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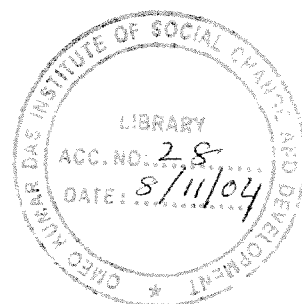
THE ROLE OF KHASI WOMEN IN PETTY TRADE IN SHILLONG

Corrected

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Rajiv Gandhi Scholar

1993-94



OMEKO KUMAR DAS
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT
GUWAHATI

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This study was conducted by Ms. Sarbani Das Gupta under the supervision of Dr. Biman Kar. The scholar was one of the recipients of Rajiv Gandhi fellowship for the year 1993-94. The Institute is grateful to the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation for providing financial support to Institute's Junior Short-term Fellowship Programme, without which the Programme could not have been implemented with its present coverage.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I express my deep sense of gratitude to Dr. Biman Kar, Reader, Department of Economics, Gauhati University, for his able guidance and encouragement throughout the study period. I would be failing in my duty, if I do not record my gratitude and sincere thanks to all the Khasi women petty traders of Laban and Police Bazar, who showered me with love and affection. I was indeed touched by their warm hospitality. This study would not have been possible without their active cooperation.

My thanks are also due to ICSSR, Shillong, A.S.I., Shillong; Office of the Commissioner of Census, Shillong; Directorate of Economics, Statistics and Evaluation, Shillong; NSS organisation, Shillong; Office of the Commissioner of Labour, Shillong; N.E.C. Secretariat, Shillong; Shillong Municipal Board; Women's Studies Research Centre, Gauhati University, for helping me in collecting necessary data and various other source material, I am thankful to Mr. Henry Marbaniang for his help during the survey.

I must acknowledge the support extended to me by my family. Thanks are also due to Mr. B.Das of Xerox Centre, Shillong, for careful typing, cyclostyling and xeroxing of the project material. I also thank the Ri Khasi Press, Shillong, for binding and printing of the report.

I express my deep appreciation and gratitude to the Director and the staff of I.S.C.D., Guwahati, for their constant cooperation. The financial help from the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, New Delhi, is also gratefully acknowledged.

Date : 4th April, 1994
Place : Shillong

SARBANI DAS GUPTA

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The deprivation of and discrimination against women is a global phenomenon and this is manifest in many spheres of life - social, political, familial, economic etc. The increasing deterioration in the conditions of women drew the attention of the UNO and subsequently 1975-1985 was declared as the Womens' Decade. Considerable light has been thrown on the condition of women during the last two decades. Recent years have witnessed a welcome upsurge of interest in the status of women and their role. Women form half the human race, but generally speaking, they do not receive fair treatment in many spheres of life - social, educational, economic, etc.

In India, the unequal status of women is reflected in their numerical deficit which is particularly marked in the Northern States. Table - 1 bears a testimony to this fact.

The primary explanation for adverse gender ratio may be sought in the higher risks of women as compared to men of death from infancy onwards atleast upto the end of their reproductive period. This leads to a lower life expectancy at birth for females. This is indeed indicative of their lower status in the Indian society.

SEX-RATIO IN INDIA

Census Year	Sex-ratio
1881	963
1891	962
1901	972
1911	963
1921	955
1931	950
1941	945
1951	946
1961	941
1971	930
1981	934
1991	929

Source : (1) Malini Karkal & Divya Pandey, " Studies on Women and Population, Himalaya Publishing House, Bombay, 1989,

(2) "Statistical Outline of India 1992-93" Tata Services Ltd., Bombay, 1992, p.35.

The continuous decline in sex-ratio till 1971 is a pointer to the inflict meted out to women. The ratio was not only unfavourable, it also went on declining. There was a slight improvement in this continuous deterioration in gender ratio in the late 70s as 1981 census recorded 934 as the ratio as against 930 recorded in 1971 census report. But the latest census report (1991) has shattered the hope that this deterioration, a reflection on the status and position of women in Indian society, has been reversed.

However, the situation in this respect is not uniform throughout the country. As an instance, Kerala records a favourable ratio (1032 in 1981 and 1040 in 1991). This ratio is higher than the all India figure in the North Eastern States of Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura. This has been shown by Table-2.

Table - 2

SEX-RATIO IN THE TRIBAL STATES OF NORTH EAST INDIA

Sl.No.	States	Year	
		1981	1991
1.	Assam	901	925
2.	Manipur	971	961
3.	Meghalaya	954	947
4.	Mizoram	919	924
5.	Nagaland	863	890
6.	Tripura	946	946
7.	Arunachal Pradesh	862	861

(Source : Census of India 1991, Series - I and from Statistical Handbook, Meghalaya, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Meghalaya)

But the situation in Meghalaya was different in the early part of this century, when the area recorded a favourable sex-ratio and then the deterioration took place. This will be evident from Table-3.

Table - 3

SEX-RATIO IN MEGHALAYA (1901-1991)

Year	Sex-ratio
1901	1036
1911	1013
1921	1000
1931	971
1941	966
1951	949
1961	937
1971	942
1981	954
1991	947

Source : "Statistical Abstract, Meghalaya, 1993".
Directorate of Economics & Statistics,
Meghalaya.

To our knowledge and information, so far no research has been conducted on this aspect. It is a matter of serious concern for sex-ratio to decline in a society where women are supposed to enjoy a higher status, because of its matrilineal and matrilocal system. It has also not been enquired as to what extent the demographic change due to influx of population from outside has been responsible for this. However, the Scheduled Tribe population form 85.53% of the total population as per 1991 census. All the indigenous Scheduled Tribe population of Meghalaya are matrilineal and matrilocal and in 1981 female ST population of the State outnumbered the male ST population (538710 females against 537635 males) There is thus a slight deterioration in the sex-ratio in the State of Meghalaya.

WOMEN WORKERS :

For raising the status of women in the society a general prescription is to increase their opportunities in work force participation. Once women achieve economic independence, men are made to acknowledge their rights as equal.¹ Green Halgh (1985 : 265-315) thinks that the patriarchal family is the fundamental source of women's subordination. This institution has in-built mechanism to subjugate women and control their labour. In her opinion, gender differentials are created from early childhood and the roots of sexual differences are mostly economic. She also adds that though capitalism is often blamed for reducing women to the secondary status, there are evidences to show that the subordination of women prevailed even prior to the advent of capitalism. It was basically the family system which used to reproduce and strengthen traditional hierarchies and capitalism was only instrumental in providing a favourable environment for it to flourish and perpetuate.² One of the major conclusions of the report on "The Status of Women in India" was that despite various legal and constitutional provisions, Indian women had failed to improve their status in the society since they had lost their relative position in the labour market.³

In India the work participation rate (WPR) of females has been showing a rising trend over the years (from 14.22% in 1971 to 19.67% in 1981 to 22.73% in 1991), whereas the

male work participation rate (MWPR) has been showing a slight and gradual decline over the same period of time (from 52.75% in 1971 to 52.62% in 1981 to 51.56% in 1991). This is shown in Table - 4.

Table - 4

WORK PARTICIPATION RATE IN INDIA 1971-91

Year	Males	Females
1971	52.75%	14.22%
1981	52.62%	19.67%
1991	51.565	22.73%

Source : Census of India 1991, Series 1, India, Paper 3 of 1991. Provisional Population Tables : Workers and their distribution

But still the economic activities of females appear to be considerably less important than those of men; or generally speaking, they are engaged in less paid jobs.

Though the first half of the twentieth century had witnessed an improvement in the opportunities for economic participation of the Indian women, compared to the rate of increase in female population, it was not sufficient. As a result the women work force as a percentage of total population (WFPR) declined sharply during the period 1911 to 1951. Though this earlier trend of falling female work participation rate started showing a rising trend from 1961 and is continuing still in 1991, there has not been any marked change.

The significant decline in women's employment started during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries when Indian markets were flooded with the British manufactured goods of superior quality. In the face of this stiff competition, the once flourishing indigenous cottage and textile industries of India suffered a severe setback through the loss of both the domestic and the foreign markets. Indian labour engaged in the industrial sector lost their employment in general but women industrial workers were the worst hit. They not only lost their share in the traditional occupations, but only a very few of them were able to find employment in the newly emerging engineering, metallurgical and chemical industries in India. Only three-fourth of the female labour engaged in manufacturing sector could find employment in the textile and food processing industries and the rest sought employment in wood, rubber and ceramic industries. Over four-fifth of these female workers were mainly confined to the household sector and thus we find that the bulk of the female workers were engaged in lower paid jobs. Even the expansion in the factory sector of these industries failed to improve employment opportunities for women.

INFORMAL SECTOR :

Of all the female workers, the females labouring in the engaged in household work and informal (or unorganised) sector are the ones which draws maximum attention. These women workers who are largely home-based, play a very crucial

role in all the levels of economic development. Since all the developing nations, especially India are characterised by the unorganised nature of the informal sector, these women workers, who work isolatedly in their homes, doing strenuous work in their capacity as wage earners, piece rate workers, casual labour and paid and unpaid family labour in an informal manner, are extremely exposed to exploitation and being 'invisible' to the family and society, they are ignored by legislators, planners and policy makers.⁵

"The informal or unorganised sector usually consists of productive activities with loosely formed groups bound by diverse types of informal working contracts. It includes a section of the self-employed, wage earners, family producers as also the household workers".⁶

There are a number of factors which determines the division between the organised and the unorganised sector in each country. Among such determinants, we can first mention (i) wage and working conditions enjoyed by the workers of the respective sectors, whereas the trade unions by exercising power and pressure tactics, can effectively bargain with employers and manage to maintain the actual earnings of their workers at a level atleast above the maximum subsistence standard, the workers in the unorganised sector, without such protection are not in a position to bargain and have continued to work under pitiable working conditions and have suffered steadily in the inflationary situation that hit the country during the 1960s and the 1970s.⁶

Apart from the difference in wage, the workers of the unorganised sector are also deprived of some benefits such as paid holidays, medical or old age allowances, and overall, the job security, which are normally enjoyed by their counterparts in the organised sector.⁶

Secondly, like the organised sector, employment in the informal sector does neither imply that the worker is employed for a definite or a standard period of time nor that he or she gets a regular wage payment for the work done. Because, the work of such a labourer normally takes the form of unpaid family labour or a combination of manual labour and risk-bearing ability as in the case of a self-employed person or a contract for repayment of a loan obligation as in the case of a bonded labourer. The wage payment may be in cash or in kind or a combination of the two and the wage may also be a regular time rate wage, a piece rate wage, a share in the family's consumption or simply a minimum subsistence wage for a specified period.⁷

Thirdly, the labourers of the informal sector are also deprived of the reasonable degree of amenities at the work place to which the workers of the organised sector are entitled since they are outside the purview of the labour laws that have been enacted by the Indian Government from time to time. Such provisions are not a part of the employment contracts in the informal sector. The profit-

seeking employers make large amount of saving by encouraging labourers especially women to use their own open spaces etc. thereby exposing them to unhealthy working environment and to various industrial hazards.⁸ Thus the informal sector is characterised not only by the absence of regulations specifying the minimum standard or working conditions but also by leave facilities, training facilities, job security and provisions against sickness and accident. All the more, the wage payment of a labourer is strictly according to the amount of work done and the worker bears the entire burden even of the employer such as quality control or changes due to the setback in the market demand.⁹

Coming to women workers, in particular, we find that the measurement of women employment presents some additional problems. Even though the majority of women workers are engaged in the household sector of the economy, generally for poor women who constitute a sizeable portion of the total women labour force, the category of 'housework' becomes very much as extended one.¹⁰

Economic activities of women in India can be divided into three categories - (a) as an entrepreneur, a self-employed worker or a wage earning employee producing goods and services to be sold in the market, (b) as a participant in the family's production which are atleast partially marketed and (c) as a contributor to the family's real income by processing some goods which are available free in order to

supplement (or avoid) its purchase from the market. Over the years, a large number of women workers have been found to be engaged in the last two categories and inspite of the changes that have taken place in the labour market over the years, this tendency has further been reinforced. But the outcome of large scale participation of women workers in these two categories is that, work in either of these categories do not give the women any control over the family's disposable income (including the share of it that she has earned) and also denies her the status of a socially productive worker.¹⁰

Since house keeping work is considered to be the primary work of a woman and it consumes a lion's share of her working hours, very often the productive or the gainful part of her total work burden is easily lost sight of - not only by the statistical enumerator, but even by the male and female members of her household itself.¹¹

But in case of men, since by convention they are expected to be engaged in activities giving income and also their productive activity is of a continuous nature and is performed in sight of others, even when they work in some household based productive activity, there is much less chance of their being left out of the labour force.¹²

According to some researchers, since the women normally perform various productive activities, cultivation and non-cultivating enterprises which are of "unpaid" nature and are normally performed in their household, such activities

generally remain hidden and "invisible" to the society and are not likely to be adequately reported or adequately identified by the interviewer.¹³

As in other spheres of our life, even in the description and analysis of labour force data - one of the most wide-spread presumption is denoting the economic roles of women as supplementary or secondary to men. This patriarchal attitude to the role of women - to assume whatever they do, it can never be better than men, has not only been perpetuated by our ancient mythology but also by the methodology which is used to generate the facts.¹⁴

It is universally held that in patriarchy, women hold inferior positions. Does it mean that they occupy superior position in matriarchy ?

With this end in view, we undertook a small study of the women petty traders among the Khasis, who are one of the majority communities of the tribal State of Meghalaya.

The State of Meghalaya is predominantly a tribal State with tribals constituting 85.53% (according to 1991 census) of the population. The tribal population comprises the Khasis, the Garos and the Jaintias. They are characterised by a matrilineal and a matrilocal society which protects to a large extent the position of women in the society. Their system of lineage, economic system, practice of shifting cultivation and land holding pattern do not permit such

prejudice against women. In the Khasi society, one finds high female participation rate in economic life. The following table will throw some light on this aspect.

Table - 5

PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL WORKERS IN 1981 & 1991

	Males		Female	
	1981	1991	1981	1991
India	52.62	51.56	19.67	22.73
Meghalaya	53.96	49.09	37.49	36.69

Source : Census of India 1991, Series I, India, Paper 3 of 1991, Provisional Population Tables : Workers & Their Distribution.

OBJECTIVE :

The objective of our study was to find out - what explains large scale Khasi women's participation in economic activity outside the traditional mode of living ? Is it a women's responsibility to earn bread ? Is it because men do not earn enough to fulfill family requirement ? Is it because men are not ready to share his whole income with other family members, leaving women and children at a very low level ?

It is with such questions in our mind that we had undertaken a small study on the "Role of Khasi Women in Petty Trade in shillong".

HYPOTHESIS :

We had proposed the following as our central hypothesis "Deteriorating condition of Khasi women is responsible for their crowding of these women in petty trading in Shillong".

Our main objective was to evaluate the objective circumstances in which women have to engage themselves in low income-yielding occupations like running of small shops or selling of pan & cigarettes on roadside or in offices etc.

SAMPLE DESIGN :

Women in Meghalaya, particularly in its capital in Shillong, are found in certain occupations, which are male professions elsewhere. Of their lowest income-yielding occupations garbage collecting, vending of pan, cigarettes etc. in office and running petty trades are more prominent. Garbage collection is done elsewhere by male child workers. But in Shillong, they are done by petty elderly women. Vending in offices and running roadside, open air tiny portable shops are generally male occupations. But in Shillong, they are the female occupations. Nearly the whole petty small retail trade is run by the tribals and in Shillong it is in the care of the women. Similar trade is done by males when it is owned and run by non-tribals. In view of several constraints, we had to confine our study to the women petty traders only in two prominent localities of Shillong, namely, Laban and Police Bazar. The areas were

purposively chosen, keeping in mind the limitations of the present researcher.

The two areas selected, namely, Laban and Police Bazar together cover 9.1% of the total population of the Shillong Urban Agglomeration. For the purpose of the study the available secondary data and source materials have been supplemented by taking a small sample survey based on questionnaire-cum-interview method. A questionnaire was prepared for the purpose and canvassed to 30 women petty traders in Police Bazar and 25 such traders in Laban areas respectively. In Laban all the traders have been contacted and only a few (5 or 6 in number) could not be contacted because of their refusal. But in Police Bazar, all were contacted. In addition to seeking response to the specific questions, additional informations were gathered through conversation.

We do not propose to make any generalisation from this study about the role of Khasi women engaged in petty trading in Shillong. But we hope that our findings would be broadly indicative of the existing state of affairs. The set of questions contained and which were circulated among the respondents has been given below.

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE KHASI SOCIETY :

Before we embark upon the detailed discussion of our study, a brief sketch of the social system of the Khasis may be helpful.

The Khasis, originally hailing from South East Asia, were a small tribe living in very small closely-knit communities of different clans (i.e. 'Kurs') in villages dotting the Khasi and the Jaintia Hills. For this tribe which was constantly at war with the neighbouring plainsmen, the menfolk had to go to war and were not always available for looking after their domestic affairs and property. Women were the ones who looked after not only the children, the property and the household but also the old and the invalid. At the familial level, the mother (or the Matriarch, i.e., the 'Iawbei') presided over the domestic affairs and overall welfare of her children; her husband (i.e., the Thawlang') was like a philosopher and guide to the children; her brothers, (i.e., the maternal uncle or the 'Kni') who were probably unfit for war, especially the senior and the spiritual ones acted as the family priest, performing religious rites within the family on occasions like marriage and child naming ceremonies, settled family disputes, disciplined her children and acted as the spokesmen in pre-engagement dialogues with the boy's uncles. Along with the mother and the maternal uncles, the youngest daughter (i.e., the 'Khadduh'), who was the last to get married and leave the parents and the natal home, as a matter of convenience, used to be entrusted with the responsibility of looking after her ageing parents and all the social,

religious and economic obligations of the family. She was appointed 'custodian' (not owner) of all the family's property which is 'more of a joint family trust' and was accountable to the 'Durbar' of maternal uncles and brothers. However, she was not the heiress to the ancestral property as it was simply transmitted to the next generation through her. She used to be a symbol of unity among the members of her clan and her house served as the hub for all religious and social activities of her family.

Thus the Khasi society which had opted for the Matrilineal system out of necessity are now practising it in matters of descent, inheritance and kinship group formation.

In the Khasi society though the lineage is traced through the mother, the society is very much male-dominated as the control and decision - making functions in the family and society are mainly concentrated in the hands of men. Historical evidences show that the Khasi women were debarred from the area of political and administrative affairs and could not participate in the village or state 'Durbars'; they also could not normally hold office of 'Syiemship', i.e., chieftains at various levels etc. all of which were the privileges of the menfolk. Thus the Khasi society differs from a patriarchal society only in that whereas in the latter it is the father who represents the source of authority, in the former, the maternal uncle wields all the power and authority.

The matrilineal set-up no doubt provides the Khasi women with more opportunities for self-expression as compared to those of the conventional patriarchal societies. The women, enjoying the privileges of inheritance and greater share of property, generally display a degree of personal and economic independence. Studies have shown that such a system, by and large, develop in women aspects of character usually associated with male dominance, aggression and decision-making abilities.²

But such a system at the same time gives birth to many weaknesses in the men-folk. For example the Khasi males are no longer occupied with warfare but are still enjoying the privileges provided to them by the system. As a result they have tended to develop more passive and emotional characteristics and have become less active. Their condition has been changing for the worse in the emerging social scenario.³ The traditional men had a dual role - that of the maternal uncle and that of the father. The maternal uncle who used to be the figure of absolute authority in the family and society is losing much of his functional control in his sister's and niece's house as new avenues of control are opening up for the father. Factors such as Christianity advocates patriarchy; urbanization by giving rise to nuclear families has created geographical and thus psychological distance and has stood in the way of close and frequent contact between the uncle and the niece; having set up his own family, he is more concerned with his own family than

that of his sister's; exposure to other patriarchal cultures, new economic avenues in the form of coal-mining, lime-quarry mining, forest-based and agro-based industries has given rise to the concept of individual property bypassing the 'kur'; nuclear families have developed the tendency towards conjugal solidarity rather than the clan solidarity; education has made a person to look at his father as biologically and psychologically closer than the maternal uncle. Thus the Khasi males are going through a kind of identity crisis. As he does not have any share in the ancestral property, this has made him less interested in matters concerning the economic welfare of his family. He has no social standing as after his marriage, the children do not carry his name and he is somewhat of an 'outsider' in his sister's house. So the spirit to strive hard has been dampened as he feels he does not 'belong'. This has made him less responsible towards his wife and children and he suffers⁴ from sheer inertia to compete with the rest of the world. Chie Nakara, a Japanese Anthropologist, on a study on two of the most remote villages in the Khasi Hills in 1968, noted that "Khasi husbands are notorious for their heavy drinking⁵ and neglect of wife and children" (Syiem, 1988).

A casual look at the Khasi matrilineal system may lead one to think that the Khasi 'women are in an enviable position' (War, 1988). But this is erroneous. Along with some privileges, they also have to shoulder many responsibilities,

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which sometimes are 'more than they can bear' (War, 1988). With this brief historical background let us briefly look into the studies that have so far taken place on the Khasi women petty traders in Shillong.

AN OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE :

The conference of the Anthropologists organised in 1972 by the ICSSR made the observation that the Social Scientists so far have taken little interest in the study of women in tribal societies.

The Khasi society of Shillong and especially its women population, who make significant contribution to the trade and business activities of the society have largely escaped the attention of the researchers.

An overview of literature, revealed two studies - one done by Mukherjee and the other by Majumdar which are related to the topic under study.

Mukherjee et al (1979), on behalf of the North East Regional Station of the Anthropological Survey of India, Shillong, made a preliminary study of two areas of Shillong to understand the nature of involvement of the Khasi women in trade which is usually male-dominated, so that it may be compared with other societies of India. This study was the first of this kind. The study brought to light the following :

(1) Certain occupations are exclusively in the hands of Khasi females such as selling of fish and readymade garments in the markets and roadside vending of goods like tea and snacks and pan (betel leaf and betel nut) and supplying of tea and snacks in the offices.

(2) Especially in petty trade, women are numerically more than men.

(3) Though most of the occupations are carried out by the traders for generations, there are many traders who have shifted to trades in the city (that is, selling of fish, vegetables, tea and snacks etc.) from other occupations (like agriculture etc.) in the neighbouring areas.

(4) The Khasi women in general are hard-working and are proud to be so. They love to have their own money and are willing to carry on any trade provided the capital for doing so is available.

(5) With the husbands and other male members playing insignificant roles in the family affairs, the females have to earn money for rearing and educating the children and for running the family.

A survey was conducted in 1978-79 by the NEICSSR, Shillong, to assesses the extent of occupational mobility among the major Scheduled Tribe communities of three towns of Meghalaya, namely, Shillong, Jowai and Tura. Making use of

the same data, Majumdar (1984) tried to highlight some important facts of the occupational pattern among the Khasi population in Shillong. He observed the following :-

- (i) In low-income yielding trade and commerce, the number of females is abnormally high. The reason for this being, there is no inhibition for the Khasi females to engage themselves in shop-keeping or small trade.
- (ii) Females are there in all categories of occupation as they have no inhibition against any kind of occupation.
- (iii) Hard life in the surrounding rural areas tend to motivate more and more people to come to Shillong in search of better avenues of income and employment.
- (iv) Because of lack of skill and education, these people seek avenues in low-paid jobs and callings.

QUESTIONNAIRE

"The Role of Khasi Women in Petty Trade in Shillong"

DETAILS ABOUT THE TRADE

1. Name of the Locality or Municipal Ward :
2. Name of the Trader :
3. Age (in years) :
4. Religion :
5. Marital Status :
6. Age at Marriage :
7. Educational Qualifications :
8. Cause of giving up study in case of a drop-out :
9. How long has she been a resident of this locality (in years) :
10. (a) Place of Origin :
(b) Distance (in Kms) from place of origin to Shillong :
11. (a) Nature of occupation carried out before the present trade :
(b) Reasons for giving up the earlier occupation (if any) :
12. Nature of occupation carried out by the parents of the trader - :
(i) Father :
(ii) Mother :
13. When was this trade started by the trader ? :

- (i) No. of years :
- (ii) Before or after marriage :

14. (a) Details about Husband of the Trader (if married)

- (i) Name of the Husband :
- (ii) Age (in years) :
- (iii) Religion :
- (iv) Educational Qualification :
- (v) Place of origin and its distance (in Kms) from Shillong :
- (vi) Name of occupation :
- (vii) Income earned (in Rs.) :
 - Daily income :
 - Monthly income :
- (viii) Does he keep his income in his pocket or hand over to his wife ? :
- (ix) Monthly contribution to the family (in Rs.) :
- (x) Whose responsibility is it to meet the family's financial requirement ? :
 - Husband's :
 - Wife's :
- Tick (/) for 'Yes' & cross(x) for No.
- (xi) Wife's perception of the nature of husband's personal expenditure :
- (xii) Wife's perception of husband's sense of responsibility towards the family :

(b) (i) How many children
does the trader have ? :

(ii) Details about the children

Sl. No.	Name	Age	Sex	Occupation or activity engaged in	Education -al quali -fication	Monthly income (in Rs)	Monthly contributi -on to the family(in Rs.)
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10.

(iii) Who look after the
children when the trader
is out on business ? :

(c) Details about other family members

Sl. No.	Name	Age	Sex	Relation with the trader	Education -al quali -fication	Occupation or activity engaged in	Monthly income (in Rs)	Monthly contri- bution to the family (in Rs.)
------------	------	-----	-----	--------------------------------	-------------------------------------	--	------------------------------	--

1.

2.

3.

- 4.
 - 5.
 - 6.
 - 7.
 - 8.
 - 9.
 - 10.
-

15. Details about the trade

- (a) Why did you select this particular trade ? :
- (b) Would you give up this trade if your family income from other sources becomes sufficient to support the family according to conventional standard ? :
- (c) Amount of capital (money) invested initially in the business (in Rs.) :
- (d) Has your trade grown over the years ? :
 - (i) If Yes, reasons for expansion :
 - (ii) If No, reasons for stagnation :
- (e) Do you face any competition from your co-traders ? :
- (f) Do you have any Association/ Union of traders of similar commodities ? :
- (g) How much can you have ? :
 - (i) Per Day :
 - (ii) Per Month :
- (h) Do you have any Bank Account

of your own ? :

16. Details about the Shop/Stall

(a) (i) Does the stall form a part of the house of the trader ? :

(ii) If not, the distance (in Kms) between the house and the stall :

(iii) Does the trader rent out any part of her house to any other trader for carrying out similar type of trade ? :

(iv) Is the stall location in the premises of the office where the trader sells her produce ? :

(b) (i) Is she a vendor ? :

(ii) If Yes, why cannot she open a shop ? :

(c) Monthly income (Profit) from this trade (in Rs.) :

17. Details about the property owned by the trader's family

(a) (i) Does the family possess any land ? :

(ii) If Yes, area of land (in sq.ft.) ? :

(iii) What use is this land being put to ? :

(iv) Income earned from land (in Rs.) ? :

(b) (i) Does the family own any building ? :

(ii) What use this building being put to :

(iii) Monthly income from it (in Rs.) ? :

18. Total monthly income of the trader's family from all sources (in Rs.) :

19. What is the total monthly expenditure of the family ? :

THE FINDINGS OF THE PRESENT STUDY :

Now, we will analyse and interpret the information that have been collected by contacting and interacting with our respondents.

DEMOGRAPHIC, EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILIAL PROFILE :

We begin by presenting the data on the size of the family of the traders. A family usually is nucleated. In some cases, the respondent lives either with her father, or her mother or married and unmarried brothers or unmarried sisters or sisters-in-law or nieces who are yet to be settled in life. The total number of persons, taking all the 55 families together is 307. The total number of children, taking all the families together is 180. Thus, there are 48 persons who are dependent on the traders and such a person is not a member of a nuclear household.

Table - 1 (A)

SIZE OF TRADERS' FAMILIES

No. of family members	No. of families
3	9
4	11
5	7
6	13
7	6
8	4
9	2
10	2
11	1

Table - 1 (B)

NO. OF CHILDREN BELONGING TO THE TRADERS

No. of Children	No. of Families	Percentage
1	9	16.9%
2	12	22.6%
3	5	9.4%
4	7	13.2%
5	16	30.1%
6	4	7.5%

We found that of the 53 married respondents, (i) 16.9% have only 1 child each, (ii) 22.6% have 2 children each, (iii) 9.4% have 3 children each, (iv) 13.2% have only 4 children each, (v) 30.1% have 5 children each and (vi) 7.5% have 6 children each. We also found that the middle-aged and the old respondents have larger number of children. The pressures and hardships of life seem to have had its bearing on the family size. We did not specifically ask any questions in this regard.

Table - 2

AGE OF THE TRADERS

Age	No. of Traders
25 - 29	8
30 - 34	10
35 - 39	2
40 - 44	8
45 - 49	9
50 - 54	8
55 - 59	6
60 - 64	4

On analysing the age of the traders under consideration, we find that (i) their mean age is 43.18

years, (ii) there are 28 traders whose age is below average, i.e., they are of 25 to 44 years of age, (iii) there are 27 traders whose age is above average, i.e., they are of 45 to 64 years of age, (iv) there are 18 traders whose age is 50 years or above and (v) there are 4 traders whose age is 60 years or above.

We note from the above table that it is at a later age that the Khasi women join this mode of earning. 47 out of 55 respondents, came to this trade after reaching the age of 30 and the majority of them are aged 43 or more.

Table - 3

AGE AT MARRIAGE OF THE TRADERS

Age	No. of Traders
11 - 14	3
15 - 18	18
19 - 22	24
23 - 26	8

We find that the (i) mean age at marriage of the respondents is 19.29 years, (ii) there are 21 traders who were married at an age lower than the average age, i.e., they got married before reaching the age of 19, (iii) there are 32 respondents whose 'age at marriage' is above this average age, i.e. they were married long after reaching the age of 19.

We made an enquiry regarding 'who looks after the

children when the respondent is at work. The finding is as follows :

Table - 4

LOOKING AFTER THE CHILDREN WHEN THE
TRADERS ARE OUT ON BUSINESS

	No. of Traders	P.C.
(a) When the respondent started the trade her children had grown up, so no need to look after them.	9	16.9%
(b) House and stall are under the same roof	1	-
(c) Eldest daughter of the respondent looking after the younger ones	4	7.5%
(d) Children who accompany the mother	14	26.4%
(e) Grandmother looking after the younger ones	17	32.07%
(f) Children used to be looked after by the niece of the respondent	3	5.66%
(g) Houses and stall are located nearby	5	9.43%

We find that, out of 53 traders who are married (i) 26.4% used to take their children along with them (or the children used to accompany the mother to the stall) all the way from the house to the stall. The accompanying children are generally 'not of school going age'. Some mothers used to carry the children on their back (ii) for 9.4% mothers, as their house and the stall are situated very near, the respondents themselves kept watch over their houses and children.

Table - 5

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION OF THE TRADER

Level of Education attained		No. of Traders	P.C.
(a)	Illiterate	23	41.8%
(b)	Literate	8	14.5%
(c)	Education upto Class II, III etc.	10	18.1%
(d)	Education upto Class IX	4	7.27%
(e)	Education upto Class X	10	18.1%

To get an idea about the educational status of the families of the traders, we tried to ascertain the educational qualifications attained by the traders themselves, by their husbands and by their children.

Table - 6

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION OF THE HUSBANDS OF THE TRADERS

Level of Education attained		No. of Traders	P.C.
(a)	Illiterate	17	32%
(b)	Literate	3	5.66%
(c)	Education upto Class II-V or above	9	16.9%
(d)	Education upto Class X	7	13.2%
(e)	Matriculate	4	7.5%
(f)	Pre-University pass	5	9.4%
(g)	Not known to the traders	8	15%

We find that (i) 32% of the husbands of the respondents are illiterate, i.e., without the capacity of being able to write their own name in Khasi, (ii) 5.66% of them are literate, (iii) 16.9% have attained education upto Class II

or III or little above, (iv) 13.2% had education upto Class X, (v) 7.5% are Matriculates, (vi) 9.4% have passed Pre-University, (vii) information about the educational qualification attained by the rest 15% of the husbands could not be collected as we have talked to the respondents in their shops, in the absence of their husbands and some traders expressed their inability to throw any light on this aspect.

Table - 7

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION OF THE CHILDREN OF THE TRADERS

Level of Education attained	No.of Children	P.C.
(a) Illiterate	8	4.44%
(b) Literate	5	2.77%
(c) Upto Class II - IX	55	30.55%
(d) II - IX and continuing	36	20.00%
(e) Upto Class X	12	6.66%
(f) Upto Class X and continuing	7	3.8%
(g) Matriculate	17	9.4%
(h) Upto Matric and continuing	8	4.4%
(i) Passed P.U.	3	1.6%
(j) Passed P.U. & continuing	7	3.8%
(k) Graduate	6	3.3%
(l) Graduate & continuing	2	1.1%
(m) Post-Graduate	-	-
(n) Post-Graduate & continuing	3	1.6%
(o) Reading in Nursery	9	5.0%
(p) Between 1-3 years, not of School-going age	12	6.6%

We find that of the total 180 children of all the 53 married respondents, (i) 4.4% are illiterate, (ii) 2.7% are literate, (iii) 30.55% had education upto class II or III or little above upto class IX, (iv) 6.6% studied upto class X, (v) 9.4% are Matriculates, (vi) 1.6% have passed Pre-University, (vii) 3.3% are Graduates, (viii) 5% of the children are aged about 4 years to little more and are just being admitted to Nursery classes, (ix) 6.6% are aged below 3 years and are 'not of school-going age'.

In this educational scene of the next generation of the respondents, a ray of hope is that about 35% of the children are continuing their education at various levels and have not yet become drop-outs.

Table - 8

CAUSE OF GIVING UP EDUCATION BY THE TRADERS

Causes	No. of Traders	P.C.
(a) Poverty and insufficient time to study	31	56.36%
(b) Sickness	4	7.27%
(c) Change of place	1	-
(d) Marriage	10	
(e) Disinterested in studies	2	
(f) Failure in examination (as a deterrent)	7	

When we asked the respondents as to what are the factors responsible for making them give up their studies, we

received the following responses -

- (1) Poverty and insufficient time to study account for 56.36% of the respondents becoming 'drop-outs'. Apart from poverty, in case of especially those whose mothers were tea-sellers and daughters used to assist the mothers in the stall - these daughters used to be left with very little time and energy to study.
- (2) 7.27% had to discontinue studies because of their weak constitution.
- (3) Only 1 respondent left the place of birth and her natal home after marriage and her education was automatically discontinued.
- (4) For 18.18%, marriage is the cause.
- (5) 2 were disinterested in education and therefore discontinued.
- (6) For 12.72% of the respondents, there was no incentive to pursue further education, as after failing once or twice in a class, they felt shy and embarrassed to sit in the same class with newly promoted younger students.

Table - 9

RELIGION OF THE TRADERS

Name of Religion	No. of Respondents	No. of Husbands of the Respondents
(a) Christianity	35	30
(b) Hinduism	15	17
(c) Islam	5	6

We find that Christians constitute the largest religious community with 35 out of 55 respondents being Christian, followed by Hindus and the Muslims.

In case of the husbands of the respondents, majority of them are Christians, quite a good number are Hindus and the rest are Muslims.

We find that 6 pairs of husbands and wives had inter-religious marriages. There is religious harmony and tolerance. The husbands and wives pursue their respective religions. The children usually adopt the religion of their mother.

Table - 10

MARITAL STATUS OF THE TRADERS

Marital Status	No. of Traders	P.C.
(a) Married	24	43.63%
(b) Widowed	19	34.54%
(c) Separated	10	18.1%
(d) Unmarried	2	3.63%

We find that of the 55 respondents, 43.63% are married; 34.54% are widowed; 18.1% are separated and only 2 are unmarried.

From our investigation, we have come to know that in no case the widowed or the separated desired to settle in marriage again. Again we find that misbehaviour of the husband and his financial irresponsibility made the separated and the widowed averse to re-marriage.

Table - 11

DIFFERENCE OF AGE BETWEEN THE HUSBANDS AND THE TRADERS

Age difference	No. of Traders
1 - 5	27
6 - 10	20
11 - 15	6

We find that the mean difference of age between the husbands and the respondents is 6 years. There are 27 pairs who have an age difference of less than 6 years (i.e., the average); and 26 pairs have an age difference of more than 6 years, even upto 10, 15 years. On the whole, we can say that the couples belong to the same age-group.

CONDITION OF THE TRADERS :

Khasis are a matrilocal and matrilineal tribe. We do not expect any mobility for women unless there are compelling

economic reasons. Of the 55 respondents, only 16 came from outside Shillong. Only in one case the family shifted to Shillong after getting assurance of a better living. In 11 cases, it was grinding poverty which drove the respondents to move to Shillong and that also after their marriage. Only in 4 cases geographical mobility took place before marriage. Had it been the responsibility of the husband to look after the family, women would not have come to such trades.

To know the condition and role of the traders, we have to know the economic position and contribution of the husbands and the fathers of the respondents.

From our investigation into the occupation carried out by the fathers of the respondents, we find that 52.7% of them were wage labourers, of whom 37.9% were in agriculture and 62% were non-cultivating labourers. Fathers of only 10 respondents were in regular government employment. But all of them were fourth-grade employees; 3 had no occupations, while the rest were in irregular employments. It is obvious that they being financially weak, could not be of much help in providing their children with good foundation in education and calling. Let us then look at the nature of occupation of the mothers of the respondents.

Of the 55 mothers of the respondents, 29.09% were wage labourers, of whom 56.25% were in agriculture, and the rest 43.75% were in non-cultivating occupation for example, doing

the work of maid-servants, etc. Of the 20 self-employed mothers, 13 were tea-sellers, 4 were liquor sellers, 1 was a second-hand cloth seller, 1 was a pan seller, 1 was a fish seller. The mother of only 1 respondent was a regular government employee, 12 mothers led the life of house-wives. About 5 mothers, the respondents could not furnish any information as in some cases their mothers died when the daughters were infants.

Coming to the nature of occupation carried out by the husbands of the respondents, we find that of the 53 husbands 18 are wage labourers, of the wage labours 17 are non-cultivating labourers, of whom 11 are carpenters, 4 are mechanics and 2 are saw-mill workers. Only 1 person is engaged in agriculture. Husbands of 20 respondents are government employees, of whom 17 are fourth-grade employees and thus are in regular government employment, while the rest are in casual government employment.

Husbands of 17 respondents are in private employment - 8 are drivers either of private vehicles of any type or of local taxis, or of his own taxi, or of tourist taxis. 1 person works jointly with his wife in running her business, 2 are vendors of vegetables, 6 are in irregular appointments.

We wanted to elicit information regarding the income of the husbands and their contribution towards the family. It was extremely difficult to collect this information for in most cases, the respondents could only tell the occupation

and had no definite idea regarding how much do they earn. Thus 14 respondents have absolutely no idea regarding how much their husbands earn and 2 husbands have no income of their own at present. For the rest, we had to estimate the income of the husbands for their callings and find that 27 earn less than Rs. 2000/- per month. 8 earn between Rs. 2000 to Rs. 4000 per month, the remaining 2 own and drive taxis, and earn between Rs. 5000 to Rs. 7000 per month.

We then made enquiry about what happens to the income of the husbands. It was an important enquiry, particularly in view of the low income-yielding profession that the respondents had to opt for.

We asked if the husband keeps his income with him or if he gives it to his wife for meeting the needs of the family. Secondly, if he gives, what portion of his income he gives. Now, we cannot expect hundred per cent honest account here, for it is reasonable that the male may not reveal his entire income to his wife. We find that 11 (21%) husbands refuse to part with their income while 24 husbands hand over their entire income and the respondents have no idea as to what proportion of the income is being handed over. In 5 cases the respondents refused to answer such questions.

We wanted to find out - how much monetary contribution the husbands make towards the family. We find that out of the 53 husbands, 68% contribute less than Rs. 2000/- per month,

about 13% of the husbands contribute less than Rs. 500 per month, about 47% contribute between Rs. 500 and Rs. 1500 per month. The monthly financial contributions of the husbands of the 10 respondents could not be determined as the wives failed to furnish any information, 2 husbands never contributed anything to the family. This explains why the wives have to earn to supplement the income of the husbands.

We enquired also about the husbands' sense of responsibility in running the family. We asked whose final responsibility is it to run the family and meet its expenses. The response is tabulated below :

Table - 12

SHOULDERING OF FAMILY'S FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
BY THE HUSBAND, THE WIFE OR ANY OTHER

Person bearing the responsibility	No. of such persons
(a) Husband bears the responsibility	8
(b) Wife bears the responsibility	13
(c) Joint sharing of responsibility	27
(d) Responsibility is that of the mother of the trader	7

We enquired into the wife's perceptions of the nature of husband's personal expenditure and the response is tabulated below :

Table - 13

WIFE'S PERCEPTION OF THE NATURE OF HUSBAND'S
PERSONAL EXPENDITURE

Drinking & other bad habit	Not worth mentioning smoking, chewing of pan etc.	No idea
16	23	14

We find that, of the 53 husbands, 16 are in the habit of drinking heavily and incur sizeable expenses on it, they also indulge in other objectionable activities. 23 spend sufficient amounts of money on things such as chewing of pan and cigarettes. 14 respondents could not throw any light on the nature of their husbands' personal expenditure.

We enquired into the wives' perception of the husbands' sense of responsibility towards the family. The response towards the family is tabulated below :

Table - 14

WIVES' PERCEPTION OF THE HUSBANDS' SENSE OF
RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS THE FAMILY

	No. of husbands
(a) Responsible	32
(b) Irresponsible	13
(c) Not much responsible but not fully irresponsible	8

We find that, out of 53 husbands, 32 are considered 'responsible' by the respondents, 13 are considered

'irresponsible' and the rest are termed by their wives as between 'irresponsible and 'responsible'.

We tried to find out the number of years of starting the present trade by the respondents and whether she has started it before or after marriage. The specific question asked by us was :- 'when did you start this trade ? Specify the number of years and also whether before of after marriage ?'

We find that 18 (32.7%) of the respondents have joined this trade before marriage and 35 (63.6%) have joined this only after marriage. This is also a pointer to the fact that for most of the respondents, the economic compulsions and hardships were more pressing after marriage when many of them have to manage the household themselves rather than before marriage, when the mother used to shoulder the main burden. Many respondents have, in the course of the interview revealed that with their mother as the head of the family, their life before marriage was very 'tension free' and simple.

ABOUT THE PRESENT TRADE :

We wanted to assess the condition of the trade in which the respondents are engaged. Our first enquiry in this respect was to find out the reason for selecting this particular mode of living. The obtained data are given below :

Table - 15

NATURE OF OCCUPATION OF THE TRADER BEFORE THE
PRESENT TRADE

Occupation	No. of Traders
(a) Maid-servant	7
(b) Helper in a Tea Stall	5
(c) Helper in mothers' stall	12
(d) Used to carry & sell sow dust	1
(e) This is the first trade	25
(f) Employee in an archery counter	1
(g) Buy & sell old news paper, tin, paper, etc.	4

Table - 16

REASONS FOR GIVING UP THE EARLIER OCCUPATION
BY THE TRADER

Response	No. of Traders
(a) Present trade is more profitable	18
(b) Desire for own business, more freedom and availability suitable space	8
(c) Earlier trade was more tiresome	9

The question as to 'why did you choose this particular trade ?' does not apply to those respondents who are engaged in it from the days of their mother, when she used to assist her mother in the latter's stall. Now she has not only inherited the business but also the stall. Such respondents constitute 21.8%. This question also does not apply to those

45.4% of the respondents for whom this is the first trade that they are doing. Among the rest of the respondents, some have given more than one reason in support of their choice for this trade. 18 of the respondents consider their present trade to be more 'profitable' than their earlier or for that matter any other trade, 8 have taken up this trade to fulfill their desire for own and independent business, more freedom and moreover, the availability of spaces suitable for business (such as sheds in office premises or in educational institutions or at good locations on the roadside), 9 term their earlier trade as 'tiresome'. This is specially true in case of those traders who were either maid-servants doing boring household chores or those who used to deal in old news papers, tin, etc. and had to carry load for long distances everyday. With this background, it becomes clear that without this trade, there was no alternative open to them.

We wanted to find out whether the respondents have any special preference for this trade vis-a-vis other trade avenues open to them. The response collected is tabulated below in 17.

We find that 43.6% of the respondents consider the trade as 'profitable' and they admit that they know no other work as they suffer from lack of education; for 34.5%, it is their traditional business and has become a 'part' of their lives; 69% think that only this business can be started with a very small capital for example, it can be started in the

morning with goods taken on credit. After the day's sales, the amount taken on credit can be paid; 23.6% respondents said that in earlier days, unlike today, not many alternative jobs were available such as the job of a cleaner in offices etc. which could be done by persons of very little or no learning. We, also asked the respondents - "would you give up this trade if the financial needs of your family are otherwise met according to conventional standards ? " The response received is tabulated in 18.

Table - 17

DATA SHOWING THE PREFERENCE FOR THIS TRADE

Factors	No. of Traders	P.C.
(a) This trade is profitable; knows no other work	24	43.6%
(b) It is her family or traditional business, household work is boring	19	34.5%
(c) Facility of credit; small capital needed to start	38	69%
(d) This trade is not 'tiresome'	7	12.7%
(e) Absence of any other alternative work; availability of stall or sheds in business area	13	23.6%

More than 47% of the respondents refused to give up this trade even if they have no financial constraints; around 14.55 say that they would, if their family conditions permit, leave this business and lead the life of a housewife; 38.1% of the respondents are not sure what they will do if such a situation ever arises.

Table - 18

DATA SHOWING THE PREFERENCE OR OTHERWISE OF THE
TRADER IF SHE HAS NO FINANCIAL COMPULSION

Response		No. of Traders	P.C.
(a)	Yes	8	14.5%
(b)	No	26	47.2%
(c)	Cannot say definitely	21	38.1%

We tried to find out, over the years, how has the trade behaved. Has the amount of sale increased or has it worsened ? We find that in case of 25.4% of the respondents, their business has improved and the amount of sales has increased; in 41.8% cases of respondents their sales have deteriorated; in case of 21.8%, it has been stagnant; 6 traders do not know whether their sales have risen or fallen since they do not keep any account. We get the impression that these 25 respondents who do not save at all, cannot save because they do not have the capacity to save. They do have the saving consciousness.

Thus we find that even in such a small trade, quite a large number of respondents are able to make handsome savings, provided the business runs well.

Those respondents who think that their trade has improved were asked to cite some causes which, they think, have resulted in the improvement. We find that- establishment of more offices in their localities have resulted in more

staff, i.e., more customers coming to their shops. Moreover, the respondents also think that there are more influx of people into the city these days, who buy from them.

Similarly, we tried to find out why the trade has deteriorated, from those respondents who mentioned this fact. From their response, we find that (i) over the years more such stalls have come up in the locality; thus there is more competition, (ii) customers do not clear the credit, (iii) many people bring tiffin since the price of food articles have gone up very much and thus do not buy from them.

We also tried to find out, whether the respondents, 'face' any competition in business ?

We find that 18.1% of the respondents think there is competition and they attribute this to the coming up of more such stalls in the vicinity; 58.1% think there is no competition; another 18.1% has no idea about this aspect and cannot make any definite remark; 5.4% thinks there is competition but it is not alarming at all.

On being asked, "Do you have an Association or Union ?" we find that about 5% of the respondents think that though they have never been contacted for such a purpose, there should be one such, which will look after their well-being.

In ascertaining the financial condition of the respondents we further asked them - "How much do you save per month ?"

We find that, out of 55 respondents, 25 do not save at all; 5 traders save less than Rs. 300 per month; 5 traders save less than Rs. 600 per month; 11 traders save less than Rs. 900 per month; 3 save less than Rs. 1200 per month; 2 save less than Rs. 1500 per month; 4 traders admit to have saved but we find them little hesitant to disclosing the amount saved. The saving of the traders are mostly done in the form of per day contribution of Rs. 15, Rs. 20, Rs. 30, etc. in various bank accounts.

In ascertaining the problems faced by the respondents in carrying out the business, we tried to find out the distance between their respective houses and stalls.

We find that only in case of 1 respondent, her house and the stall are under the same roof and all other 54 respondents have to cover some distance varying from 1 to 4 kms. for carrying out the trade. This is another indicator of their financial burden.

We enquired into - "Is the stall located in any office premises etc. or is it located on road side ?"

We find that, 36.3% stalls are located in various office premises. 10.9% stalls are in the premises of the various educational institutions; 52.7% stalls are roadside ones.

To ascertain the cost of running such a business, we made an enquiry and found that of the stalls, 45.4% are rented

which do not have to pay any municipal tax; 14.5% stalls are rented and such stalls also have to pay municipal tax; 34.5% of stalls are owned by the respondents and they have to pay municipal tax; only 5.4% stalls are such that they are owned by the respondents and they have to pay neither any rent nor tax. The rent for such stalls normally vary from Rs. 350/- per month to Rs. 800 per month.

We also tried to find out how many respondents stay in rented houses and how many stay in own houses etc. We found that 31 respondents stay in rented houses and the house rent varies from Rs. 210 per month to Rs. 750 per month; 23 respondents are staying in their own houses; only one respondent stays in Government quarter as her husband is a Government employee.

CONCLUSION :

We began our study with certain questions in our mind and after carrying out our investigation we find that all our questions have been positively answered.

We wanted to find out - 'what explains large scale Khasi women's participation in economic activity outside traditional mode of living ?'

As experience tells, people want to stick to their traditional mode of living as far as possible and only when they are compelled that they move out of it. In case of the

Khasis, traditionally they are "Jhumias" or cultivators. But now it becomes evident that since their traditional mode of living cannot sustain them any further, not only the male population have started moving out even the females have to step out of their homes. Over the years, 'Jhum' cultivation has turned into one of the most uneconomic systems of production. And this has necessitated this moving out of population. The extent of the compulsion and hardships faced by the females is evident from the findings of the investigation which shows that the economic position of their fathers and husbands are unable to maintain them and their children. Being brought up in a matrilineal set up, it is well known that the Khasi women are more free and independent. So even if the Khasi women have chosen this trade out of love for work and freedom, why do they come to such a low calling ? There are many avenues available for fulfilling one's love for work and independence. Their choice for such a low calling is a reflection of their mental set up, which has made them to consider themselves inferior and this low level of thinking is a reflection of their poor living standards.

We wanted to find out 'Is it women's responsibility to earn bread ?' The answer to the question is 'yes'. In our sample, it is generally true. Because if the earnings of the male members had been sufficient, it could have prevented the women from working and stepping out of traditional life style.

The answer to our question - 'Is it because men are not ready to share his whole income with other family members, leaving women and children at very low level ?' is also found to be valid. Because we have found that only a small number of husbands share their entire income with the family.

Thus our findings have supported the hypothesis. The Khasi women are found to crowd this low income-yielding occupation because of their economic conditions and all the more day by day, there is increasing competition among the Khasi women for entry and survival in this occupation.

The present project being a short-term one, did not allow the undertaking of an in-depth study of the problem. But even within this short span of time, the problem, when investigated did bring to light some interesting aspects, which call for urgent attention.

While suggesting policy prescription (measures) for improvement of the situation, one thing should be kept in mind that the Khasi women in general, are very self-respecting and have a tremendous love for work. For them 'work is worship' and they do not have any inhibition or social stigma attached to work. The social ills that are found to be prevalent in the Khasi society can be seen to exist in many parts of India, where the menfolk play insignificant roles in the society and force their wives and children to lead miserable lives. But only in few cases, do we find such females stepping out of houses and shouldering bigger responsibility of running the

family and thereby supplementing the roles of their husbands. Thus whatever measures are taken to ameliorate their condition, it should be such as not to hurt the sentiments of these self-respecting, hardworking women.

In course of our conversation during survey, it transpired that none of our respondents have any idea as to what is the total number of such traders in a particular locality or in Shillong as a whole. Even the officials of the Office of the Labour Commissioner also did not have any record of the exact number of such traders since these petty traders are not registered. Some of the respondents also feel the necessity of registration. They feel the need for an association or union of traders (engaged in similar trade), which will fight for their cause. So, first we would like to suggest the system of registering these traders engaged in selling pan, tea, cigarettes etc.

Secondly, we would like to suggest to the Government to make the traders aware of the various loan facilities available and also to provide these traders with loans to start their trade. Since their trade can be started with very small amount of capital, it would not be difficult for the Government to assist a large number of such traders at a time. We have seen a majority of such traders come from a poor background, it might be difficult for them to repay the loan amount initially. So the first installment of the loan can be an interest-free one.

Thirdly, our investigation revealed that quite a good number of our respondents are illiterate and hence have neither the consciousness nor the scope to keep any account of their earning, expenditure, profit or loss etc. So we think if the Government could organise Adult Literacy Programmes for these traders or for atleast one member of each family especially after their working hours (which is normally the office hours), they are likely to benefit immensely from it.

Fourthly, the merits of savings should also be popularised among the respondents. They should be made aware of the various saving facilities available and should be encouraged to save. It was found that the majority of the respondents who save, do so by contributing in the daily accounts of various banks whose agents come personally to the traders shop for collecting the contribution every day. It shows that the savers want to avoid the complicacies associated with deposits and if they do not have to face such complications they are willing to save. So the network of such collection of deposits should be enlarged.

Fifthly, the Government also should normally boost these traders by recognising their contribution to the developing economy of the State. They are self employed people and by taking care of themselves they relieve the Government of the burden of providing additional employment. In some cases, the educated children of the traders also assist their mothers in the shop and relieves the Government burden of providing employment to them.

Apart from loan facility the Government can also encourage such traders by providing sheds in the office premises or in suitable roadsides.

Our Government is very keen on announcing various measures for the welfare and uplift of the rural women who are poor and under-privileged, in the all India content. But it is very difficult to conceive of a section of women who are urban-dwellers but whose economic and social conditions are worse than those of the rural women. Thus, these petty women traders of Shillong (whom we have studied), though represent a sizeable portion of the population, who earn their livelihood from this trade and make significant contribution to the income of their State has escaped the attention and sympathy even of the local administration for so many years. We hope that the present study will act as a pointer to the plight of these traders and attract the attention of the local administration, voluntary organisations, womens' fora etc.

It is universally acknowledged that for the uplift of the society, social awareness of its female population is the most important prerequisite. In case of the Khasi Society, because of its matrilineal structure, and the pivotal role that the mother plays - raising the level of social consciousness of the mothers assumes more significance.

Many respondents admitted the fact that it was the only avenue left to them as they do not know any other work. In the

light of this, we propose to suggest that if the traders, even the illiterate ones, can be provided with some opportunities for training in operating woolen machines, sewing machines, etc. it can be an alternative source of employment for them. In such cases, the Government can set up such schools and arrange for machines and provide training free of cost or at a very nominal fee. Another aspect that has come to our notice is that specially for those traders whose stalls are located in the premises of educational institutions, during the long holidays, winter or otherwise, their trade is adversely affected in the absence of the students who are the main customers. Such traders also need alternative source of income during these lean periods.

The list of the places visited in connection with the collection of data and source material, is as follows :-

1. I.C.S.S.R.,
North Eastern Regional Centre,
Shillong
2. Anthropological Survey of India,
North East Regional Station,
Shillong.
3. Women's Studies Research Centre,
Gauhati University
4. Office of the Commissioner of Census,
Shillong
5. Directorate of Economics, Statistics and Evaluation,
Govt. of Meghalaya,
Shillong.
6. National Sample Survey Organisation,
(Field Operation Division)
Meghalaya Region,

Shillong.

7. Office of the Commissioner of Labour,
Shillong.
8. Office of the Secretary,
North Eastern Council,
Shillong.
9. Office of the Chairman,
Shillong Municipal Board,
Shillong.

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