

GENDER DISPARITY IN INDIGENOUS MUSLIMS COMMUNITY: A CASE STUDY IN CHAKCHAKA DEVELOPMENT BLOCK OF BARPETA DISTRICT, ASSAM

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Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to analyse the status of women and men in terms of various socio-economic indicators based on data from primary sources collected with the help of stratified random sampling. It is widely believed that empowerment of women through equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities to women will go a long way in removing the existing gender discriminations. Gender discrimination and gender disabilities are not uniformly found in all the communities in Assam. It is no different to the indigenous Muslims community of the Chakchaka Development Block of Barpeta district of Assam.

Here gap does exist and in absolute term also the status of human development indicators like literacy rate, employment level, sex ratio, political participation etc. are not so satisfactory compared to the national level. Giving property right, access to employment or educational opportunity on the part of the government will not change the picture. There is only social barrier and no legal or constitutional barrier to equality

Key words: Gender disparity, stratified random sampling, literacy rate, work participation rate, sex ratio.

Introduction:

Mahatma Gandhi, while defining empowerment of women, had described it as a situation “when women, whom we call *abala* become *sabala*, all those who are helpless will become powerful.” Gender equality refers to that stage of human development at which the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not be determined by the fact of being born male or female, in other words, a stage when both men and women realize their full potential and become a partner in every sphere of their lives. Realizing the extent of gender inequality throughout the world, the United Nations Development Fund for Women was established as a separate fund within the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 1984. At that time, the General Assembly instructed it to ensure women’s involvement with mainstream activities. The platform of Action resulting from the 1995 Beijing World Conference on women expanded this concept, calling it “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. In this way, the gender factor is no longer is to be only a supplement to development but central to the practice of development. As a result of Beijing conference—and the 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. Similarly in human development front, it is gradually realized that if the women, who constitute almost half of the population, have remained as passive, human development in its real sense cannot be possible. Therefore in 1995 Human Development Report, the main emphasis was on gender equality. The first global gender indices were launched in the 1995 HDR--- the Gender related Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) --- just before the 4th world Conference on Women, held in Beijing. The GDI considered inequalities by gender in the HDI dimensions. It measures the inequalities confronted by women in achievement of those which are 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 the labour market--- with negative repercussions for their freedoms. Human Development Report 2010 introduce a new measure of these inequalities built on the same framework as the HDI and the IHDI--- to better expose differences in the distribution of achievements between women and men. This is known as Gender Inequality Index (GII).

The Gender Inequality Index shows that:

- Gender inequality varies tremendously across countries--- the losses in achievement due to gender inequality (not directly comparable to total inequality losses because different variables are used) range from 17 percent to 85 percent. The Netherland tops the list of the most gender-equal country, followed by Denmark, Sweden and Switzerland.
- Countries with unequal distribution of human development also experience high inequality between women and men, and countries with high gender inequality also experience unequal distribution of human development. Among the countries doing very badly on both fronts are Central African Republic, Haiti and Mozambique.

The Gender Inequality Index (GII), estimated for 138 countries, reveals gender disparities in reproductive health, empowerment and labour market participation. The losses in these achievements due to gender inequality, as expressed by the GII, range from 17 percent to 85 percent, with larger losses concentrated in the Arab States and South Asia (HDR 2010).

Along with these measures of measuring gender inequalities the Global Gender Gap Index, introduced by the World Economic Forum in 2006, is another measure for capturing the magnitude and scope of gender-based inequalities and tracking their progress. 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 Global Gender Gap Index examines the gap between men and women in four fundamental categories: *economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment.*

According to the reports of WEF, the large populous nations such as India, Pakistan and Egypt hold some of the lowest ranks in respect of gender gap. The study puts Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland on the top of the list. These countries are characterized by strong liberal society, with an impressive record of openness and transparency in government and comprehensive safety net which provides security to vulnerable group of

population. As a result women of this part of the world enjoy greater access to education, work opportunity and a higher standard of living. Although no country has yet succeeded in eliminating the gap, it is narrowed in case of Nordic countries. The 2015 report throws a valuable snapshot of the current performance of 136 countries. On average, over 96 percent of the gap on health outcomes, 93 percent on educational attainment, 60 percent on economic participation and 21 percent on political empowerment has been closed. The three highest ranking countries--- Iceland, Finland and Norway have been able to close their gender gaps significantly (over 80 percent), while the lowest ranking country; Yemen has closed only around 46 percent of its gender gap. India's position is 101 among 136 countries in global gender gap report.

The status of women is high in comparison to in some other states of India as there was the absence of dowry system. But in this modern society it is invading with a result of some dowry death cases have been reported.

Area of Study: The Chakchaka Community Development Block of Barpeta District in Assam was established in 24, 1997. The Block area extends longitudinally from 90°48'30" E to 90°59' E and longitudinally from 26°40' N to 26°55' N. The circle is bordered by Manas National Park on the North, Kalgachia Revenue Circle on the south, Sarthebari Circle on the east and Bongaigaon district on the west. It has 171 villages surrounding Sorbhog town. Covering an area of 190.88 sq. km. the circle constitutes 5.88 percent of district's total area. As per 2011 census, it has the total population of 306786. The study area is largely inhabitant by different communities like indigenous Muslims, non-indigenous Muslims, Koch-Rajbongshis, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and other Assamese communities.

Objective: Women are the most vulnerable sections of society often being sidelined from taking any important decision. The present paper is an attempt to analyse the status of gender disparity of Indigenous Muslims Community of Chakchaka Development Block, Barpeta, Assam using various indicators based on data from primary sources.

Data and Methodology: The extent of gender gap in Chakchaka Development Block has been studied in four fundamental areas like economic participation and opportunity, education and political participation using the indicators like work participation rate, literacy rate, enrollment ratio, sex ratio, infant mortality rate and political participation using primary data. For this a 90 households were sampled. The necessary primary data have been collected through sample survey using a well designed household schedule. The villages are selected at different locations like roadside, riverside, and remote areas. While drawing the sample households stratification is done based on economic conditions of the households, i. e., high income and lower income groups. During survey, head of the households in the community has been interviewed towards understanding the above mentioned indicators. Gender differentials in these areas are calculated and analyzed after collecting the data.

Secondary data relating to the indicators have been collected from the concerned Circle office, Block office, District Headquarters (Barpeta) etc. besides census and other statistical handbooks to compare with the primary data at state and national level.

Literature Review: Many studies have studied on the subject of gender disparities to focus on realization of gender equality. Niroj Sinha, editor "Women in Indian Politics", (Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2000), it has clearly depicted the role of women in Indian politics. Dhruva Hazarika, (2011) in his research work emphasizes the need that each and every citizen should be careful and responsible to promote the equal status for

women in modern Indian society. Jogesh Das, (2012) reveals about gender differences, customs, traditions, social attitudes etc., as prime reasons for the inequality between men and women. Amtul Waris and B. C. Viraktamath, (2013) considered gender equality as a critical element in achieving social and institutional change that leads to sustainable development with equity and growth. Sutapa Saryal, (2014) emphasizes that the United Nations in its Millennium Summit in 2000 declared 'Gender Equality and Women Empowerment' as one among the eight 'Millennium Development Goals' to be achieved by the year 2015. However, these goals are far from being realized in a country like India. Md. Faisal & Kartik Joshi, (2015) analyses gender inequalities throughout the world are among the most pervasive forms of inequality. Priti Jha & Niti Nagar, (2015) describes the gender inequality that exists among every region, social class, which prevents the growth of Indian economy from improving the lives of Indian people. The reality of gender inequality in India is very complex and diversified, because it exists in every field like education, employment opportunities, income, health, cultural issues, social issues, economic issues etc. Dr. Subhasish Chatterjee & Lt. Col. (Rtd.) Dipali Chatterjee, (2016) in his research paper discussed the factors that are responsible for gender inequality and to understand about the inequality in sharing of ancestral land. K. S. Jayakumar, (2016) research deals with the principle of gender equality enshrined in the Indian constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights and Duties, Directive Principles of State Policy and under the other provisions. Sandeep Kumar, (2016) concludes the gender equality and women empowerment has a positive relation with the socio-economic development.

Analysis: Let examine the status of gender inequality in the study area using indicators like literacy rate, work participation rate (WPR), sex ratio, women's political participation, household decision making and attitude towards unequal gender role.

Gender Gap in Literacy Rate:

Literacy rate and educational attainment are considered to be the basic ingredients of socio-economic development and transformation of society. Literacy is the first step to formal education. It is seen that in the study area the gender gap in literacy rate (6years and above) exists which indicates that male are more literate than female population. The gap is 20.51 % percentages in the study area which is significantly more than that of state and national level. It is also seen that the male and female literacy are also significantly less than that of state and national level. It is largely because of prevailing socio-economic backwardness as it is located in rural areas and lack of awareness for education and having less impact of less urbanization.

Table 1: Gender Gap in Literacy Rate (in percentage):

	Total	Male	Female	Gender Gap
Indigenous Muslims (2018)	70.13*	79.26*	58.75*	20.51*
Barpeta District (2011)	61.47	67.09	55.56	11.53
Assam (2011)	72.19	77.85	66.27	11.58
India (2011)	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68

Source: I*. field survey.

II. Census of India (2011).

Gender differentials in Work Participation Rate:

The participation of women in the secondary and tertiary sectors is lower in the Block. An attempt has been made to access the occupational pattern and economic conditions of the people of the study area. Female participation rate is one of the indicators of employment status of women. The gender differential in employment level is analyzed taking the difference in male and female work participation rate of the area.

Table 2: Gender differentials in Work Participation Rate (in percentage):

	Male	Female	Unemployment	Gender gap
Indigenous Muslims (2018)	51.16*	28.23*	20.61*	22.93*
Assam (2011)	53.59	38.36	8.05	15.23
India (2011)	53.26	39.79	6.95	13.47

Source: I*. field survey.

II. Census of India (2011), Office of the Registrar General, India.

Female work participation is another indicator of women's status in the society. The gender gap in work participation rate is far more than that of state and national rate. It is only 13.47 p. c. in India while it is 22.93 p.c. in the study area. Here, the total male and female work participation rates also lower than that of state and national level. Hence the rate of unemployment is quite high in the study area. The less rate of work participation is attributed to crisis of agricultural land as compared to the growing population. Lack of industrialization is also another factor influencing the workers having considerable educational level to go for tertiary occupations including services and business.

It is worth mentioning here that sex ratio is of paramount importance as it is an index to show the socio economic condition of any population of an area. It has a greater impact on the demographic structure of any region, including the growth of population, marriage, working force and employment pattern (Das, 1999). Moreover; an imbalance sex ratio may lead to the emergence of many social and moral evils.

Table 3: Age composition of the community (in Percentage) in the Block

community	0 – 15 years			15 – 59 years			Above 60 years		
	person	male	female	person	male	female	person	Male	Female
Indigenous Muslims	24.89	23.60	26.64	67.08	68.70	65.75	8.03	8.33	7.61

Source: Primary Survey (2018)

Attitude towards Unequal Gender Role: Attitude towards unequal gender role in one of the important indicator of women empowerment. A society with high degree of gender inequality exhibits a positive attitude towards unequal gender role. Data of NSSO (2004-05) shows that in India 54.3 percent women accept unequal gender role. However in the study area it is found that the entire respondents are agreed that they treat equally both male and female child of their family. The field surveyed data shows that the sex ratio in the community is 729 females/1000 males which are much lower than that of state level (958 females/ 1000 males) in 2011. The prevailing lower sex ratio among the Indigenous Muslims may be associated with domination of males at birth and higher child mortality among females.

Gender Disparity in Political Participation: Women’s political participation is another input to their empowerment. It is one of the important factors that contribute to their wellbeing. Empowered women have political freedom which in turn translates into their decision making capacity both at the community and state level. Women’s representation in political field even in most modest form of local government has the ability to transform and reinterpret the practice of politics. It helps to create better village communities based on harmony and cooperation achieved through gender balance and justice. However in case of India and even in the north east, the strong family based structure of Indian politics makes it difficult for women to assert independent political choices, as distinct from the male headed families. Therefore judging women’s political agency on the basis of their representation in political bodies is hazardous; women standing proxy for men are quite common in India (Assam Human Development Report, 20013).

It is fact that the status of women in the community is worst in terms of their position in decision making bodies. However the representation in local bodies does not always indicate that women are politically empowered as in most cases they act as proxies of their male counterparts. Here, it is found that the entire respondent cast vote but not their own will but with influence of their spouse and other members of the family.

Gender Disparity in Household Decision Making: Since of late modern women has become very conscious of their rights, and empowering the women as a whole has become a new motto of the world around. It is another indicator of women empowerment and thus can be a source of gender inequality: empowered women can take major household decisions by their own. However it is found that in the study area in most of the cases the major household decisions are taken by both respondent and spouse. From the table it is found that in the study area their exist gender gap of -1.31 p. c. in household decision making, i. e., women decision making is more than that of men, but this cannot be interpreted as women are superior in this indicator than their counterparts as all those households of the area where wife alone make decision are female headed households.

Table 3: Gender Disparity in Household Decision Making (in Percentage), 2017

	Major Household Decision taken by			Gender Gap
	Husband	Wife	Both	
Indigenous Muslims				
	12.23	13.54	74.23	-1.31

Source: I. field survey.

Findings: The major findings are as follows:-

1. Gender gap exists in literacy rate. But this is much more than state and national averages. In absolute term also the literacy rate of both male and female is very low. The gap is 20.51 percentages in the study area whereas it was 11.58 p.c. and 16.68 p. c. in 2011 census in state and national averages respectively.
2. Gender gap exists work participation rate too. The gender gap in work participation rate (22.93 p. c.) is far more than that of state and national rate. It is only 13.47 p. c. in India Here, the total male and female work participation rates also lower than that of state and national level. Hence the rate of unemployment is quite high in the study area.
3. The sex ratio of Indigenous Muslims in the block is only 729 which are much lower than that of state (958). The prevailing lower sex ratio among the Indigenous Muslims may be associated with domination of males at birth and higher child mortality among females.
4. Generally decisions are taken by both husband and spouse. But in some cases husband alone take decisions and in the female headed households decisions are taken by the women.
5. The entire respondent cast vote but not their own. They are influenced by their spouse and other members of the family.
6. All the respondents said that they show no discriminations against the girl Childs and female members.
7. Another very important aspect of this point is that women themselves are still ignorant about their own rights and policy formulated especially for them.

Conclusion:

1. Government has undertaken various efforts to empower women and to eliminate gender gap; they are not to that extent successful in achieving the goal. In national level and in state level gender gap exists and the condition is no more alarming among the below poverty level. Here, gender gap exists in all the indicators taken in the study area and are not satisfactory compared to state and national level. Giving poverty right, access to employment or educational opportunity on the part of the government will not change the picture. A revolutionary change in the social

and cultural values and behavioral pattern is necessary to foster the process of achieving gender equality. When women feel that they have the capability of operate the society at the same term as men then achieving gender equality will not remains as a distant dream. There is a need to create awareness towards achieving the desired goal of women in the Block. The study concludes by an observation that access to education, employment and change in social structure are only the enabling factors to Women Empowerment.

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