

# Participation of Apatani Women in Socioeconomic Development of Lower Subansiri District, Arunachal Pradesh

**Yadi Nani**

Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, Neelam Taram Government College Yachuli, Keyi Panyor District, A.P

## Abstract

Female participation is essential in any socioeconomic development of society in order to achieve inclusive, equitable and sustainable growth. Despite comprising half of the global population, women have historically faced significant barriers to participating in economic, social, and political spheres. However, as the world recognizes the immense value of women's contributions, there is a growing emphasis on empowering women to take on leadership roles, access education and training, and participate in the decision-making process. Women's participation in decision-making can lead to more sustainable, equitable, and environmentally conscious development practices. From home to social, economic, and religious spheres, as well as directly or indirectly in politics, Apatani women were highly involved. This paper aims to examine the participation of Apatani women in socio-economic development within the society.

**Keywords:** Apatani, Women participation, Socio-economic, Development

## 1. Introduction

The word "development" is commonly understood to signify socioeconomic growth that occurs for the benefit of all groups of people. Women's involvement in development, especially in rural areas, is therefore commendable. "Rural development, simply means a strategy designed to improve the social and economic life of people in a rural setting and in particular it focuses on the rural poor consisting of small and marginal farmers, labourers, rural artisans and the weak vulnerable people" (William and Christopher, 2011). In rural communities, women actively participate in every step of the social, economic, and political development process. Since the beginning of human evolution, women have played a crucial part in the process of growth. The men were food gatherers during the nomadic era of human civilization, relying on what nature had to offer. In rural areas, women's participation is essential to all social, economic, and political development processes. Women often assist the men in the food collection duties. Men and women worked together to keep the house warm. Women actively participated in the transition of humans from food gatherers to food producers at the beginning of civilization.

Throughout human history, women have fulfilled a variety of roles. Because of the way society is structured, women would be expected to play a role. Women were also very important in almost every social, economic, and political field, whether directly or indirectly. Women have made significantly

greater contributions than men in some families, if we look closely. “There is no denying the fact that tribal women contribute to the economic development in more substantial way than tribal men” (D. Thakur and D.N. Thakur, 2009).

## 2. Study Area

The state of Arunachal Pradesh is located in the eastern most part of the country. It is the largest state in the North East India. The land is endowed with deep a sense of beauty in the form of a delightful expression of natural and cultural landscape, which is the very heart of this unexplored part of the earth. The climate is hot and humid at the lower altitudes and cold in the higher altitudes. Average temperature in the summer months range from 15°C to 21°C, and the state is dominated by the monsoon-induced temperature regime influenced by the Eastern Himalayan mountain system. The state is predominantly inhabited by various primitive tribal communities of Mongoloid stock. Presently, there are 26 major tribal groups and more than 100 sub groups that exhibit their distinct socio-cultural identities. The state is also home to mind blowing varieties of wildlife resources. Rare medicinal herbs also grow here. The mountain ranges are interlinked by enchanting lakes, rivers, and sprawling valleys. The area is also reflected by its historical and socio-cultural richness.

Ziro Valley is the district head-quarter of Lower Subansiri of Arunachal Pradesh. The valley lies between 93°47' E 93°55'E 27°30'N 27°36'N. The land comprising of about 32 Sq.km of cultivable areas and 1058 Sq.km. areas of the valley, is undulated by small hillocks at an elevation of 1525 meters above sea level to tall mountains ranging from 1830 to 2900 meters in altitude. The land is situated at an altitude of about 5754 feet from sea level.

The area under study comprises seven major villages located in the same valley. These are Hija, Dutta, Mudang-Tage, Hong, Bamin-Michi, Hari and Bulla (comprising Kalung, Reru, Tajang and Lempia) villages. The Hong village being the largest in the valley was once considered to be the largest village of Asia also. The entire region of Apatani valley falls within the heavy rainfall zone.

### 2.1 The People

The Apatanis are a tribal group of people living in the Ziro valley in the Lower Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh in India. The total population is approximately 67751 as per the 2011 census. The urban population is about 12,806, and the rural population is about 54945, approx. Their language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family as well as the Tibeto-Burman and North Assam groups. There are no known written records of the history of the Apatani tribes. One of their oral accounts speaks of their migration from the extreme North following the rivers of **Kuru** and **Kume**. These oral accounts are usually presented in the form of folk tales such as the **miji** and **migun**. At the small village of Yangte in Kurung Kumey district, for example, is a stone beside which the Apatanis are supposed to have held a high-jump competition on their way to their present habitat. It is also said that at the Upper Subansiri District (Dumporijo) in the Subansiri River, there is a big stone, which is called **Tanii Huwa**, named after the Apatanis who crossed the river during their course of migration.

The Apatanis are agriculturists in nature, especially in rural areas. They practice a unique agricultural system of their own, where resources are used judiciously to gain maximum production. For example, every inch of arable land available in the valley is used for cultivation. In a paddy field, the long raised land to demarcate boundaries, which is called a ridge or bund is used for millet, maize, and bean cultivation. The limited water resources are used judiciously for irrigating the entire agricultural plot. The Apatanis are known for their meticulous care-taking of their agricultural fields. For example, after

the transplantation of paddy seedlings, they repeat three cycles of weeding to ensure a weed-free field and a healthy crop. Their wet rice cultivation system and their agriculture system are extensive even without the use of any farm animals or machines, and so is their sustainable social forestry system.

### 3. Statement of the Problem

The participation of women in rural development needs critical analysis. The integration of women in the rural development process requires a multidisciplinary approach, as their problems and conditions can not be considered in isolation. Modernization and transformation of the agricultural sector provide adequate rural infrastructure and services, which are considered to be necessary prerequisite for improving the lives of rural people, especially rural women. It is seen that unless rural women get actively involved in decision-making, planning, and implementation of programmes for action, modernization could have adverse effects on their lives. The study needs several works to express justification for giving special attention to provide opportunities for rural women so that they would be capable of assuming equal responsibilities and take advantage of equal rights open to them. The study also needs to understand the ways of the rural representatives in the process of planning and making strategies. Unless development planners and strategists have the knowledge of rural dwellers, women's participation in the development process would not be altogether correct.

In the event of women's participation towards rural development, it becomes pertinent to understand the values of women as wives, mothers, sisters and caretakers. It can be done by converting all roles into expressible value, like converting their role into payable services. If the contribution of women's role in socio-economic development process is minutely observed, it would give a vivid picture about the intensity and worthiness of women's role in rural development. Their contribution may be even much more than their male counterparts.

The Apatani women are hardworking and very laborious by nature. They take active participation in household work, in all socio-economic activities, and in rural cooperative sectors, NGOs, Self Help groups, and cottage industries. They are also skillful weavers. Every festival and traditional ceremony is incomplete without participation of women. In spite of all these contributions made by the women, they fail to get due recognition. The study will examine the participation of rural women at home and also in various activities held in the areas of Ziro. The study needs to indicate the invisibility of the majority of women, who act as unpaid workers on the family farms.

The inaccessibility and understanding of women's role at remote rural area secluded by topography and communication is also a problem. Because of illiteracy of rural women, many significant role played by women may not be fully communicated for understanding only by expression. Therefore, role of rural women need extensive research, re-writing and understanding through different approaches, aside from conventional one. Women of rural areas are shy, speak very less, and introvert by nature. Research needs to be based on rural areas to understand their laboriousness, industriousness and entrepreneurship quality which arguably need more to be done. Thus, this work will present the true contribution of women in socio-economic development in rural areas.

### 4. Objectives

The main objectives of the study are:

- To assess the participation of Apatani women in socio-economic development in Lower Subansiri District.

- To identify the contribution made by rural women to society.

## **5. Database and Methodology**

This study has used both empirical and descriptive methods of investigation. It has also used exploratory and explanatory methods in terms of its perspective. The source of data collection for the present study is both primary and secondary.

The primary sources provide firsthand information using several methods like the observation method, interview method and schedules. The survey has been conducted in the sample villages of the Apatani valley of Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh covering 100 households of the study area. The primary data was also collected by preparing schedules with a written list of questions. Through face-to-face interview method, data has been collected with the help of structured interview schedule with list of questions to obtain information from various respondents, open-ended or closed-ended. Secondary data was gathered through various sources like census reports, office records, gazetteers of Arunachal Pradesh, statistical handbooks, various published and unpublished records of government and private organization, newspapers, and magazines.

## **6. The Apatani Women in Socio-Economic Development**

Women, in general, are homemakers, hard-working and dedicated to their families. In addition to homemakers, Apatani women play a crucial role in agricultural production, contributing to food security and household income. They are primary caregivers for children, the elderly, and society as a whole. Women often participate in community activities, which include water management, healthcare, and education. They are increasingly engaged in economic activities such as agriculture, gardening, weaving and handicraft, which have been in practice for ages.

### **6.1 Women's Role in Society**

Society, in simplest terms, cannot exist without women. A healthy society is determined by women's status and their role in the socio-economic arena of particular areas. To have a healthy society, women the right proportion are very important. Women play a balancing role in society by becoming an equilibrium force within the family. In society, the family is a social unit that cannot have stability without women. Women motivate their male counterpart to bring changes and development in society as per the demands of the time. Women, as a group, also exert influence in decision making process for development, planning, policy formulation, and their execution in society.

A society that fails to address women's issues cannot truly prosper, because women are an integral and constituent part of that society. Apatani women have many roles to play in the family and society by being indispensably involved in various ceremonies and occasions such as marriage, and child birth like **Niipo Apin** (party given after a baby is born), **Mabo Enchi**, **Eli Banii** and **Mida miinii** (sequential step by step marriage ceremony). Their involvement in festivals and rituals marks the importance of women's participation in social work.

### **6.2 Women's Role in Family Economy**

Since great yore, the family economy has been supplemented by women in the Apatani community. They are industrious, innovative, creative, and hard working. They undertake allied activities like knitting, weaving, arts and crafting besides others to augment family income. They are the only member who are very concerned about family thrift, even though it is small in amount for future security. They

also cultivate fruits, vegetables and undertake petty business with the sole motive to enhance family earnings.

Some women even partake in groups of agricultural wage labourers to supplement family income. There are a number of examples where Apatani women have excelled over men in entrepreneurship development. For example, one of the most well-known people in recent times is Mrs. Tage Rita, an engineer by qualification, is a renowned entrepreneur and proprietor of Nara-Aba Kiwi Wine, who has been conferred the President of India Award and many more. Apart from her there are many like Mrs. Bamin Yapii, Mrs. Nani Jailyang, Mrs. Mihin Asha, who are engaged in the field of creativity, fashion, handloom and handicraft production by creating new motifs and designs which enhance the marketing of the products, greatly popular among locals and tourists.

### **6.3 Women's Role at Home**

The Apatani woman is a perfect homemaker in the true sense of the term. Without women, the Apatani home is void. She manages the entire internal affairs of the home. Interior decoration is done with traditional arts and crafts, interior furnishing and fixtures, cleaning, and other chores lie entirely in the hands of the womenfolk. Day-to-day chores like preparing the dishes, watering, dressing of family members, besides choice of taste and delicacy, are at the ultimate disposal of women without any help from the menfolk. Taking care of parents, in-laws, offering hospitality to guests and performing traditional gifting ceremony to uncles and aunts are also some of the prerogative roles and responsibilities of women.

### **6.4 Women's Role in Decision Making**

In the matter of decision making, Apatani women enjoy sufficient autonomy and independence, particularly over the issues related to internal affairs of a family. She controls the internal family income, manages the family household budget and contributes to the well-being of the family. Some women also decide family business matter as where to invest, what amount to invest and also function as the custodian/treasurer of all the earnings. House size, design, layout and other amenities are also decided by women while constructing new ones. In spite of the limited opportunities given to woman in the Apatani society, when it comes to decision-making, they play a vital role in upholding the traditions and culture of the society. The age old traditional practice of fish cum paddy cultivation, observing festivals, weaving and wearing traditional dresses and regular participation in different ceremonies have paved ways for them to take part in decision making related to the agriculture, land and resource management, they hold responsible positions in the matter of procurement of materials, managing, arrangements and disposal during the various traditional ceremonies, rituals and rites.

Presently, some women have even become members of the gram Panchayat (rural governing system backed by the Government of India) and take active part in decision making towards the development of the villages. There are several instances of women who have become Zilla Parishad Members, entrepreneurs, fashion designers, Academicians, etc. In recent years, efforts have been made to encourage even more participation of women in the decision-making process, identifying their activeness and constant zeal for the in sustenance of the culture and the tradition of the society.

### **6.5 Women's Role in Agriculture**

Agriculture is the main occupation of most of the families in the Ziro valley. Every Apatani household owns a plot or more paddy fields of unequal size and measure besides kitchen gardens and fruit orchards. And it is well known across the globe, that Apatanis are well versed in farming of fish cum paddy culture which is in practice since time immemorial. Cultivation of crops, nursery, maintaining of



bund, water canal, harvesting and even threshing of ripe crops is executed by women. Weeding of a field, the upbringing of fish fingerlings to full grown and their harvest are also undertaken by women alone. In the kitchen gardens too, they grow varieties of vegetables which are again sold in the local market by women themselves in order to supplement family income.

### 6.6 Women's Role in NGOs

Apatani women play a pivotal role in the social sectors. They are very active in social activities especially when they address the community sentiment and development. Apatani women's role in 'Apatani Youth Association' and 'Apatani Student Union,' the two front runner NGOs of the Ziro valley, cannot be overlooked. These two NGOs have been instrumental in ushering modern Apatani civilization and development in consonance with mainstream India. In the social development, broadening of village roads across Apatani valley, eradication of child marriages, system of tattoo making over the face of adolescent males and females, elimination of traditions like 'Yalu-Lisu Nii' and others are some of the major achievements of NGOs where women actively took part. Prominent women leaders among them are: Smti. Hage Yasung, former ZPM Hari, Dr. Millo Kuniya, Smti. Mudo Dumi, Smti. Rubu Tago Rinyo, etc.

### 6.7 Women's Role in SHGs

Self-help Groups play a significant role in the rural economy, especially in small saving activities. These organizations function based on self-help basis with a small amount of equity fund raised from members of the group with the sole motive to save money for the future. Women are predominant in the SHGs movement in the Ziro valley. Nearly 70-80% of SHGs existing in the Ziro valley of Lower Subansiri district are in operation, consisting of homogeneous groups. They lend a small amount of their group fund to members at a nominal rate of interest for certain socio-economic activities, and the interest earned on the loan amount constitutes their income. This in turn helps in earning their livelihood and raising their standard in the long run.

### 6.8 Women's Role in AWAZ

The AWAZ, popularly abbreviated "*Apatani Women Association Ziro*", is one of the prominent NGOs of Apatani women functioning at Ziro, Lower Subansiri District, Arunachal Pradesh. It is a recent development in the era of women's empowerment and social development, which is playing a vital role in the socio-cultural spheres of Ziro valley. Development processes, in all spheres of the socio-economic sector of Apatani, took the patriarchal form led predominantly by male counterpart until recently. However, since the inception of AZAW, it has broken this repulsive feature and ushered in a new era of women's role in the socio-economic sector.

This organization, to date, is functioning as an apex organization of all women of Apatani, with a sole motive to cater to the socio-economic need and aspiration of women, in particular and society, in general. It has succeeded in bringing positive changes in traditional ceremonies, rituals and rites and other customary practices. This organization has also succeeded in introducing positive regulation in the procedure, sequence and order of ceremony, ritual and social observation for the betterment of all.

The AWAZ has made significant contributions in combating anti-social issues, such as curbing drug trafficking, controlling addiction and preventing child abuse. Recently, women have taken a bold and dynamic stance in the social sphere, leading campaigns against pressing issues such as Drug abuse, with the rallying cry "Zero Drug Ziro" and crimes against women and children. Their efforts demonstrate the significant impact women can have in driving positive change and promoting social welfare.

### 6.9 Women's Role in Politics

Women play a vital and influential role in modern politics, driving policy changes, advocating for social justice, and inspiring future generations of leaders. They, champion critical socio-economic issues and shape policy decisions, serving as a catalyst for the transformative change that benefits society as a whole. They as individuals as well as groups, exercise adult franchise to elect a leader of their own choice without pressure and force from their male counterparts. They also raise issues which have not been addressed by ruling incumbent.

It is also commonly seen that today, the women of the present generation have developed the courage to contest panchayat elections for development by being directly involved in party politics. A few Apatani women like Smti. Nada Dumi, of Hija village and Smti Nani Jailang of Reru village, Smti. Hage Yassung, Lower Subansiri District, become ZPM by contesting the election against powerful and prominent male opponents. Besides them, there are many female members at the Gram Panchayat Level as well.

### 6.10 Participation in the village Level

Apatani women have always been mindful and attentive, nurturing both the physical and emotional well-being of their loved ones. They are wanted in every village-level activity of both genders. Be it in village-level meetings, gatherings, ceremonies, rituals, rites, festivals and other activities, women's participation is a must. They are not spared on any occasion. In festivals like 'Myoko', 'Murung', 'Dree' and 'Mida', etc., they are to be present as constituent parts. In rituals like 'Kharung', 'Dani Tuni', 'Ude Ui' etc., women equally take part. Furthermore, in every village-level activity, such as social service, plantation of flowers at the roadside, cleaning up of the irrigation canal etc., women are also required to take an active part alongside their male members.

## 7. Conclusion

Women in the Apatani valley play a diverse range of important roles, with responsibilities that are both numerous and never-ending. Apatani women are the main pillars of family life, playing a multifaceted role that encompasses building and nurturing families. They also contribute to the development of social and economic activities, boosting family income, making key decisions, and even venturing into politics, shaping the community's future. It would be impossible to describe women's role in entirety, as their contributions and influences are vast, diverse, and multifaceted. Without women, there cannot be a family, and without family, there cannot be society. Women's role in the society and politics is profoundly significant, as they themselves are the foundation of society and politics, having become an integral and indispensable part of the fabric of the Apatani world.

## References

1. Agarwal, A. and Arora, D. R., "Women in Rural Society- Socio-Economic Impact of Gobar Gas plants On Rural House Wives", Vohra Publishers and Distributors, Allahabad, 1989.
2. Grewal, Joshi, S.T., "Women and Development the Changing Scenerio", Mittal Publications, New Delhi (1999).
3. Kurane, A., "Issues in Women's Development", Rawat Publications, New Delhi, 2012.
4. Kalbagh, C. (Ed.), "Women and Development, Policies and Plan Strategies for Women's Development", Vol.7. Discovery Publication House, New Delhi, 1991.

5. Kongolo. M & Bamgose. O.O., “Participation of Rural women in Development: A Case Study of Tsheng, Thintwa, and Makhalaneng Villages, South Africa”. *Journal of International Women’s studies*, 4(1), Campus Journals and Publications>JIWS>Vol.4>iss.1, 2002, 79-92. <http://VC.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol4/iss1/6>.
6. Mibang, T. & Abraham, P. T. (ed). “Arunachal Women and Education, Tribal Women: Development and Education with Special References to Arunachal Pradesh”, Sanjukta Das, Himalayan Publisher, Itanagar, 2003.
7. Rao. P.Gopinath. “Rural Development: Sustainable Livelihood and Security”, Author press, Delhi, Laxmi Nagar, 2006.
8. Sahay. M., Women Participation is must for Rural Development, was published in the 23 March 2012 Issue of IFRSA Business Review, 2012. <https://www.arita.edu/news/women-participation-rural-development>.
9. Sarthi, A., “Women and Rural Development in the Third World”, Tata Institute Of Social Sciences Bombay, 1987.
10. Thakur.D. & Thakur.D.N. (ed.) “Tribal Women-Tribal Life in India”, Vol.7. Deep and Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd. Ragouri Garden, New Delhi, 2009.
11. Tanwir. M. & Safdar. T., “The Rural Women’s Constrains to participate in Rural Organizations”, *Journal of International Women’s Studies*. 14(3), 210-229. Vol.14/issue 3 Article 15, 2015. <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol14/iss3/15>, 2013.
12. Vats, S., “Women’s Participation in Rural development”, Abhijeet publications, Delhi, 2004.