

# ASPECTS OF TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE ON WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN FISHERIES: A CASE STUDY FROM MANIPURI WOMEN OF NORTH EASTERN INDIA

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Traditional Knowledge of fisheries are the local skills, techniques, wisdoms, beliefs, costumes and folklore in relation to fishes held by the aboriginal people of a community over successive generation. This knowledge has a strong connection with Manipuri women in North Eastern India and this plays a major role in enhancing their participation in fisheries. Women actively involved in fishing with various types of indigenous gears that are fabricated and operated by them easily. The gears are made of locally available light weight and cheap. Community fisheries are unique and a part of cultural heritage that is also performed according to gender and manpower. Community based fisheries played a significant role in the women empowerment. The women fisher's folk congregate and established women's associations like Women Fish Culture Group. Fish marketing is generally undertaken by women and the retail trade sector is an exclusive domain of women. The traditional food habits in the region such as preference of small fishes, preparation of dry, smoke, paste, fermented and marinated fishes results in increased involvement of women in these activities. Various community festivals for women that are related with fish are celebrated in the region. Customs and beliefs of the local Meitei community in relation with women has strong connection with fishes. Large amount of literature on fish as a traditional medicine, particularly for women, are available in Manipur.

The degree of gender specificity attached to the ITK depends not only on the responsibilities assigned but also on the degree of flexibility with which women carry out the same. Traditional knowledge and practices have been sufficient to sustain livelihoods in the past. But in a world of globalization and immense pressures on resources, this knowledge needs conservation and expansion for sustainable development in the region. Most of these women fisher folks who maintain a subsistence economy still resort to their primitive and traditional fishing crafts and gears. There may be a possibility of loss or fossilization of such traditional knowledge from the region. The ascendancy of modern tools and the slow obliteration of indigenous knowledge will be a challenge to women's participation in fisheries in the region. Blending of traditional techniques with modern scientific technologies will assist economic improvement of the local community in the state.