

DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN EDUCATION IN ASSAM: A REALITY OF OVERFLEW SINCE INDEPENDENCE

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ABSTRACT

Education is the powerful tool that changes all aspects of society for men and women, but our Indian society is still lagging far behind when it comes to educating women. The development of women's education is not only much more important in the development of a domestic family, but it is also more important in the development of the whole society. Therefore, it is urgent need to study the development of women's education in Assam. This paper aims to study the educational landscape of women past and present in Assam and its obstacles and has some suggested views on how to overcome it.

I. Introduction:

Women constitute almost half of the population in every society. In this context, women education is very much essential in every aspects of development, In case of development aspects not only the Indian society but in different parts of the world women are not getting equal opportunities to men due to the hegemonic masculine ideologies in the society. Due to this they are suffer a lots in different parts of the world. Education not only makes women more capable and competitive to perform their household duties apart from a mother and wife but it also makes them more efficient members of society. Although the Indian constitution guarantees equality between men and women, women are still less educated, unemployed and less visible in the power structure, they are sick and suffer from the customs and norms of parenting traditions. In the field of education, women are always lagging behind. Its educational ambition is easily shattered by various socio-cultural impositions. Therefore, it is our endeavor to study the development of women's education in Assam, their obstacles and the way forward.

II. Objectives of the study:

The present study has been pursued keeping in view the following objectives-

1. To analyzed the history of women education in Assam (Pre and post Independence)

2. To find out the present women Educational scenario of Assam.
3. To identify the some Obstacles of women Education in Assam.
4. To suggest a different way to overcome of different obstacles associated with women education in Assam

III. Data Base and Methodology:

The methodology to be used in this paper is conventional and analytical based on the secondary source. The secondary data is collected processed and analyzed as per the requirement of the study to draw inferences and conclusion. Important inputs for the study is also received from the experts, made available from different journals, published books, news papers and various websites etc. Apart from that the personal experience and knowledge in the field also helped to make meaningful interpretation and opinion regarding the way to overcome the different obstacles of women education in the studied state of Assam.

IV. MAJOR DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS:

A. Development of women Education in Assam till Independence:

Before independence when the education system of Assam was almost neglected, no one could think of women education. Neither society nor parents wanted their girl child to send to school. Even these were a superstition that she, who went to school, would be a widow. Yet Assamese women of that time educated themselves by listening to the scriptures. "Satras" and "Namghars" gave spiritual and religious knowledge even to those illiterate women, without any knowledge of the letters of the alphabet; Assamese women were able to recite the scriptures to sing the devotional songs unerringly.

During the British rule in India, the Christian missionaries took several reformative steps against the prevailing system and women education was one of them. At first they introduced a kind of non-formal education for higher class women, which was known as "Zenana". But due to the superstitions and class discrimination that system of education failed to make any significant contribution. Even the Wood's Dispatch of 1854, they had failed to make any remarkable impression on women education. In the middle part of the 19th century Anandaram Dekiyalphan advocated for women education. Yet at the beginning of the 20th century, the women literary rate was almost zero. In, 1901,

it was only 0.6%. But India Independent movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, brought a new horizon to women education. Gandhiji appealed for equal footing of both men and women, which helped to dispel different superstition related to women.

1961 a girl's high school was established at Dibrugarh. The second girl's high school was established at Guwahati 1926, which is now known as Panbazar Girls High School. The third and the fourth girl's high schools were established Dhuburi and Jorhat. But due to different reasons, only a few women came forward to take education. Before independence total 31 girls schools were established in different corners of Assam. Some girls of upper Class, went to Calcutta for their education. Durgaprabha and Hemprabha from Dibrugarh, went to Bethun College of Calcutta to get their education. Durgaprabha was the first Assamese Girl to complete matriculation.

Till the second decade of 20th century, no women had gone to college. In 1929 a woman took admission at Cotton College. In 1933 the first women college was established at Shillong (Lady Kin College). Radha Kanta Handique Girls College, the first women college of the Brahmaputra Valley was established in 1939. The college was initially started with only two girl students and later became known as "Handique Girls College". Being inspired by this institution, several girls' college was established at Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Nagaon, Sivasagar and in other parts of the state for women higher education.

B. Development of women Education in Assam in Post Independence Era:

The development of women education in Assam was very slow because, the East India Company as well as the missionaries did not interfere with customs and traditions of the society. Education of girls was not favored by the parents. Therefore, the percentage of literacy among the females is much lower than that of boys and men. The growth of literacy rate since 1951 to 2011 in Assam and national level are shown in the following figure-1 and 2.

The expansion of girl's education during the recent years however, was remarkable. At the Pre-Primary and at the Primary stage, the enrolment has increased enormously. At the Secondary Stage appreciable progress has been made. At the college level also. The expansions of girl's education are very rapid. Before independence there were only three girl's colleges in Assam, now the

numbers has increased to more than twenty. Facilities for post graduate studies in Assam were not available before the establishment of the Guwahati University in 1948. (History of Education in India, Dr.S. Saikia page¹⁰¹)

The state council for women's Education was also formed to advise the government on the improvement and expansion of women education in the state. The state council for Women's Education in Assam recommended certain step in 1963 for the expansion of Women's Education in the state. To look after the development of Women's education, several women officers were appointed in the Department of Education of the Govt. of Assam.

It is depicted from the figure-1 and 2 that the female literacy rate in all the census decades in the state of Assam is higher than that of national level. It indicates that the development of female literacy rate is far better than that of national average. It is a positive sign for the development of women education in Assam. The female literacy rate has been increased from 7.58% in 1951 to 18.62% in 1961, and then 22.76% in 1971 to 43.03% in 1991 and further increased to 54.61% in 2001 to 66.27% in 2011 where as in National level 8.86%, 11.6%, 17.2%, 23.1%, 31.1%, 54.2%, and 65.46% respectively. The position of literacy rate in case of gender gap is also far better than the all India level. It is a good sign for development of women education in Assam.

C. Development of women Education in the Present Scenario:

Today's, the participation of women in education is quite high and is growing thanks to the great aspiration to work and the support of parents. Education began to play an important role in women's emancipation from traditional addictions; women become more articulate and assertive. Above all, the National Education System has carried out a positive intervention. But until the 1976 constitutional amendment, the new education policy of 1986, the 1992 education policy revision also placed adequate emphasis on women's education; Sarva Shiksha Avijan 2000 attaches importance to girls' education. In this system, tuition for girls is free up to class XII. Apart from that after move in 34 years in the first time in Indian history in the education sector new education policy 2020 has given more emphasis on gender inclusion towards equitable education for girls as well as transgender students and a substantial increase in

public investment to bring education spending to 6% of gross domestic product, there are growing concerns about its implications on girls' education.

Currently, most women mainly participate in higher education at both local and foreign universities. Many girls have entered law, economics, science, engineering, medicine, defense and other professions.

The enrollment of women is increasing day by day. It is noted that the following factors influence decisions about women attending educational institutions:

- (a) natural evolution of the school;
- (b) Economic reasons: work, salary, situation, status.
- (c) Independence
- (d) Parents' wishes.
- (e) wanting to be better mothers and members of their communities;
- (f) Desire for education and personal development.
- (g) follow the role models; and delay the marriage.

These target conditions are more applicable in urban than in rural areas. Rural women face some obstacles in their education.

D. Obstacles of Women Education in Assam:

Although the education of women is increasing day by day in the state of Assam, but the female literacy rate is still lower than that of men and other north-eastern states. This is depicted in the following table-1.1. Women are less likely to be educated than men. Again, literacy simply refers to the ability to read and write. Many literate people can only sign. This is more applicable to the female population. Many literate women are deprived of any higher education.

There are several reasons for the low literacy levels of women in Assam. In the case of Assam, poverty is one of the main obstacles to women's literacy. Many poor parents prefer only their boy child to send school. Many parents view their children's education as an investment because they will be responsible for the income of the elderly parents. On the other hand, parents may view their daughter's education as a waste of money because the daughter will eventually live with her husbands' families. And parents will not directly benefit from their

education. Apart from this, the natural climatic conditions, the seasonal floods, the negative attitude of the parents towards the education of their daughters, the lack of adequate school facilities, lack of personal guidance and supervisions, lack of schools infrastructure facilities, distance of their house and their schools, inappropriate school's curriculum to their life, lack of faith on education, global impact of globalization, family decision making and the shortage of female teachers in the different schools are the main obstacles for the education of the girls in Assam.

E. A Way to Overcome:

Some suggestions are put forwarded to overcome those obstacles-

1. First of all a favorable atmosphere should be created for encouraging women for education in every corner of the country.
2. Secondly the gender biasness should be removed in all forms and a daughter must not be considered to be inferior to a son.
3. Thirdly, Parents, guardians and teachers should encourage the girls to set proper education.
4. Fourthly, the Government and NGOs should promote scholarship to impart education among women.
5. Fifthly, Marriage should not be allowed to act as a constraint for education.
6. Sixthly, the modern rural populations in the state have favorable opinion towards girls' education. The favorable opinion augurs well for the future girls. Since main problem for educating girls is lack of finance, the women should be made aware of the government programmes for women development and government should also provide more scholarship to deserving and needy students.
7. Last, but not the least, any forceful activity that can deprive women from getting proper education should be considered as a legally punishable fence.

V. Conclusion:

From the ongoing discussion it can be concluded that the time has been change so the time has come to realize the urgency of the fact that society cannot progress by keeping half of its population inside the kitchen. At first, we must change our mind set that we are women, we are inferior to men. Sooner we realized this fact, better will be our future.

It is also observed from the forgoing discussion that the development of women education is far better in the state of Assam as compared to the national level. It is a good sign for development of the society. The people think that the education of women is the foremost requirement in improving the status of women in the society. And educated women can face the vagaries of life without any fear education creates modern outlook among women which in turn strengthened their claim for better status of society because lack of education implies lack of awareness about their own right and privileges which ultimately becomes a factor in deteriorating their social status. Therefore, the education is the only medium through which the images of a girls' child as a second class citizen can be removed.

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Table-1.1: Literacy Rate of North-Eastern Region in 2011

States	Male Literacy Rate	Female Literacy Rate
Assam	78.81%	67.27%
Nagaland	83.29%	76.69%
Manipur	86.49%	73.17%
Tripura	92.18%	83.15%
Mizoram	93.72%	89.40%
Sikkim	87.29%	76.43%
Meghalaya	77.17%	73.78%
Arunachal Pradesh	73.69%	59.57%

Source: Census of India 2011

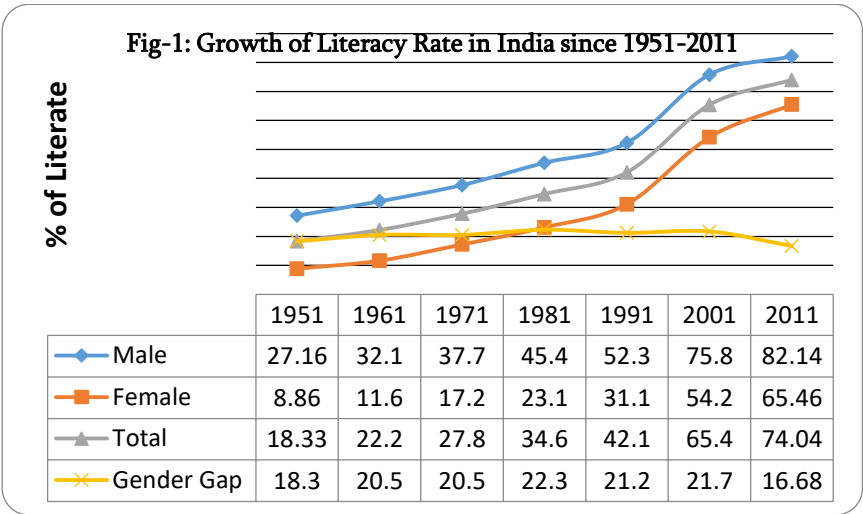
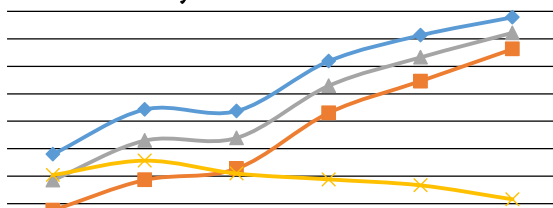


Fig-2: Growth of Literacy Rate in Assam since 1951-2011

% of Literate



	1951	1961	1971	1991	2001	2011
Male	28.01	44.28	43.72	61.87	71.28	77.85
Female	7.58	18.62	22.76	43.03	54.61	66.27
Total	18.53	32.95	33.94	52.89	63.25	72.19
Gender Gap	20.43	25.66	20.96	18.84	16.67	11.58

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