



Separated Women: A Study in Assam

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This paper attempts to explore the socio-economic conditions of separated women reside in rural areas of Assam. Even the study also tries to examine whether the gender role expectations for separated women stand as a barrier for achieving equal rights with men in Assamese society. Significantly, the study reveals that though the separated women have economic hardship, but they are not ignored by their family members to a large extent.

Key Words: Assam, Gender, Separated Women.

Introduction

Marriage is one of the most important events in one's life affecting the physical status as well as psyche of an individual (Mazumdar, 2001). It is traditionally being destined by the society to every woman as a way to improve the status of women in a country like India. In India, the age old traditions of the Hindus have determined a distinct status for the women. The status relates to the image of the woman- pious and devout, married away early in life, loyal and obedient to the husband and devoted to the service of the family and the rearing of the children (Barooah, 1993). Marriage among Hindus is considered like a sacrament performed by both the husband and wife. Among the Muslims, marriage is concerned with the fulfilment of sexual desires and for long life partnership among the Christians as the basic aims of marriage respectively, every woman is forced to step on the threshold of marriage (Dakuah, 2015). While discussing the classical notions of marriage age, Kapadia (1988) refers to the Hindu concept in the following way: "Woman is not fit to be independent. At early stage in her life she should be under the dominion of someone, her father, her husband or son. The idea of marriage was the transference of the father's dominion over her in favour of her husband." Recent development in the society like rapid industrialization, urbanization, migration and mass-media has powerful influence on family dynamics in many parts of the world. Many changes are occurring in the family patterns throughout the world, which include change in marriage and fertility practices i.e. delayed marriages, divorce, separation and remarriage, changing living arrangements, out of wedlock childbearing,

movements toward individual partner's choice, lower fertility and better prospects for the women etc. In country like India, marriage has always been seen as sacred event. In the past several decades Indian marriage system has experienced various changes as a result of socio-economic development and improvement in education, dramatic increase in age at marriage of both the sexes, changes on attitude towards marriage, love-marriages, inter-caste marriages, divorce and separation has been observed (Kadi 1987; Singh 1992). Growing literacy among women has opened new avenues as well as challenges. Their role in the modern society is fast changing. These changes affect matrimonial relations (Hussain 1983). In many developing countries including India; marriage dissolution (divorce) is growing with the time. In recent decades there has been alarming increase in incidences of divorce (Thakur 2009). In Indian society social stigma is attached with divorced men and women especially with women. Despite the introduction of marriage laws and legal sanction to the divorcee to remarry, divorce is not easily accepted in Indian society. In India divorce is highly stigmatizing and undesirable (Gore 1968; Kurien 1982; Choudhary 1988; Singh 1988; Amato 1994). However in modern times, divorce is more or less acceptable in Indian society. It is a way to come out of unhappily marriages. Continuation of broken marriages which have failed to achieve their objectives will do more harm than good to the society (Hussain 1983).

Though emancipation of the Indian women and solution of their problems have engaged the attention of the governments, social thinkers and reformers for a long period of time past, but these are yet to be resolved satisfactorily. Though separations, desertions and divorces are increasing in India today, not much attention has been paid to the manner in which these deserted and separated women live, often with their children, and what their rights and entitlements are in/from the marital home (Singh, 2013). Like other parts of India, the social situation in Assam, too has undergone significant changes due to various factors and forces of change. The resultant of these changes in society has also impact on the conditions of life of the womenfolk. The problem is even more acute in Assam, but unfortunately, in Assam, where serious thinking and action programmes on this problem are very limited and the efforts has been sporadic and scanty than the other parts of India. Hence, the problems of the women in Assam are very slightly known to all of us especially in Assamese society. More specifically the social status of the separated women, particularly living in the rural areas of Assam is quite unknown and no significant work has yet been done to show as to how separation affects the social, economic and cultural aspects of the separated women living in rural areas of Assam.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

An attempt has been made here to study the socio-economic conditions of Assamese separated women and living condition of separated women. In doing so, it is necessary to speak a little about the significance of the study. The study is covering that segment of population in the society, which has been frequently neglected in family and in society by its members. The sense of negligence by society regarding separated women is not formed in a day; it is a long back process. Such kind of negligence makes society to put Separated women into an isolated category. This gradually takes the shape of gender discrimination and gender trouble. Women are constantly being victimized and exploited by society but divorced women or separated women are victims of a double exploitation. This is because they not only suffer as women but also

as separated women. They are vulnerable to economic, social, psychological and physical exploitation throughout her lifespan. Social problems of separated women are classified in terms of the social stigma attached and the social restrictions imposed on them by society. The social rejection that society imposes on them results in their low social status. Ironically, the society that the present paper is taking into consideration is patriarchal in nature, where male dominance is prominent since time immemorial. The problems of separated women are in many ways unique. The main problem is that of their economic insecurity and dependence on others to meet their basic needs. Sometimes, their own family members and relatives harass these women. This constant feeling of dependence on others often makes them miserable. In society, they also face a lot of problems in their day to day life. Psychologically they feel insecure, mental conflicts and live a lonely life. The society rules, values, norms never allow a women to remain separated. Besides all these problems, there are number of other problems that separated women have to face. Under such circumstances, the need for the study is obvious. India is a country known for its rich tradition and vast spiritual and cultural heritage, where on the one hand women are worshipped as 'Shakti' and on the other the separated woman faces inhuman treatment and discrimination in society. This remains a matter of great concern and therefore their plight and problems need greater attention. There is genuine need for studying vulnerability of the separated women, special types of problems they are likely to encounter over the life span, and factors marginalize them.

The problems of Assamese separated women are in many ways unique. These have to be properly understood. Hence, the status of the 'separated women' in Assam is very slightly known to all of us especially in Assamese society. More specifically the changing social status of the separated women, particularly living in the rural areas of Assam is quite unknown and no significant work has yet been done to show as to how modern life style affects the social, economic and cultural aspects of the separated women living in rural areas of Assam. As of today, a few studies have tried to analyse and describe the economic status and problems of the separated women. So the present study has been made an attempt to addressing the problems and issues of the rural separated women and in analysing gender perspective towards separation. Hence, this study will help to find out the socio economic background, living condition of separated women, which will be a useful secondary source for researchers, academicians, student, administrators, NGOs and others those who are interested in the welfare of the rural separated women in the state or in the country.

METHODOLOGY:

The universe of the study consists of the separated women living within the various village of Tengakhat tehsil of Dibrugarh district of Assam. Tengakhat is a tehsil under Dibrugarh sub-division of Dibrugarh district of Assam. Tengakhat is a historical and small place in Dibrugarh district. It is located 29km towards East from district headquarters. As per 2011 census, total population of Tengakhat is 220,478 (male 112,046 and female 108,432). As per 2011 census there are 968 females per 1000 males. There are about 224 villages in Tengakhat tehsil. The majority of the population, nearly 83% population of Tengakhat live in rural areas and 17% live in urban areas. The literacy ratio of Tengakhat is 77%, out of which 83% are male and 70% are female. Keeping in view the objectives of the study utmost care was taken while selecting the respondents, so

that it fulfils the objectives of the study. For this study 50 respondents have been taken out from selected villages by employing purposive sampling method. On the other hand, the data for the study have been collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data are those which are collected for the first time from the selected respondents in a face to face situation. To collect primary data the researcher personally visited the sample household and data have been collected with the help of certain relevant methods like observation, interview schedule, case study etc. On the other hand secondary data have been collected from various sources of data collection which included census reports, various books, journals, official reports and records, newspapers and internet etc. For the analysis of data the researcher used 'descriptive' analysis process. The analysis of data has been based on logical as well as an analytical point of view.

DISCUSSION:

In many developing countries including India; marriage dissolution (divorce) is growing with the time. In recent decades there has been alarming increase in incidences of divorce (Thakur 2009). The number of Indians who were divorced or separated more than doubled over the past two decades, and the number of women divorced or separated exceeded the number of men in all census years since 1961. The lower number of divorced or separated men is almost certainly due to their higher rates of remarriage compared to women. The proportion divorced or separated is generally below 1 percent for men and women in both rural and urban areas, except for urban women among whom it reached 1.04 percent in 2011. The magnitude of the difference between rural and urban areas is not large. The 2011 census presents numbers for divorced and separated separately. Among both men and women, those who separated constituted about 72 percent of those who either divorced or separated (Dommaraju, 2016). Though separations, desertions and divorces are increasing in India today, not much attention has been paid to the manner in which these deserted and separated women live, often with their children, and without children, what their rights. They often neglected in life and neglected by society, they stay in a corner in which light needs to be thrown to be properly understood them. The increasing large percentage of separated men and women in India has made the study of separated people an important concern in sociology because of the inadequate services available to meet their needs and aspirations. Therefore, in order to study the condition of separated women in rural areas, the present study is an attempt for better understanding on their socio- economic background and living condition of rural separated women. Socio-economic background of the individual plays a very significant role in the formulation of an individual personality in both the patriarchal and matriarchal societies. Significantly, the study reveals that among the 50 respondents 30 (60%) are Hindus and 20 (40%) are Muslims. Furthermore, the highest number, i.e., 28 (56%) of respondents are illiterate, 10 (20%) are read up to primary level, 5(10%) are read up to secondary level, 5 (10%) are read up to higher secondary level, while only 2 (4%) of them have graduation and above qualification. As far as family pattern is concerned, among the 50 respondents, 30 (60%) respondents live in nuclear families and 20 (40%) respondents live in joint families. 35 (70%) out of 50 respondents have children, while 15 (30%) of the respondents do not have any children. It is noticeable that most of such respondents who do not have any children belong to the groups of young separated women (20-28 years).

Economic background of the respondents also has been explored in detail in this study. Family income is another significant component of one's social background. Like their own monthly income family income also important criterion in determining the problems faced by the separated women. The study reveals that among the families of the respondents, 18 (36%) had business as their source of income, 27 (54%) had agriculture and 5 (10%) had Govt. Jobs as their source of income. Significantly, among the 50 respondents in case of 40 (80%) respondents, the respondents themselves are engaged in income generating activities. The remaining 10 (20%) respondents have been found to be unemployed. These respondents without a source of income of their own were asked if they receive some money on a monthly basis from their family members for their personal needs. Surprisingly, they commented that they do not receive any money from their family members for their personal needs. They also expressed that they have felt negligence due to family members do not support them physically and mentally and do not interact with them. Significantly, they have been expressed that their personal needs are not fulfil as they have no source of income and their family members do not cater to their personal needs. However, it is observed that those who have not any source of income they have to suffer from financial hardship and remains poor in the later age of life than those who are married. In terms of property, the study found that only 10(20%) respondents have some form of property, primarily land in their name. Among them 6 (12%) respondents inherited this from their parents. Only 4 (8%) respondents brought land themselves.

Concluding Remarks

This study significantly depicts that economic insecurity is the major concerned for the separated women which gave rise to various problems among the separated women. Though they do not want to depend financially on their family members but due to their inability and insufficient income, they have to depend on their family members for fulfilling the requirements and better care. The study also reveals that the separated who have own source of income; they have a better adjustment in the family and society than for those who have not any source of income. Significantly, the study reveals that though most of the separated women are living with their parents but they do not get proper care and respect from their family members and community. It further reveals that a higher proportion of the separated women have not been able to maintained a good and satisfactory relationship with others which are found to have a negative association with adjustment within the family and society at large.

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