

# Sources and Management of Personal Finance - A Study on the Role Played by the Hmar Women of Haflong (Dima-Hasao District) and its Emerging Opportunities

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**Abstract:** *Finance is the provision of money and is needed by everyone to carry on activities and to achieve its targets. It is so indispensable today that it is rightly said to be the lifeblood of an enterprise and also for any individuals. This paper is an attempt to study the sources of personal finance and its management with special reference to the part played by the Hmar women of Haflong. Personal finance deals with the analysis of principles and practices involved in managing one's own daily need of funds. Mention may be made that the Hmars are a group of hill tribes living in Assam and different parts of North East India and Haflong is the only hill station of Assam situated in the district of Dima Hasao (formerly known as the North Cachar Hills district). This paper will not only emphasize on the role played by the Hmar women to generate income for its family and their active participation in household management, but will also try to pinpoint the opportunities and suggest ideas so that the Hmar women can generate more income and manage their personal finances.*

**Keywords:** Hmar, Personal finance, Sources, Management, Income

## 1. Introduction

As much as the circulation of blood is essential in the human body for maintaining life, finance is also an indispensable part of a human to carry on with its life. To heighten the importance of finance, it can be said that finance is the lifeblood and nerve centre of a business. Without adequate finance it is difficult to even meet the basic needs of an individual and for an enterprise, it is impossible to accomplish its objectives. Personal finance is a broad term and includes management of money, savings and investment. It is evident that among the different communities existing in the north-eastern states, the man is the head of the family and is the main source of income to his family. Likewise, the Hmar society is a patriarchal society where the father, the man or the husband is the head of the family. In earlier days, women were denied education and had no career opportunities because of the patriarchal society where it is considered that men are the bread-earners and women the home-makers. However, with the concept of modernization, there has been a revolutionary change in the role played by women. The concept of a woman's position within the four walls no longer holds good. They are no longer confined to only household chores, homemaker, a mother and an obedient wife. Things have changed overtime. Not only the man or the husband is the source of income to the family, women have now more or less the same participation in generating funds for the family.

The fact is that managing personal finance is as important as generating it. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to study the sources and management of personal finances by the Hmar women. Though many of them have been successful in bringing home a good income, yet there are many more scopes and opportunities for them to explore. Therefore, this paper will also make an attempt to give ideas, suggestions of such opportunities and enlightening them with the factors that can contribute to its source of income.

## 2. Objective

The purpose of the study is to understand and analyze the sources of finance and how it is being managed by the Hmar women and also to suggest ways and means to broaden their source of income.

### Research Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature and data are collected through personal observation and interaction with the Hmar women. The study has been conducted among the Hmar women of Haflong, Dima Hasao district, Assam.

### THE HMARS

Hmar in ordinary sense means 'North'. The Hmars are a group of hill tribes in North-east India and Myanmar, living in the northern part of Mizoram, southern part of Manipur, scattered in different parts of Meghalaya, N. C. Hills and Cachar district of Assam, Tripura and Upper Burma. There are differing theories related to the meaning and origin of the Hmars. The term Hmar is believed to have originated from the term "Hmerh" meaning "tying of one's hair in a knot on the nape of one's head." Several theories have been put forwarded regarding the origin of the Hmars but it appears historically evident that the Hmars originally came from Central China. The Hmar as scheduled tribe has been given recognition under the 6th schedule of the Constitution of India in 1956 under the initiative of Rev. Dr. Rochunga Pudaite. However, the Hmars who are in the plain districts of Karimganj, Hailakandi, Cachar of Assam are not included as scheduled tribes.

Most of the population of the Hmar people can be classified as agriculturists or cultivators. They practice what is commonly known as 'jhumming cultivation' and this is their main source of livelihood. They were once termed as a nomadic tribe because of their frequent movements and migrations which were solely motivated by economic

interest, that is, in search for better cultivable land. However, modern education has made a great impact on their culture. We can now find some Hmar women taking up entrepreneurship as a career and has set up their own small enterprise. Hmar women are known for their weaving skills. They dye their homespun yarns into different colors and weave exquisite clothes. They have produced many kinds of clothes and garments with various designs numbering a hundred. All these had resulted in generating income for them.

#### HAFLONG: Brief Note

The only hill station of Assam- Haflong is a small town and is the headquarters of Dima Hasao district. Haflong offers a pretty side of Assam to behold. It is best known for its picturesque views and rich cultural legacy. The name Haflong is derived from Dimasa language which means 'ant hill'. Haflong is also called as the "Scotland of Assam and sometimes it is referred to as the "Switzerland of the East". The distance between Assam's capital city Guwahati and Haflong is 345 kilometers). It is a hilly town surrounded by natural beauties with enchanting hills, water streams, lush green hills and waterfalls. The town is occupied by several ethnic groups, communities, tribes and races who maintain their own dialect, culture, customs and beliefs. The district witness both tribal and non-tribal communities giving it a beauty of diversity. The inhabitants of the town generally include the Hmar, Kuki, Naga, Mizo, Dimasa, Biata, Hrangkhawl, Karbi, Vaiphei tribes and also non-tribal communities like Assamese, Bengali, Nepali. This hilly terrain can be a hub for all travel junkies as it has many tourist attractions.

#### Personal Finance: Sources and Management

Personal finance is about meeting personal financial goals which may be short term or long term financial needs. In Hmar society, women play a very important role in the socio-religious-cultural life of the tribe starting from domestic domain to religious and public domains. A research was undertaken to enhance this article. To know how finance is generated and managed, it is pertinent to know the types of women existing amongst the Hmar society. Based on the research, we found that some women are:-

- i) An agriculturist
- ii) A working woman (salaried)
- iii) A costermonger or a green grocer
- iv) An entrepreneur (relatively a new concept)
- v) A housewife etc.

However the role played by the women in the management of finance and household activities is same for all. It is unfortunate but the fact is many Hmar women of Haflong are widow. Or there are instances where the husband does not earn at all, say due to old age or ailment. In such cases women is the only source of income to the family.

The Hmar people in general are **agriculturist** or **cultivators** and their method is very primitive. Many Hmar women earn their livelihood by practicing jhum cultivation. They plant varieties of food items such as ginger, rice and mostly green vegetables. These are sufficient enough to meet their basic

food needs and if they are available in abundance, they are marketed which leads to cash inflows for the family.

A **working lady** is someone who is a salaried lady. Some of the Hmar women of Haflong fall under this category. She may be working in a school as a teacher, or in a college as a lecturer, or as an office employee and a bank employee. She goes hand in hand with her husband in earning income. It is obvious when two members of the house are working and both are earning, it becomes a lot easier to manage the family (pecuniary advantage) than those families where only one person is earning. Even when the head of the family i.e. the father is working, at the end of the day it is the mother who manages the fund flows and outcomes of the family. The mother prepares a budget, considers the future needs and expenses and accordingly manages her finance.

A **costermonger** or a **green grocer** is one who sells fruits and vegetables in the streets or markets. The term costermonger is now often used to describe hawkers in general. The Hmar women sell inexpensive items, handicrafts or food items in the market. This is yet another source of income to the family. Besides, there are also vendors who go door to door to sell products. Many instances are witnessed in the Hmar society where women would buy products from places other than their native places. Such women would sell variety of products ranging from cosmetics to clothing and household products such as solar, mosquito rackets, to mention few. These products are mainly brought from places like Manipur, Burma, Dimapur, Aizawl etc. These women can literally be called business woman. As we know, business is all about risk. "The more the risk, the higher the profit." Thus we can say that the Hmar women are bold in nature and are willing to take risks in undertaking such business. They also have a convincing attitude so they find it easy to persuade customers to buy their products. Mentioned may be made that there are also some women who own a local store/shop.

**Entrepreneurship** amongst the Hmars is relatively a new concept. Undeniably the Hmar women are known for their weaving skills but it is only in recent times they got engaged in weaving business. Since then, they have worked harder to keep the art of weaving alive. Though their market is yet to have a wider coverage; it has resulted in earning income for the household- meeting the basic needs for survival and others. The Hmar women are talented and creative and they not only weave the aboriginal costumes but have also transformed their creative ideas and modified the traditional costumes with conformity to the modern fashion. The Hmar women entrepreneurs not only create income for themselves but also provide employment opportunities to its fellow members which in addition are a source to the household income.

A **housewife** or a **homemaker** is a common reality existing in every society. There are a section of Hmar women who are homemaker but no derogatory remarks can be given to them. Despite not earning an income, they deserve the same respect like any other women and it doesn't mean they need to be belittled or underrate them. Nevertheless they are the ones who manage the finance and budget of most of the

families existing in the Hmar society. Also one cannot ignore the importance of a mother figure in any home.

Mentioned may be made that amongst the Hmar society, there are families where the mother is the only source of income. Instances are there where a mother single handedly takes care of the entire family members. But this does not imply that a single mother is a housewife; she may take any forms as mentioned above. As such she may be a working lady, an agriculturalist, an entrepreneur and the likes. For a single mother where she is the only source of livelihood to its family members, managing her household chores, procuring finance and managing them has never been easy. However, as stated earlier, the Hmar women are bold and they are ready to confront the varying types of hardships and difficulties that come their way and try to maintain the family budget sufficiently. She makes sure to meet all the basic needs of the family for long term physical well being, usually in terms of consumption of goods. Besides, she takes into account all the unforeseen events that may pop up in the near future so that she and her family do not face financial crisis. The most important and the foremost money that she earns are saved to be given as tithes. Tithes are the one tenth of annual produce or earnings, set apart from personal income as an offering to God or for works for mercy, or the same amount regarded as an obligation or tax for the support of the church. Since the Hmar people are Christian dominated society, they believe that giving one-tenth of their earnings will be a blessing to them. As it is written in the Bible Malachi 3:10 "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my temple. If you do," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!

It is a kind of tradition and the Hmar women are accustomed to it, henceforth unless she gives the offering to God its one tenth of its earnings, she does not spend a penny on other stuffs. It is only after this offering that she starts using and segregates the income as needed and required.

Despite the hardships, this is how a woman of the Hmar society plays an important role not only in generating finance for the household but also manages the funds effectively and efficiently keeping in mind all the contingencies that may affect its budget in the near future.

### 3. Opportunities

There are many scopes and opportunities for the Hmar women to expand their horizons in terms of generating finance and managing the same. The different scope and opportunities are discussed as follows:

1) **Entrepreneurship**- One of the best ways to increase their flow of income is setting up a small enterprise, that is, to take up entrepreneurship as a career. Though there are some Hmar women entrepreneurs but their number is yet to grow. As mentioned earlier, Hmar women have a good weaving skill and therefore they can use this skill and talent to generate finance for themselves. Considering their weaving skills, many more women can come up and showcase their skills by setting up an enterprise of handloom and weaving products using the traditional method as well as producing clothes with the

help of weaving machines. The reason of lesser women entrepreneurs amongst the Hmar may be because of their ignorance about the very idea of business and also they do not possess any vocational education.

- 2) **Salon**- Yet another scope for the Hmar women to generate income is taking up a beautician profession and opening a beauty parlor or a salon. Many women have in born talents with regard to this profession. Given appropriate training, many of the women can sharpen their skills and bring about income to the family.
- 3) **Farming**- The practice of different kinds of farming can result in inflow of money to the family. The various types of farming practice may include dairy farming, poultry farming, pig farming etc. These types of farming are not popular or common amongst the Hmar community. The reason for its unpopularity may be because of lack of finance, ignorance and clueless about the idea of farming and the income that it can generate.

### 4. Conclusion

The role and responsibilities of a woman has become larger and heavier. She alongside taking up the responsibilities of a housewife has played a fruitful role in generating income and managing them efficiently for its household. The hard work and skills pointed out by women has proved that women are at par with their counterparts. Through this study, it has been found that the Hmar women has different sources for generating finance and has taken up all the responsibilities of managing the finances efficiently and effectively. However, there are many unexplored ideas with which the Hmar women can enlarge their finance. The reason behind the unexplored ideas and opportunities may be because of ignorance, no vocational education, and inadequate funds. Therefore impartment of basic vocational education and training and availability of adequate funds or help from the Government will enable the Hmar women to broaden their sources of finance.

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