



GENDER CONCERN OF EDUCATION IN ASSAM: TREND AND EMERGING ISSUES

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ABSTRACT

Women education is an essential need to change their status in the society. Educated women can play a very important role in the society for social, economic and political transformation. Education eliminates inequalities and disparities as the means of recovering their status within and outside their family. It holds the key to women empowerment as it enables them to respond to the challenges, confront their traditional role and change their life. Girl's education in India has been a major preoccupation of both the government and civil society as educated women can play a very important role in promoting sustainable development. This paper is an effort to highlight the trend and emerging pictures with respect to women's education in Assam.

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INTRODUCTION

Women education is an essential need to change their status in the society. Educated women can play a very important role in the society for social, economic and political transformation. However, the persistent low educational participation girls till recently has had adverse impact on women's quality of life and empowerment. This educational backwardness has cost both the individual and national advancement, producing a skewed national progress. Education will lead to empowerment securing the means of creating a social environment in which one can make decisions for social and individual transformation. It strengthens innate ability through knowledge, power and experience enabling an individual to think, act and control human, intellectual and financial resources. It develops intrinsic capacity, inner transformation of one's consciousness to overcome barriers, access resources and change traditional ideologies. Empowerment therefore is possible only without disparity of women education as a fundamental right.

With all its promises, Assam has failed to provide Universalization of education as it remains under the stranglehold of major stratifications leading to discrimination. Early marriage, social prejudices and absence of educational infrastructure have led to more girl children lacking access to primary education and the gender gap remains a problem with the state.

The Assam government having expressed a strong commitment towards education for all, but still projects one of the lowest female literacy rate in India. Gender disparities persist, as social and legal institutions do not guarantee women equality in basic human rights. It is a major area of concern at the school level and the literacy question remains the largest juggernaut in the management of Assam's education.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Women education in India plays a very important role in the overall development of the country. It is not only helps in the development of half of the human resources, but in improving the quality of life at home and outside .The Indian Education system has two important structures, one is formal and another one is non-formal education. Some other educational programmes also formulated to motivate the women education such as online education and distance education. The main objective of the entire educational programme is to make every girl child to educate. This low level of literacy not only shows a negative impact on women's lives but also on their families and country's economic development. Hence it is of foremost importance to raise the level of education amongst women (Suguna, 2011).

Fundamental Rights of women are equality, freedom to religion, educational rights, cultural and educational, against exploitation, freedom. Improving girls' educational levels has been demonstrated to have clear impacts on the health and economic future of young women, which in turn improves the prospects of their entire community. After the Universal

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Declaration of Human Rights, Basic education is more than an end in itself; it is the foundation for lifelong learning and human development (Ramachandran, 1998).

Geographical, socio-cultural, health, economic, religious, legal, political/administrative, and educational factors, and initiatives by governments, non-governmental organisations, and other agencies to address the educational disadvantage of females. Gender discrimination still persists in India and lot more needs to be done in the field of women's education in India. The gap in the male-female literacy rate is just a simple indicator, while the male literary rate is more than the female. The women were considering only house wife and better to be live in the house (Bhat, 2015).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyse the root causes of gender disparity of education in Assam, and
2. To suggest some strategies for promoting gender equality of education in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

The present study on gender concern of education in Assam is based on secondary data. The secondary data was collected by the NSSR, Ministry of HRD, Census Data, NCRB, etc. The secondary data was also collected by the various published sources like books, journals, magazines and research paper. The findings were discussed in the light of published literature.

MAJOR CAUSES OF GENDER DISPARITY IN EDUCATION

High Dropout Rate

A very significant negative factor perceptible in the educational sector leading to colossal waste of financial and human resources is the phenomenon of dropouts. The dropout rate in Assam at primary level was 10.1% in 2017-18, followed by Arunachal Pradesh (8.1%), Mizoram (8.0%), Uttar Pradesh (7.2%) and Tamil Nadu (5.9%). At secondary level, Assam's dropout rate was 33.7%, followed by Bihar (32.0%), Odisha (28.3%), Tripura (27.2%) and Karnataka (24.3%). Broken up between the genders, the dropout rate among boys in primary schools in Assam was 11.2%, followed by Arunachal Pradesh (10.0%), Mizoram (8.6%), Uttar Pradesh (7.2%) and Tamil Nadu (5.9%). For girls at primary level, the highest five dropout rates were in Assam (8.9%), Mizoram (7.4%), Uttar Pradesh (7.1%), Arunachal Pradesh (6.1%) and Tamil Nadu (6.0%).

At secondary level, the dropout rates for boys were 32.1% in Assam, followed by Bihar (30.3%), Odisha (28.7%), Tripura (27.1%) and Karnataka (26.4%). Among girls in secondary school, the highest five dropout rates were in Assam (35.2%), followed by Bihar (33.7%), Odisha (27.8%), Tripura (27.3%) and Karnataka (24.2%).

Table 1 Dropout Rate in Primary Level (I-V) and Secondary Level (IX-X) in 2017-18

State	Primary Level (I-V)			State	Secondary Level (IX-X)		
	Boys	Girls	Dropout Rate		Boys	Girls	Dropout Rate
Assam	11.2	8.9	10.1	Assam	32.1	35.2	33.7
Arunachal Pradesh	10.0	6.1	8.1	Bihar	30.3	33.7	32.0
Mizoram	8.6	7.4	8.0	Odisha	28.7	27.8	28.3
Uttar Pradesh	7.2	7.1	7.2	Tripura	27.1	27.3	27.2
Tamil Nadu	5.9	6.0	5.9	Karnataka	26.4	21.9	24.3

Source: Ministry of HRD

Crime and Violence against Girls and Women

The crime rate is calculated as a crime per one lakh of the population. The crime and violence against girls and women are categorized as murder with rape/gang rape, dowry death, suicide abetment, acid attack, cruelty against women and kidnapping.

Assam of late has witnessed a rising trend in crime against girls and women basically due to increase in incidents related to dowry demand, rape and various other forms of atrocities. According to the data in 2018, there were 66 cases of murder with rape and gang rape recorded in Assam, 173 dowry death, 76 abetment to suicide, 3 victims of acid attacks, 6401 victims were kidnapping and 4180 cases of assault to outrage the modesty of women

Table 2 Crime and Violence against Girls and Women in Assam during 2016-2018

Year	Total Number of Crime and Violence
2016	20,869
2017	23,082
2018	27,728

Source: Report of NCRB (2018) published in January 2020

From Table 2 it shows that Assam has witnessed a sharp rise in the total number of crime and violence against girls and women during 2016-2018. The number of registered cases was 20,869 in 2016, 23,082 in 2017 and 27,728 in 2018.

Gender Gap in Literacy Rate

Almost every second women in Assam continues to be illiterate. Girls are the first to be pulled out of school when needed in the family to supplement the family income or to help care for the siblings. Without access to education, girls are denied the knowledge and skills needed to advance their status.

Out of the total literacy rate in Assam i. e. 64.28 percent, the male literacy percentage is 71.93 percent whereas the female literacy is 56.03 percent, with the gap of 15.9 percent (Census of India, 2001) although during 1991-2001, annual average growth rate of female literacy (1.3 percent) was more than that of male literacy rate (0.99 percent). According to the Census of India 2011, from the total literacy (73.18 percent), male literacy percentage is 78.81 whereas female occupies 67.27 percent with the gap of 11.54 percent.

Table 3 Literacy Rate in Assam during 1961-2011

Census Year	Person	Male	Female	Gender Gap in Literacy Rate
1961	32.58	44.28	18.61	25.67
1971	33.32	42.96	22.31	20.65
1981	NA	NA	NA	NA
1991	52.89	61.87	43.03	18.84
2001	64.28	71.93	56.03	15.9
2011	73.18	78.81	67.27	11.54

Source: Census of India, 2011

Declining Sex Ratio

Gender inequality begins before birth and the very right for the girl child to take birth, as preference for son is a mania for majority of the Assamese population. Women are denied the right to be born, thanks to the pre-natal medical tests. The result: men have outnumbered women in every census of the last century, which is indicative of continuing female foeticide.

The sex ratio has declined from 895 in 1901 to 869 in 1961, but gradually increases from 1971 onwards.

Table 4 Sex Ratio in Assam during 1921-2011

Census Year	Sex Ratio (Female per 1,000 Male)
1921	895
1931	874
1941	875
1951	868
1961	869
1971	896
1981*	910
1991	923
2001	932
2011	954

Source: Census of India, 2011

* Projected population since Census could not be held

Discrimination in Health Care and Nutrition

It further cuts short the lives of unwanted girl children. Eighteen percent more girls die before their fifth birthday according to a Ministry of HRD report. So, there are higher mortality rates for girls as compared to the boys.

While poor nutrition starts in utero, it extends throughout the life cycle. Although it affects boys and girls equally, since girls grow up to be mothers, female malnutrition has inter-generational impact on malnutritional levels of the whole society. Hence, discrimination against girls and women over the life cycle affects all. Unfortunately, gender discrimination in Assam is among the worst in India, indicated by Assam's rank of 139 in gender inequality index, according to the global HDR, 2010. Even in 2011, female literacy rate is barely 67.27 percent or nearly 12 percent points behind male literacy. Given intra-household allocation of resources is biased against women, coupled with gender discrimination over the life cycle have resulted in high female and child nutrition.

Gender Gap in Work Participation Rate

In the rate of work force participation in Assam, there is also a significant gap, with the male occupying 53.59 percent and the female 22.46 percent, and the gap is 31.13 percent according to the Census of India 2011. The trend of female work participation rate is fluctuating in nature, the participation rate of female was 21.61 percent in 1991 declined to 20.71 percent in 2001 and again increased to 22.46 percent in 2011.

Priority to Boy's Education

A boy's education is viewed as a possibility of increasing the earning and status of the family. The value of a daughter's education is gauged in terms of her marriage prospects and the benefits of her education in any case are seen as going to her husband's family. Motivation or desire to send girls to school and ensure its completion is circumscribed by high economic costs, unfriendly school environments and school sanctions.

STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

If education indicates national development it must also address and incorporate gender free education. The core issue for achieving Education for All is the critical issue of access and equity. It is now globally recognized that 5-8 years of education is imperative to control illiteracy and poverty. The World Bank supports educational projects like Alternate and Transitional schools for different social groups. In Assam, the schools supply factors and Government intervention must be

strengthened without any compromise to achieve comprehensive growth, better female conditions and strive to make The Millennium Development Goals successful. There is a need:

1. Promoting gender-sensitive education by promoting actively equal educational opportunities, equal rights and equal treatment.
2. Providing safe and friendly schools. Schools should be in a democratic setting respecting the religious and cultural diversity and stressing the fundamental principle of equality between girls and boys, women and men, whatever differences may be between them, there viewpoints and expressions. Girl students may be accommodated in morning shifts. Safe transportation to and from school, free uniforms, workbooks, mid day meals, flexible time tables and proper toilet facilities (separate for boys and girls) should be provided to girls.
3. Transforming boring school routine into fun-filled learning experiences for preventing drop-outs.
4. Include gender sensitivity and promotion of equality in all pre and in-service teacher training of teacher educators and vocational advisors.
5. Improve gender balance of teaching and administrative staff and school management. Increasing the number of female teachers especially at primary and secondary levels.
6. Open learning system for girls who cannot come to educational institutions or for life long learning of educated women.
7. Initiate gender-sensitive research for finding solutions to problem of gender disparity.
8. Regular monitoring of gender equality in education and global exchange of experiences and problems relating to gender equality in education.
9. Remedial teaching and bridge courses for girls to prevent them from dropping out.
10. Providing home counseling to illiterate mother's emphasizing the importance of education and gender equality.

CONCLUSION

To set right the imbalance of relationship in a male centered and dominated society, education and economic independence is imperative. Quantitative and qualitative evidence reflects acute gender bias, confirming discrimination in educational status. Women's ability for independent thinking and her participation at par with men will confirm Gender Equality and comply with the targets of the Millennium Development Goals. The Assam Government needs to identify those geographical locations and culture patterns contributing towards gender disparity in education. The gap between male and female literacy is a sensitive indicator of social discrimination. The concept of women's empowerment through education was introduced at the International Women's Conference in Nairobi in 1985 where Empowerment was stated to be '*a distribution of social power and center of resources in favour of women*'.

The need of the hour is to ensure better lives for the coming generations by creating an equitable social order. The objective of gender equality may be attained by guaranteed access to quality education for all.

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