

Gender Disparity in Educational Development in Assam: A Study

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Abstract

Education is the main criterion for defining a country's growth and development and as such has been an honorable position in society. The indicator of development is education and empowerment for women. The complete and comprehensive development of society is ensured by female education. It should involve equal access to and work for higher education. However, the social-economic spectrum of the state is affected by a gender imbalance in schooling. Before attaining higher education, a lot of females particularly from rural regions drop out. A flexible, accessible and equal educational system should thus be developed in which both women and men easily meet their aspirations and overcome their societal duties and build a responsible society for the development.

Keywords:-*Gender, Inequality, Education, Status, Women, Higher Education, Assam.*

Introduction

Women constitute half of the total population, yet they suffer from educational rights, economic rights and human rights. Women are still relatively deprived of equal rights and privileges as enjoyed by men. There are rampant gender differences between men and women in terms of wages specifically in the unorganised sectors. Women are deprived of proportionate job opportunities in the administrative offices. They suffer badly in the educational field, and their suffering is visible from the very low percentage of their enrolment in higher education. The level of education, rate of work participation, usability and enjoyment on profits etc. are some of the areas which show the lower status of women compared to that of men. Women usually get lower wages than that of men for the same work. Comparatively, they also suffer from poor health status, low educational status, and lower skill compared to men. In a male dominated society, the activities of women are considered belonging mainly to the private domain, whereas the activities of men are considered part of the public domain.

But, India being a democratic country, everyone has the right to enjoy equal rights and opportunity, equal chance to access the various resources constitutionally guaranteed to all.

The implementation of the rights under the social sectors such as—right to education, right to employment, right to equal pay for equal work, right of access to health services, right to participate in the political life of one's community, etc. have been launched for bringing in the necessary upward mobility of the different sections of the people in the country. Besides, for the long-term benefit as well as the development of a country, economic security, social security, educational security, the security of life etc. among the members of the country are very essential. Therefore, it is right time to rationalize critically the share of women's contribution into the developmental aspects of a society or the nation that will ensure the Human Development Indices in the country.

Assam has made notable progress in increasing its literacy rate in India's North-East state and is currently one of the country's top five countries. The literacy rate of the State is more than the country's average, although there remains to be an extensive disparity between men and women. Data from the National Statistical Organization's (NSO) study indicate that 81.2 percent of women in the country live at 90.1 percent of the rate of literacy in males. In addition to the literacy rate of 96.2%, Kerala maintains being the most literate state and reduces the gap between men and women. The female literacy rate in Kerala is 95.2 percent vs 97.4 percent of male literacy. The difference at level India is 14.4% compared to 2.2% in Kerala and 8.8% in Assam. This disparity was 11.58 percentage points in the 2011 census in Assam. These statistics need a particular emphasis on the education of women in the state to bridge the gap. From July 2017 to June 2018, the NSO conducted a countrywide survey and the survey results represent the newest information available in policy and strategic formulation. The literacy rate of Assam has risen from 72.19 in 2011 to 85.9, whereas in 2017-18 the national average rose from 74.07 in 2011 to 77.07. The NSO study indicates that the gender disparity in higher education levels in the state is becoming increasingly important. In the category successfully finished and higher graduation, only 3.9% of men aged 15 and above finishing and completing their graduation and further education are 8.2% female. In stark contrast, the proportion of women in the Kerala group is 16.1 more than 13.6% for men. At Assam, gender disparities in rural and urban regions remain apparent, reminding policy makers and educators that complacency can't exist if literacy rates are simply improved. The successful completion of higher education at the general and technical levels was a major barrier for development of human resources in India. In the post-secondary level the gross attribution ratio in the state

decreases significantly to 16.5% compared to the national average of 22.8%. This requires identifying the causes why the post-secondary level falls enormously. Ensuring the gross attendance ratio of gender parity in this category seems to be more demanding and the broad divisions between men and women indicate deficiencies in the public education system. While both men and women are often left out of financial restrictions, domestic labour and marriage are two important reasons in the increase in the drop-out rates of women across the nation. This needs a cross-cutting of the programs of the various departments to alleviate women's and girls' socio-economic situation. The broad gender disparity in reading and education means that States are being called upon to concentrate on results, so that girls' empowerment does not just remain catch-all for advertising campaigns. In Assam marriage is a significant cause for 11% of urban women's and 8.3% of rural women's dropout rates. These figures raise questions about the logic underlying the Assam government in the Arundhati Gold Scheme. The State Government would provide Rs 30 thousand newly married women for the purchase of gold for their weddings under this program. The bride's educative level to qualify is Class X whereas the community of Adivasi does not need a minimum educational level. The money for the program may be used to decrease women's drop-outs and provide excellent education to assist them achieve their goals of further education. The results of the survey provide Assam numerous lessons in bridging gender disparities in schooling.

Gender Disparity and Women Empowerment: Conceptual Issues

Gender Disparity: Past few decades have witnessed a steady increase in awareness of the need to empower women and achieve gender equality through various measures. The concept of gender equality has been gaining importance since subordinate status of women in relation to men has been seen in almost every facets of life. Gender equality is understood as that stage of human development at which the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals are not to be determined by the fact of being born as male or female. It is a stage when both men and women realize their full potential and become partners in every sphere of their lives. Realizing the extent of gender inequality throughout the world, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) was established as a separate fund within the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 1984. The General Assembly at that time instructed to ensure women's involvement with mainstream activities. The Platform of Action resulting from the 1995 Beijing World Conference on

Women expanded the concept and called it as 'gender mainstreaming' i.e., the application of gender perspectives to all legal and social norms and standards, to all policy development, research, planning, advocacy, development, implementation and monitoring- as a mandate for all member states. As a result of the Beijing conference and many years of work leading up to it, more than 100 countries announced new initiatives to improve the status of women. In 2000, the follow-up Beijing+5 Conference further strengthened the application of the mainstreaming concept and used it to highlight the need for more progress in reaching equality worldwide.

In 1995 main emphasis on gender equality was given in the Human Development Report (UNDP, 1995). At the global level for the first time just before the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing two important gender indices were constructed by UNDP (1995): the Gender related Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). The GDI considered inequalities by gender in the Human Development Index (HDI) dimensions. It measured the inequalities confronted by women in achievement of those which were very essential for overall development of human being. The GEM focused on political participation (measured by women's shares of parliamentary seats), economic participation (shares of high level and professional positions) and power over economic resources (income gaps). The disadvantages facing women and girls are a major source of inequality. Very often, women and girls are discriminated against health, education and in labour markets- with negative repercussions for their freedoms. In 2010 report, UNDP further introduced a third measure of inequality known as Gender Inequality Index (GII) built on the same framework as the HDI and the Inequality adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI) in order to better expose differences in the distribution of achievements between women and men. The GII is unique in including educational attainment, economic and political participation and female specific health issues and in accounting for overlapping inequalities at the national level. Thus it became an important advancement on existing global measures of gender equity. Along with those measures of gender inequality another measure to capture the magnitude and scope of gender-based inequalities is known as Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI). This was introduced by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2005. The Index benchmarks gender gaps on economic, political, education and health based criteria, and provide country rankings that allow for effective comparisons across regions and income

groups, and over time. The GGGI examines the gap between men and women in four fundamental categories: *economic participation and opportunity*, *educational attainment*, *health and survival* and *political empowerment*.

Women Empowerment: The concept of empowerment of women has, however, undergone a sea change from welfare oriented approach to equity approach. Today empowering women refers not only to improve their material wellbeing but also their active participation in the development process. The concept of women in development emerged at a point of time when attention was shifted to enhancement of the role and status of women. Then equity and empowerment approach merged to form the gender and development concept (Mathew, 2003). Although many researchers made attempts to explain the concept of empowerment, the most relevant definition is one provided by Sen and Batliwala (2000). According to them “Empowerment is the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives. It includes both controls over resources and ideology... a growing intrinsic capability, greater self-confidence and an inner transformation of one’s consciousness that enables one to overcome external barriers [as quoted by Kishor & Gupta (2004): 694]. This definition mainly emphasizes on two important aspects: Firstly, empowerment is not a power over others but a power to achieve certain desired goals. Secondly, the idea of empowerment is more applicable to those who are powerless irrespective of sex, caste or class. According to the report on Human Development in South Asia (2000: 28), “Empowerment can be considered a change in the context of a woman or man’s life that enables her/him increased capacity to lead a fulfilling human life, characterized by external qualities such as health, mobility, education and awareness, status in the family, participation in decision making, and level of material security, as well as internal qualities such as self-awareness and self-confidence”.

The Research Questions

The study is organised to answer the following questions:

1. How is the gender disparity in education across Assam?
2. What are the reasons behind gender disparity in education development in Assam?
3. How does Gender equality play the role for Human Development?

Objectives

Though the main objective of the study is to investigate the gender disparity in Educational development in Assam, the specific objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the gender disparity in educational development in Assam.
2. To find the reasons behind gender disparity in education and means to reduce the gap in Assam.
3. To find out the ways of reducing Gender Inequality and accelerating capacity building among the women, particularly in a state like Assam.

Methodology

Women education is selected for our study as the women education is more valuable for the society and economy. The study is based on secondary data. The secondary data were collected from both government and nongovernment publications. In addition to secondary data, a large number of discussions were held with knowledgeable persons regarding the women education in Assam

Significance of the Study

Although various international treaties have affirmed the right to education and non-discrimination, countries still face gender inequality in education where females lag behind males. India is one of those countries that still face gender inequality in education. In 2007, 2008 and 2010, India was listed in the list of low EDI countries by the UNESCO. According to the 2011 Census Report of India, Assam, one of the North-Eastern States of India has the 20th highest gender disparity in literacy rate out of 35 positions (based on GPI of LR). Several researchers have found negative impact of gender inequality in education on economic development in their studies. Against this backdrop, the study that has been undertaken is significant. It is expected that the findings of the present study will bring light to the government's policy making regarding the elimination of the gender disparity in education. Moreover, in the field of gender disparity in education and economic development in the State of Assam very limited study has been done so far. Therefore, the study would be a humble attempt to fill the research gap.

The level of Education for Women in Assam

Out of the total literacy rate in Assam i.e. 73.18 percent, the male literacy is 78.81 whereas the female literacy is 67.27 percent, with the gap of 11.54 percent. In terms of literacy, the rank of Assam is situated at the 26th position out of 35 states of the country. (Census,

2011) Although the female enrolment is increasing in the primary and elementary level, the enrolment rate of women in secondary and higher education segment is less than that of men. The rank of Assam in terms of Educational Development Index of 2009-10 was 31 and 32 at primary and elementary level among the 35 states of the country (MHRD Report 2013- 14). According to 12th FYP, 43% women enrolled in universities and colleges in 2009-10. But the enrolment of women were to be seen mostly in general courses rather than i professional and vocational ones. Even within the North Eastern region of India, there is a wide range of variations in terms of GER at the higher stage. In the North East, Assam has comparatively poor GER (16.8% as per AISHER 2014-15) compared to other North Eastern States like Manipur (38.5%),Sikkim (29.4%) etc. Besides, it has been observed that there is less number of female GER compared to male in India and other states of the North East except Meghalaya and Sikkim. This reveals that the overall inclusion of girls and women in higher education is too poor to be compared to boys and men.

Women and Higher Education in Assam

The fundamental shift in women's position is driven by education. It is the key to overcoming obstacles facing women and the fundamental instrument for women's empowerment. However, Assam's educational level is considerably behind in comparison with the other country's states. The Assam Women's Education League was established in May 1940 with Lady Reid as its President to ensure that the education of girls was obtained from Government and the public. The League was aimed at: I inviting all women in the province interested in learning to join the League. (ii) Enhance the cause of the education of women in the province, (a) push for legislative change, (b) assist in the development of an educated public opinion; It was accessible to all women on an annual fee of eight years. 136 223 women joined the League in the first year itself. As he felt (iii) that the League had huge potential in advancing the cause of women's education in Assam, the Director of Public Instruction welcomed it. It may be stated that the first time females entered the official education institutions was the foundation of the British colonial administration in Assam. Before the British arrived, women's education was informal and mainly restricted to practical skills in the home. It was a world of sex; men and women performed various jobs and inhabited distinct places. The combined efforts of Christian missionaries, the British Indian and social reformers of the era led to the opening up of

women's education. There has been progress in terms of increasing the number of girls and schools of all kinds and the number of girls and women in the province. In 1911, for example, just 20,753 females were literate, compared to 46,002 in 1921.

Once independent, the educational achievement of Assam women in the district may be evaluated at various levels of education by means of women's literacy and women's enrolment rate. In the upper Assam, women's literacy rates are 60.35% higher than the national average of 54.61%. The Central Assam and the Lower Assam exhibit inferior performance compared with the Upper Assam in the area of final literacy. The rates are respectively 52.61% and 52.53%. The percentage of women registered at various educational levels is extremely low. In practically the whole state district, the primary enrolment rate at middle and secondary level reaches over 50%, while the enrolment rate is approximately 45%. However, female enrolment is considerably less, i.e. less than 40% at upper secondary and junior colleges. When the Gauhati University was established in 1948, a new chapter for females' higher learning had been started soon after independence. The Assam government established in 1963 the Assam State Women's Education Council, which offered important proposals to enhance higher education for women. For example, the construction of at least a (1) school in each district for both science and arts and an appointment of the woman Head – Quarter Joint Director at every level of higher education provide a post-graduate & abroad bursary for females. The development of women's studies centres in various central and state universities according to the 11 plan guidelines is another good thing for women's education. The Chandraprabha Saikiani Center for Women's Studies in Assam, which was founded in Tezpur Central University in 2009, was set up in 2010 and in 2013, Assam Women's University in Jorhat. The GRR of the male population is 21.6% compared with 18.9% of the female population in all of India (AISHE, 2011- 12). India has just 65.46% of females, compared with 82.14% of males (Census, 2011). During Assam the literacy rate for women was 67.3% against the literacy rate of 78.8% for men (Census, 2011). These data indicate that women's education at all levels is still belated as compared to the male population.

The Way Forward

Massive awareness programmes should be carried out in the entire state related to the importance of education.

1. Awareness on the negative impact of child marriage should be organised. Children should be asked to set their career goal in life, which will lengthen their educational years and keep them away from getting married early in life. Children should be reminded that there is age for everything such as age for marriage, age for voting right etc. If they are made aware about all this, there will be fewer problems related to child marriage in the society. The early marriage system and dowry system should be abolished from the society to uplift the status of women.

2. At the local as well as regional level, the government should take initiative to provide good educational facilities to promote the quality education especially for the girl child.

3. The reservation system for the weaker section of the society as well as for the girl child should be implemented.

4. Government should establish girl's schools and colleges to minimize the educational gap between male and female in the district.

5. Providing scholarships and other incentives to reduce the financial stress on the family will help in reducing the educational gap between male and female and also will motivate the children to continue their education.

Conclusion

The only way to empower women is via education. Women throughout the centuries have had to ask in society for equal standing. In almost every country in India, however, the pace of growth is sluggish. The registration depends on the teaching of women. The setting up of educational institutions for women in rural regions in particular is still poor and women still have a low level of registration compared to males. Different social, psychological, and economic reasons may be linked to the gap between men and women in schooling. To eliminate these obstacles, the main problems related to women's education in a specific community must be addressed. In order to empower women in all areas, efforts must be made to shatter the old illusions of feminine impotence, lack of leadership and drive to the heights of glory. It is thus essential to provide women psychological assistance and direction to make it progressive.

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