

# Women's Contribution in Household Economy with Special Reference to the Tangkhul Naga in Manipur

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## ABSTRACT

*In traditional society, domestic work is undervalued in the household economy simply because the input is all for consumption and output are non-market productions. This paper attempts to understand the contribution made by the Tangkhul Naga women in the household economy in the pre-colonial period and the changes in post- colonial period. The Tangkhul Naga women are never idle, they believed in the old maxim "if a man does not work, he shall not eat." They opined that work is livelihood and survival of the household. To accomplish works in time they wake up early and sleep late night. The household works if done by a hired hand cost money yet it is not counted when done by the women of the household even in census neglecting their contribution.*

**Keywords:** Household economy, women, Tangkhul Naga.

## Introduction

The woman who is also known as homemaker, dedication in the household economy goes unnoticed. All her comfort and leisure time are sacrificed in household work to build a happy family. Yet, people hardly acknowledged her hard work but considered it as women's duty. The concept of gender labour division is cultivated in the minds of the children in the smallest unit of society called family. The parents classified and taught their children that pan is for girls', hammer for boys that signify cooking for women and building work for men. This concept imbibed by the children, who are the constituent unit of the society becomes social norms and dictate the people generation after generations. The division of labour in the household as paid and unpaid work create the hierarchy within the household that is reflected in the lower status of women in the household as well as in the labour market. This unpaid work of women go unnoticed in conventional statistics and so women's work remains invisible that has implications for employment and welfare policies which tend to neglect women's needs. Despite the division of labour women's works have no boundaries; from kitchen to house building women are not spared. S. Kuznets (1930) pointed out that "housewives services" (as they were called at that time) constituted the largest single item left out of national accounts. The Conventional economic statistics include only the remunerated activities exchange in the market though unremunerated activities also contribute to human welfare. The key feature of traditional agrarian household is the close interdependence of consumption and

production. Part of the goods and services consumed by the population are produced and consumed without undergoing monetary transaction, this non-monetised consumption and the corresponding productive activities go unrecorded in labour statistics in national accounts (Goldschmidt-Clermont and Pagnossin-Aligisakis, 1996). This is so, for the goods and services provided to the household by unpaid household members.

The Tangkhuls in colonial period were primarily agrarian practicing hunting, fishing and gathering side by side. They used barter system as a channel to meet their needs. The intensity of household work varies according to the agricultural season. Like other Naga women the Tangkhul women have a much responsibility in household works and contributed largely to family's economy. However, no record of statistical means attempting to measure Tangkhul women's contribution in household economy is found. No attempt has been made thus far towards understanding their contribution in household economy during the colonial period. A need is therefore felt to collect information on these activities. The present paper attempts to understand the Tangkhul Naga women's contributions in household economy. The data are collected from primary source using recalled method and secondary sources. However, the time used method cannot be calculated since the study is made on the past time period.

The Tangkhuls are primarily agriculturist. In leisure time they made all kinds of handicraft

for their household used and for exchange of goods. The people developed skills in arts and crafts. The women folk are well regarded for their skills in weaving, knitting and embroidery. Besides agricultural works and making clothes, household work is indispensable for women.

### **The Tangkhul Naga Household**

Shimray (2004) defined Naga household as a social, cultural, economic and religious entity. Each household is a unit of food production, consumption, distribution and property ownership. The household consists of grandparents, parents, children, brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles in joint or extended family but most of the Tangkhul Naga families are nuclear family. The way families are organized is linked much to the relationship of economic production.

Understanding Tangkhul Naga Household Work is the primary task in studying household economy. Generally, work is any activity or spending of energy that produces services and products of values. The population census definition on work is restricted to the activities of economically productive work. Indeed, work is a defining force in people's livelihood. Here, we will examine the concept of work in the context of Tangkhul Naga society. For the Tangkhuls, household work plays a significant role in their livelihood system. To understand the concept of 'work' in the Tangkhul context, we need to understand the traditional economic systems and means of livelihood. It is also important to understand how Tangkhul Naga perceived work in relation to their social and cultural practices. In Tangkhul Naga society, work performed in a household include cooking meals, cleaning, fetching water, washing clothes, collecting firewood, looking after children, drying paddy, pounding and husking of rice, etc. This work is considered as an important economic activity of the household.

### **The Traditional Tangkhul Naga Economy**

The Tangkhul Naga economy is predominantly agrarian yet hunting and gathering always associated. They highly depend on land and its products. Major land used system in Tangkhul Naga villages is shifting cultivation 'slash-and-burn' or 'Jhum' cultivation as it is called in the north eastern region of India. The Tangkhul Naga also practiced sedentary terrace cultivation, both irrigated and wet cultivation. The people used their skills in arts and crafts and practiced barter system to meet their daily needs. They are also good in making iron equipment such as spear,

swords, and agriculture implements. They also make pottery and bake salt. These are great booster in their economy

Naga woman perform the role of a wife, mother, child-bearer, food producer and household manager. Tangkhul Naga women are required to respect and obey their husbands and clan members as they are patriarchal and patrilineal society. Women have a greater range of responsibilities, starting from household maintenance to various agricultural activities, and they have greater work burden in both as well. It is difficult to measure women's agricultural and farming work because it is closely linked up with their social roles within the family. Women's time is divided between domestic work like cleaning, preparing food, tending to the children, and chores outside the household (collection of fuel wood, fetching water, and agricultural and farming activities).

Most of the domestic affairs are in the mother's hands. Before the planting season and harvest season a women should keep food provisions ready in sufficient amount for the main agricultural seasons. In the main agricultural seasons, reciprocity of labor known as 'working guild' formed by same age cohorts is practiced. In matter of woman's responsibility on feeding the family. Horam (1977) said, "If the household go hungry or if the grain fall short due to any mismanagement of domestic affairs, the accusing fingers points at her disapprovingly." Tangkhul Naga women in the household are the first to rise before the crack of dawn and start the day's work. For Tangkhul Naga women daily life is a great deal as they try to manage all the tasks and responsibilities. Women's daily chores range from preparation of family meals, cleaning and maintenance of households, child care and looking after elderly people. Colonel Mc Cullock described Naga women in 1854: "In the grey of the morning the females of the family are astir and the village resounds with the blows of the long pestle in the wooden mortar beating out the rice from the husk. This finished, lunch is cooked both for the family and pigs. Later, the women proceed for water which they fill into bamboo tubes and bring on their backs in baskets. Then they go for firewood and this brought, they set about the internal economy of the house; that is to see to their husband's drink being in proper quantity and quality, to their spinning or weaving, or any of the other household occupations, an act in which they have no pride." (cited in Shimray, 2002).

Despite their hectic schedules, Naga women find spare time for spinning and weaving the family's clothes. In fact, weaving and knitting Naga traditional clothes for the family is an important activity and it also earns some cash income and saved money in buying for the family. The young girls usually work collectively as a 'cloth workers' guild in a particular place earlier but now they weave at their own home. These led to a new design in shawl. The art of embroidery was practiced by the hill women as early as their weaving history. On Naga shawls and ornaments Hutton wrote, "All Naga tribes have a most remarkable appreciation of the effective and picturesque in their used of color is usually an extraordinary good taste and particularly well adapted to the surroundings in which it is displayed. The designs of their clothes are conspicuous for the right use of brilliant colors, while their ornaments of black and white hornbill feathers, cowries, ivory and scarlet hair seem peculiarly well fitted to the deep green or bluish background usually afforded by the well weeded hills which is their home."

The Tangkhul women performed important ritual for food sufficiency in the household in the festival called Chumpha. In this

ritual no male can take part. On this particular day all male should leave home and woman performed the ritual by offering food to the granary deity. They invoke for the grains they have to be sufficient for the whole year. Since food is basic needs of human existence, when they have sufficient food their economy is stable. In the colonial period, what the Tangkhuls bothered for was sufficiency of food since they have little need of money as barter system was practiced. They weave raincoat called *nampho* from palm leaves. It is also used as shield to scorching sunlight while working. The western Tangkhuls known to them as *khuraonao* are much exalted for their skill in weaving; the northern people who are called *rapheinao* are famous for the salt making and pottery making. The south eastern Tangkhuls also called *kamonao* people are fine workmen of mats, *liphan* (dining table) and wooden kitchen receptacles. This entire works contribute much to the household economy but they are go unnoticed taking it for granted.

In the country like India, where society is conservative women's contribution to the household economy is conspicuous. Therefore, women's input in household activities must be counted in national economy.

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