and perpetuated through patriarchy the task to empower women becomes even more challenging. While women in India have the legal right to own land, very few do. For those women who do own land, ownership rarely translates into control of the land or of the assets flowing from the land. The policy prescriptions and legislations assure the equality of right over land for women in India, such as, the Article 25 of the Indian Constitution permits freedom to all. Indian constitution mandates gender equality. The theoretically non-discriminatory nature of law in practice cannot challenge the religious and customary law that guide issues and ideologies on status and treatment of women, property rights related to inheritance, marriage, divorce etc. The constitutional provisions and amendments to the inheritance laws are not sufficient in themselves to change the patterns of rural land ownership. Increasing women's property rights not just in theory but in practice can positively contribute towards the welfare of poor and would help in bringing about effective change in the nature of current status of poverty as women are more likely to spend income from land on education and meeting the basic needs of children and family. In fact the right over property and land can be an important source of alleviating poverty from rural India.

Women as an independent target group, account for 495.74 million and represent 48.3% of the country's population, as per the 2001 census. No country can achieve its potential without adequately investing in and developing the capabilities of women. In the interest of long-term development it is necessary to facilitate their empowerment. In many developing countries, including India, women have much less access to education, jobs, income and power than men. Even after five and half decades of planned development Indian women, except a

privileged minority, have not achieved expected success in the mainstream of life. If we cannot improve the status and role of women, then our country will be unable to compete over the world.

### **Different Schemes for Safety of Women**

**Mother and Child Tracking System (MCTS):** The Mother and Child Tracking System was launched in 2009, helps monitor the health care system to ensure that all mothers and their children have access to a range of services, including pregnancy care, medical care during delivery, and immunizations. The system consists of a database of all pregnancies registered at health care facilities and birth since 1<sup>st</sup> December, 2009.

**Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY), Conditional Maternity Benefit (CMB):** It is a scheme sponsored by the national government for pregnant and lactating women age 19 and over for their first two live births. The programme, which began in October 2010, provides money to help ensure the good health and nutrition of the recipients.

**Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls–Sabla:** The Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls–Sabla is an initiative launched in 2012 that targets adolescent girls. The scheme offers a package of benefits to at-risk girls between the ages of 10 and 19. It is being offered initially as a pilot programme in 200 districts. The programme offers a variety of services to help young women become self-reliant, including nutritional supplementation and education, health education and services, and life skills and vocational training.

**Rashtriya Mahila Kosh:** Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (The National Credit Fund for Women) was created by the Government of India in 1993. Its purpose is to provide lower income women with access to loans to begin small businesses.

**Priyadarshini:** Priyadarshini, initiated in April 2011, is a programme that offers women in seven districts access to self-help groups.

In addition to the above schemes, other Women Empowerment Schemes are:

1. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme
2. One Stop Centre Scheme
3. Women Helpline Scheme
4. Ujjawala: A Comprehensive Scheme for Prevention of trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation and Re-integration of Victims of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation
5. Working Women Hostel
6. Ministry approves new projects under Ujjawala Scheme and continues existing projects
7. SWADHAR Greh (A Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances)
8. Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)
9. Nari Shakti Puraskar
10. Awardees of Stree Shakti Puruskar, 2014 & Awardees of Nari Shakti Puruskar
11. Awardees of Rajya Mahila Samman & Zila Mahila Samman
12. Mahila police Volunteers
13. Mahila E-Haat
14. Mahila Shakti Kendras (MSK)

### **Education as a Tool for Women Empowerment**

Women empowerment came to be associated with social justice and equality. This was real barrier for the feminists and women's movement to grab and thrash the government, law makers, and implementers of laws and point out lacunae in social and political structure which were responsible for women being so powerless. The women groups started evolving strategies to achieve the two goals i.e., equality and social justice. Without further

digressing into the issue of empowerment of women whether considered in absolute term or in comparison to men, it is concluded that women's fight is not against men but against the system of patriarchy and all its manifestations. Equality in social systems is a necessary condition for empowerment of women; however it is not sufficient for their development; as development and empowerment are not synonymous. Development refers to "progress of an individual/group in economic, social, political and cultural context" whereas empowerment is defined as "distribution of social power and resources in favour of women".

Education is central to the process of sustainable development. The role of education in empowerment is not only learning of three 'R's (reading, writing and arithmetic) but includes:

- Raising awareness;
- Critical analysis of various structures and
- Acquiring knowledge for empowerment at all levels.

Education should include not only formal education but also skill training and functional literacy. First and foremost of all is to demystify the myth that girls are not sent to school because they are girls and in view of their primary role as mothers and housewives. Girls and women are not only housewives and mothers but they are also 'workers' in the economic sense. They should be educated to perform an indispensable role in the home and in the household economy, as well as for bringing enlightenment and emancipation. Empowerment of women through education will develop:

- Self-esteem and self-confidence of women;
- A positive image of women by recognizing their contribution to the society, polity and economy;
- Ability to think critically;
- Decision-making abilities and action through collective process;
- Choices in areas like education, employment and health;
- Equal participation in development process;
- Knowledge and skill for economic independence and
- Access to legal literacy and information relating to their rights.

### Participation of Women

Participation of women in economic and non-economic activities has been universally recognized as an important element in the adoption of the small family norm, essential for the achievement of the twin goals of economic development and population planning. Such as recognition, however, presupposes not only that existence of a conflict between the economic employment of women and child rearing but also an association between employment of women and their socio-economic status. Social change is possible only by empowering and educating women. **Jawaharlal Nehru** once said, "To awaken the people, it is women who is meant to be awakened, once she is on the move, the family moves, village moves and the nation moves". **Swami Vivekananda** also once said, "There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing". Likewise no nation can flourish keeping half of its population in negligence and ignorance, as women constitute half of its human capital. A modern society cannot bring all round development without utilizing the talent of its women.

### Women in Arunachal Pradesh

In Arunachal Pradesh, various tribal communities are at different stages of development; as such the status of women differs from community to community. However, in general the position of women in Arunachal Pradesh is respectable but not very high. The prevalence of polygamy, victim of bride price, sex abuse and child marriage were quite in common. It had no doubt lowered their position. They were generally devoid of equal political and property rights. Today, the position of tribal women has changed. They have come to know that they are exploited by their male counterparts. The educated women are coming forward to shoulder the equal responsibility with the men for the socio-economic development of Arunachal Pradesh. But the realities of women in rural Arunachal Pradesh are difficult to comprehend. Women, most of the times, are even deprived of some of the

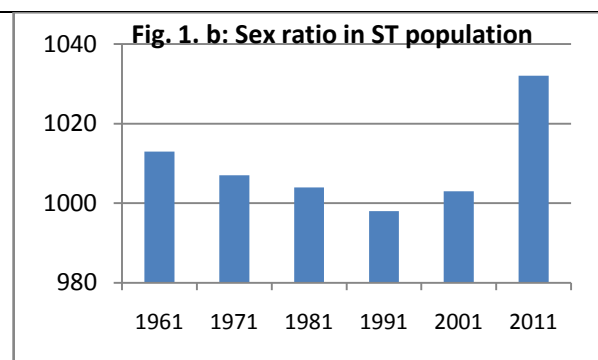
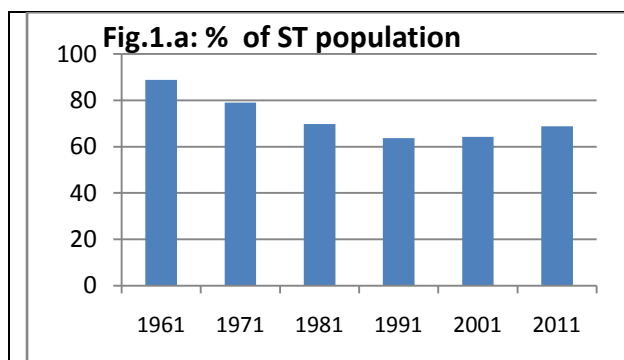
fundamental human rights and this denial is justified often in the name of tradition. In rural areas, women are generally relegated mainly to household duties and cheap labour in agricultural activities.

Tribal societies of the state are generally characterized by the traditional types of work, often considered to be less ‘productive’ and more community-based. Such a society is considered as ‘an aggregate of social relations’ rather than ‘set of individuals’ and form its ‘core-identity’ in a specifically confined set of house – hold environment that compels the people to alter the work-pattern. Every society accords social status to women members as per its own perspective. The status and role of women in tribal society in Arunachal Pradesh is also governed by their own norms and values. The tribal family is patriarchal. Kinship is recognized on the side of men. The tribal women’s status is lower than that of men. She faces many problems in all walks of her life simply because of being a female. In this male dominated society, women are considered inferior to men. They are meant to depend on and under subjugation of men. The family in which she was born as a daughter does not consider her as a permanent abode. She is looked upon as a transient member to be handed over on marriage to her in-law’s family. She cannot have a share in the immovable property at all. Decision making and exercise of authority go under power of men. Thus, the tribal women are not recognized by their social system regarding their freedom and rights. The future of children depends, by and large, upon the mother, who generally stays at home and takes care of their children’s health and education. This is particularly so in our country where society and life of people are mold by traditional and spiritual foundations. Though women are the key factor in the process of change of development, yet in many times they are underestimated. For example, women in this traditional societies take equal part with men in producing foodstuffs, in addition to endless household works, yet their works are not given due weightage. In rural areas women participate equally or even more with men in various agricultural operations (Mandal, 2010). The census wise silent features of S T population in the State are shown in Table-1 and Fig.1.a and Fig.1.b.

**Table-1: Silent Feature of S T Population in Arunachal Pradesh (Census wise)**

Census	% of ST population to total population	Sex ratio in ST population
1961	88.76	1013
1971	79.02	1007
1981	69.82	1004
1991	63.65	998
2001	64.22	1003
2011	68.78	1032

Source: Different Issues of Census Report



The census in Arunachal Pradesh has been being conducted regularly after every decade since 1961 (First census). It is a thinly populated state. The percentage of S T population and ST sex ratio are shown in the above Table-

1. The sparsely inhabited Arunachal Pradesh is a predominantly tribal inhabited State. Obviously in the past, the tribesmen purely inhabited it. During 1961, the tribal people formed 88.76% of total population. The percentages of S.T. population were 79.02 in 1971, 69.82 in 1981, 63.65 in 1991, 64.22 in 2001 and 68.78 in 2011 censuses. ST population in different census years reflects that it has been declining continuously from 1961 to 1991 again it has been increasing from 1991 to 2011. This situation can be explained that from the very beginning there was a large number of inflow of non-tribal people for contact labour and regular jobs but from 1991 census the local tribal people have come to engage in contact labour and regular job on account of which there is a small number of inflow of non-tribal people i.e., inflow is lesser than outflow. More non-tribal people are going on superannuation.

It is interesting to find that the female population of scheduled tribes has always been higher than that of male population excepting 1991 census. While the generality in this case needs to be answered through systemic study of population genetics, this might be worthwhile to mention here that female sex is generally stronger than that of male. Thus, the female lives longer than male. This could be supported by the evidence and the fact that in the advanced western countries, the proportion of women in total population is higher than that of males. Similarly, the number of female population in the scheduled tribe population in the state has always been higher than that of the male population. While prenatal mortality could be a valid factor in general, but lack of maternity care, access to medical services in general and absence of the same in the interior areas, low awareness among females, hesitation to visit male gynecologist, superstitions during pregnancy, lack of care at home led to increasing chances of infant mortality in the instant case. Availability of data in this regard is the limitation of the study.

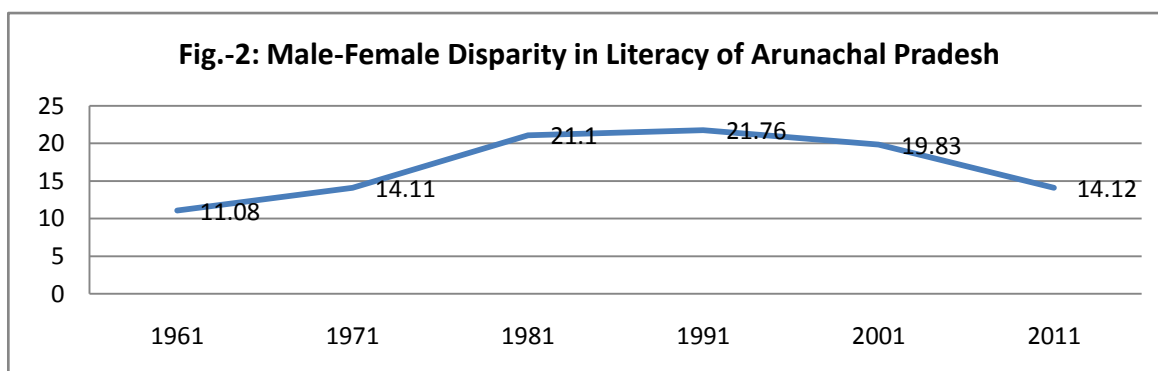
**Educational Scenario in Arunachal Pradesh**

Till independence literacy rate was only less than 1%. In the succeeding five years plans, an increasing percentage of expenditure on education has given good results despite of formidable constraints like inaccessibility of territory, people’s unawareness of the need of education and traditional dependence on children for domestic and field work. Thus, with increasing emphasis through successive plans the State has achieved commendable progress in the field of education. The literacy rate census wise from 1961 to 2011 is shown in Table-2 as census started first in the state from 1961. Male-Female Disparity is also shown here and in Figure-2.

**Table-2: Census wise Literacy Rate in Arunachal Pradesh**

Census Year	Person	Male	Female	Male-Female Disparity
1961	7.13	12.5	1.42	11.08
1971	11.29	17.82	3.71	14.11
1981	25.55	35.12	14.02	21.1
1991	41.59	51.45	29.69	21.76
2001	54.74	64.07	44.24	19.83
2011	66.95	73.69	59.57	14.12

Source: Census Report, Arunachal Pradesh, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011





From Table-2 and Fig.-2, it is observed that the good fruit of education in the State is achieved though the females are lagging behind the males. Higher education in Arunachal Pradesh needs a far-reaching structural reconstruction. We get more or less same picture in case of Arunachal Pradesh. Male-female disparity is highest in 1991 and after that it is decreasing. It is good sign for the educational progress and empowerment of women in the state.

Arunachalee tribal women, being uneducated, indeed suffer most in their society and life. The literacy rate of Arunachal Pradesh since 1961 is shown above in the Table 2. It shows that how many women are lagging behind their male counterpart regarding education. Gender discrimination is prevailing to a great extent. This is evidenced and found in every walk of life. Gender discrimination between men and women and boys and girls take root even at the early stage of life.

### **Political Empowerment of Women in Arunachal Pradesh**

The political empowerment can be defined as the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in shaping and sharing of power and in the value given by society to this role of women. The recognition of women's political equality in the Indian constitution was a radical departure, not only from the inherited norms of traditional Indian Society, but also from the political norms of most advanced countries at that time. Thus, the women achieved the great political equality of franchise as well as right of being elected. In the constitution equality on the basis of sex becomes one of the fundamental rights.

Amendment in constitution in 1992 to strengthen the sharing of power by women at local level has opened a new chapter in the history of women's struggle for empowerment. The enactment of the 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment i.e., Panchayati Raj, in India is, no doubt a landmark event in this regard. It is important because of revolutionary measure by reserving 33 per cent seats for women at all levels in the local governance. Local governance interpreted as the active involvement of the local population within the territorial boundaries in local government is ensuring improved quality of service and leadership at the local government level. This is a significant shift in the approach towards the well being of women from 'Welfare during Fifties' to 'Development during Seventies' and to "Empowerment during Nineties".

Political empowerment at local level i.e., Panchayati Raj assumes particular importance as a means of producing democratic functioning and decision making decentralized governmental power, thereby restructuring political institutions. This development i.e., amendment in the constitution has brought the question of competitiveness of Indian women to the centre stage of controversy. In view of the majority of Indian rural women being illiterate and new in this role, this question has attracted the attention of the large number of commentators and researchers. It also presents interventions promoted through local government to reduce poverty and promote socio-economic development targeted at women and seeking to bridge gender gaps. Women in tribal society in Arunachal Pradesh are generally not allowed to participate in the tribal village councils. Thus the councils are male dominated institutions. Tribal people cannot easily think of women being a member in village council. Consequently, women are invariably discarded even today. But the introduction of Panchayat Raj at grass root and parliamentary democracy at upper layer has armed the women with voting right and political rights on the equal footing of their male counterparts. Democratic creed and ethos have introduced the concepts of election through secret ballot boxes, adult suffrage and equality before law, rise of the sense of individualism, emphasis on social justice, social equity and social welfare. All cumulated together accelerate and speed up the process of social change.

Women in the state are generally not allowed to participate in the tribal village councils. Thus, the councils are male dominated institutions. Women are generally considered as inferior and weak in decision making. In general,

women are expected to be submissive and continue to play the subordinate role in the male dominated tribal patriarchal society. But reservation policy with the principle of gender equality has played a very important role in bringing about a major socio-political change in this traditional tribal society since 2003. The results of three term elections as per the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act are depicted in following Table-3.

**Table-3: Elected Members of Three Consecutive Panchayat Elections in Arunachal Pradesh**

Year of Election	Name of Tier	Total Elected	Number of Male elected	Number of Female elected	Percentage of Elected Women
April, 2003	Gram Panchayat	9046	6485	2561	39
	Anchal Samiti	2216	1639	577	35
	Zilla Parishad	181	136	45	33
May, 2008	Gram Panchayat	7348	4167	3181	43
	Anchal Samiti	1779	1130	649	37
	Zilla Parishad	160	101	59	35
April, 2013	Gram Panchayat	7313	4378	2935	40
	Anchal Samiti	1777	1155	622	35
	Zilla Parishad	177	111	66	37

Source: Data of 2003 and 2008 from State Election Commission and data of 2013 from State Commission of Women, Itanagar.

Note: Figures of 2003 do not include the allotted strength of Tirap District, as PR elections were not held in that time.

Table-3 shows that percentage of women leadership in Gram Panchayat level was higher than Anchal and Zilla Parishad level. Arunachal Pradesh has accepted the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act gracefully by giving the political leadership space as 33% reserved for women. It was observed in three terms of election results, women occupied more than 33% of seats in all three tiers of Panchayati Raj Institutions. At Gram Panchayat level, 39 per cent of women were elected in first election and it increased to 43 per cent in 2008 and decreased to 40 percent in 2013 election. The State government is firmly committed to the preservation; development and strengthening of the Panchayati Raj Institutions throughout the state, democratic and empowerment of the state have been the guiding policy for the state government.

## Conclusion

President **A.P.J. Abdul Kalam**, said empowering women was a prerequisite for creating a good nation, “when women are empowered, society with stability is assured. Empowerment of women is essential as their thoughts and their value systems lead the development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation”. Educating both boys and girls in non-stereotyped thinking about male and female roles is critical. Women need to be empowered to become equal to men and thus have equal access to developmental resources and benefits. In order to empower women we need not only to give them more economic power but also bring changes in the entire, social, political and legal systems of the countries because these are responsible for women’s lower status in society and the main hindrance in their progress.

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