



Empowerment of Women in the North Eastern state; Assam

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Abstract

The debate of Gender discrimination is going worldwide. Especially the violence against women in the various states of the country can be seen. When it comes to the North eastern states then, it is often regarded as the capricious regions of the country. Since independence, this region has been inflicted by various conflicts which have impacted on the lives of people, especially the women and the children. To know the status of women, understanding of empowerment is necessary. Women always have a deliberate role to play in the society which leads to the development of the economy. The goal of enlightening the eastern states will be achieved only if women are brought up to a level where they can participate in the all walks of life. The goal of economic equality can be achieved through women's involvement in the process of empowerment. The objective of the paper is to analyse the status of women in the Assam state. Complete desk review of the secondary data has been done to understand the level of empowerment of women in the North east state. It has been revealed from the data that more awareness generation is required towards achieving the desired goal of women empowerment.

Key words: Empowerment, Gender, Discrimination, Development, Participation

Introduction

North Eastern region basically comprises of eight states and Assam is one of them. The states of eastern region are considered as the backward area in terms of the per capita income. There is lack of development. The geographical area is 78,438 sq. kms. I.e. about 2.4 percent of the country's total geographical area, Assam has a population of 31,160,272 as in 2011 census, of which 15,954,927 are males and 15,214,345 are females. The sex ratio (females per 1000 males) is 954 and the female literacy ratio is 67.27 percent. The socioeconomic set up of the state has not been favourable to overall progress. Since it is a multiethnic state with heterogeneous cultural backgrounds, it has been experiencing insurgency and ethnic conflict for the last three decades because of which not only its economy but also the social structure is under threat. The worst sufferers in the process are the women. If we talk about the social customs and cultures, Assam is free from that. (Purusottam Nayak, Bidisha Mahanta, 2012) According to the Human Development Report, 2003, the state has got 29th rank among the 32 states and Union territories. The state is developing on the certain parameters, but to understand the real development we need to focus on the empowerment of women. The term empowerment will bring the equality among the society. Training for better efficiency does not suffice because women need decision-making capacity and ability to organize and take part in community and national activities.

All countries share a common characteristic. Their women are unable to give their best to the national development. The resulting curricula and materials help prepare women for self-development as active members of their family, community and nation. They seek overall personal development and account for the notorious double accountability that women shoulder as financial producers and as mothers and wives. (Aksornkool, 1993) The



hidden power of women and her unheard voices will come up through the multidimensional process of empowerment. The word itself consist the term 'power'. To understand this process for women s of Assam different aspects should be considered and deliberated.

Why empowerment?

The term empowerment has become popular in the era of 1980's. Women empowerment is central to the human development. There are various scholars who have given definitions to the term in the context of women. According to Kabeer (1989) interprets it as a redial transformation of power relations between women and men 'so that women have greater power over their own lives and men have less power over women's lives'. According to Kate Young (1993), empowerment enables women to take control of their own lives, set their own objective , organize to help each other and make demands on the state for support and on the society itself for change'.

Empowerment is a multidimensional concept, it becomes difficult to define. N a simple terms it can be defines as the level of participation of women in the decision making process without the subordination of male member. When a woman is free of made dominance and can make independent choices, she is said to be empowered. When a woman is empowered, she develops self confidence and self esteem which leads to the overall development. Empowered women always have various opportunities in her life and can utilize it to its full potential. Her empowerment can be reflected in the indicators like female literacy rate, Participation rate etc.

Methodology

The research paper is based on the secondary data. It sheds light on the census report of the government, National sample survey organization (NSSO) to understand the status of empowerment of women in the Assam state various indicators have been used such as Female Literacy (FL), Female Workforce Participation Rate (FWPR), Gross Enrolment Ratio (GRE), Dropout Rates, and Sex Ratio. The main objective of the study is to do analysis of the overview of the women in the North East region and to forefront the voices of women which could help in the growth of the country.

Need of the Study

Women plays role in the developmental processes, but she needs to be strengthen to create more wonders. In the modern Society of India, where some of the regions are backward, it is important to have a look at the society which is considered as the backward. The participation of women in every sector should be recognized. Generally, women face greater restrictions, since independence many attempts have been done by government to vanguard women. One good example can be the reservation for women in various sectors. After such enhancements, it becomes significant to study the situation of the state. Such studies would contribute to the gender voices and help in increase the policies for women which lead to equality.

Women of Assam



In the last three decades the concept of women empowerment has undergone through a change of various aspects. The status of women in the north eastern region is slightly different in comparison to rest of the regions. The social evils like purdha system, dowry, violence is absent in the state of Assam. Still there is lack of mobility for women in the state. Assam Human Development Report (2003) sheds light on disparity in the accomplishment between men and women of Assam in different spheres of life. The report viewed that poverty; violence and lack of participation were the main issues of concern for Assam. It passes the Act of Assam State Commission for Women in January, 1994. It is a statutory body under the State Act which strives to achieve equity and justice. It provides a platform for realizing the expectation of millions of women in the state and gives them an opportunity to work hand in hand & shoulder with the men in the development process of the state. Assam state commission for women is working to cherish the goal of equality and justice in the state. (center, 2016)

Sex Ratio of women

Sex ratio is one of the imperative demographic factors that signify the status of women in a particular society. The ratio of women is lower in Assam as compared to the other four states of the region. Improvement of Sex ratio indicates a healthy growth rate among female to male population. When the female ratio increases, it signifies a better growth for the developing economy. It can boost the backward regions like Assam.

Table 1: Sex Ratio of women in Assam State (Number of females per 1000 males)

State	Census
Assam	954
Arunachal Pradesh	920
Meghalaya	986
Manipur	987
Nagaland	931
Tripura	961
Mizoram	975

Source: Census of India 2011

Female literacy rate

The female literacy rate in the state is less as compared to the other seven sister states of the north region. There can be various reasons for low literacy rate in the state. The social evil poverty which leads to the dropouts of the children and further complicated the problem. Discrimination is the other reason which is prevailing. Although Government has made many



efforts through the formulation of policies and programmes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and District Primary Education Programme are among the various education plans.

Table 2: Female literacy rate of women in Assam State

States	Census (%)
Assam	67.3
Arunachal Pradesh	59.7
Meghalaya	73.8
Manipur	73.2
Nagaland	76.7
Tripura	83.1
Mizoram	89.4

Source: Census of India 2011

Female Workforce Participation

The table below is reliving the fact of female work force participation. Women face enormous challenges in the work place due to harassment and violation and injustice. Due to this, the lack of participation is persisting among the women. In the case of Assam, the participation rate is much lower. The better work participation comes from the education and better awareness generation which is lacking in the state. Most of the women in Assam are engaged into the agriculture labour. It means they are engaged into the primary activities more. Only to substantiate the basic needs of women is not enough, to provide economic and the political support is also necessary. The development of the good infrastructure is not the solution of the problem; it is needed to work on the ground level to empower women. That would be come to know by their decision making power and to enlarging their choices.

Table 3: Female Workforce participation of women in Assam State

States	Census (%)
Assam	20.8
Arunachal Pradesh	45.1
Meghalaya	51.4
Manipur	31.5
Nagaland	56.5
Tripura	15.6
Mizoram	45.4

Source: NSSO, 2010

Health conditions of women

If we talk about the health conditions of women, it is the primary and the basic need. If it is fulfilled then all the dimensions of empowerment can be achieved easily. National



Family Health Survey - III pertains to data collected on various indicators of women empowerment. The table is showing the Anaemia among the women of Assam state. It can be seen that the rate is very high. Iron deficiency among the women, who are pregnant or lactating is very common and it happens due to insufficient and improper diet. Women are generally engaged in the household task and other domestic work, but they did not take care of themselves. Due to which several diseases arises and the health condition worsens, especially in the pregnant women of the state, who needs extreme care. There is need of Anganvadi workers and more number of ASHAS (Accredited Social Health Activists) who can create awareness among the women. Proper trainings should also be provided to the people who are operational on the ground level.

Table 4: Anaemia persisting among women in Assam state

States	Census (%)
Assam	72.0
Arunachal Pradesh	51.8
Meghalaya	60.2
Manipur	36.4
Nagaland	N.A
Tripura	57.6
Mizoram	51.7

Source: National Family Health Survey -3

Health schemes for women

There are several schemes for women in Assam which is for the benefit of women, they are centrally and state sponsored. Below are the schemes which focus on the issues of health, education, employment and other advantages for women.

- ✚ Janani Surkha Jogana(JSY) is an Indian Government scheme and it was launched on 12th April 2005 by the Prime Minister of India. Its aim is to reduce the neo-natal and maternal deaths happening in the country by promoting institutional delivery of new born.
- ✚ Mamoni Scheme: The Assam government introduced the Mamoni scheme in the state under the National Rural Health Mission (NHRM). The aim of the scheme is to reduce Maternal Mortality Ratio. This scheme encourages the expectant women to undergo 3 ante-natal checkups so that any danger indication could be detected during pregnancy at earliest and proper treatment could be offered. The pregnant woman also receives 1000 rupees.
- ✚ Majani Scheme: Through this schemes government has inspired the parents having female child. An amount of rupees 3000 has been fixed during the birth of the female children and whenever she will attain 18 years, she will get this money.
- ✚ The "Janani Sishu Suraksha Karyakram (JSSK)" also provides for free transport from home to institution, between facilities in case of a recommendation and a drop back home. Janani



Suraksha Yojana (JSY) is a safe motherhood intervention under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) being implemented with the objective of reducing maternal and neo-natal mortality by promoting institutional delivery among the poor pregnant women.

- ✚ Swadhar: The Ministry of Women and Child Development under Government of India set up a scheme for women in difficult circumstance known as Swadhar. The main objective of the scheme is to focus on the marginalized and the poor girls living in the difficult circumstances. The scheme provides basic needs like food, shelter and also the economic and social support.

The schemes which are introduced are for the betterment of the women and to improve their health conditions. The health status of women can become better if they utilizes the government schemes at its best, but that also needs the awareness generation among them. The health service distribution system needs to be stronger at the ground level. The staff at the ground level needs to be strengthen so that qualitative output can be achieved. If we talk about the modern term 'Globalization' that will be best suited in the developed countries, since when we talk about the developing countries and the backward regions like Assam, then it will not help the poor women where lack of awareness and illiteracy is persisting. Therefore an attempt has been made to see rural women's health aspects at a better position by the government.

Women participation in every field is necessary. Empowered women have the freedom to do choices and take their own decision which later converts into capacity building and helpful for the state and the nation. Assam poses sometimes doubts on the efficacy of the empowerment variable. This is because of the actuality that strong family-based construction of Indian politics makes it difficult for women to emphasize independent or self governing political choices, as distinct from the male headed families or patriarchy. (Purusottam Nayak, Bidisha Mahanta, 2012) .Even employment is the important indicator of empowerment. If, the women is employed the sense of independence will arise which would help women to build their skills. The dignity and culture of a society can be detected from the status of women in that society.

Constrains of Women Empowerment in Assam

Education is considered as a gateway towards empowerment. It produces opportunities and choices for women. Empowered women can play role in the social revolution because they know the roles and duties towards the society which leads to development. But due to various constraints and burden of responsibilities women do not able to step up towards the door of growth. Especially when it comes to the backward states their development gets a hindrance. Below mentioned are some of them.

- ✚ Gender discrimination is one of the biggest problem which female faces. Whether it is a home or workplace, from womb to tomb the subordination is prevailing.
- ✚ In Assam early marriage is one of the chief barriers which hinder the girl's further studies. The anxiety of parents towards the girl's future becomes hindrance in her development. It can be seen more in the rural areas where lack of awareness is existing.
- ✚ In the backward areas supplementing the basic needs, which can be fulfilled through earning of the family is more important rather than gaining education and moving towards empowerment. In such situation the education becomes burden on the family.



- ✚ The social discrimination also has its roots. Boys are always assets for the family and girl is liability, as a result of this no importance is given to the education of girls.
- ✚ Traditional values and norms also play an important role. All the sacrifices are done by women only because of the patriarchal society. Women are supposed to keep all the religious beliefs of the generation. These values lead them to be more subordinate towards men.
- ✚ The prevailing notion among the society is that women solely can look after the household work and also take care of her children. This conception increases her burden of double work and ultimately women do not get time for her who again results into health issues.

Suggestions

Government should take appropriate steps with the participation of masses in order to bring the girl child to the main stream of education. The policies which are designed should go hand in hand. Every woman related issues are important to consider by increasing their collective power.

- ✚ The parents of girl child belonging to poor families must be specially educated to understand the importance of education for their girl child as base for women empowerment.
- ✚ To construct consciousness concerning rights and responsibilities relating to laws governing to women's status in the society.
- ✚ To help women to achieve financial feasibility through literacy.
- ✚ Women to be given social security.
- ✚ The implementation at the ground level needs to be strengthening and the research gaps needs to be identified so that utmost women can contribute.
- ✚ Societal attention ought to be given to women in the complicated and difficult circumstances like domestic violence, social discrimination, early marriage, dowry etc.
- ✚ Persuade changes in laws relating to ownership of property and inheritance so as be gender just.
- ✚ Any policies or programmes which are framing even at the grassroots level should be gender just.
- ✚ Building a constructive image of women in the society and recognizing their contribution in social, economic and political sphere.
- ✚ The feedback system should be made compulsory so that timely responses and the opinion of the women can help in improving the status.
- ✚ If possible, media campaigns should also be done highlight the issues of women. Others will also understand the importance of it.
- ✚ Revolving funds can be helpful for the microenterprise development.

Conclusion

Education is the only answer for women empowerment. After going through this discussion it can be understood that empowerment is a tool for development. Women down the ages have always had to claim for equal status for themselves in the family and society. They must change the patriarchal attributes and the ideology of subordination of men towards them. Women should be educated to comprehend that they require a change for the betterment of themselves. To empower women in all spheres, efforts have to be taken to



break the old mythology about women's helplessness, lack of drive and enthusiasm in order to reach the heights of credit. The change of mindset for both male and female is necessary. Only government will not be able to achieve the target of women empowerment and development. Many policies have been introduced by the government but still there is a gap which needs to be fulfilled. Common man should also understand the need of it. Especially in the backwards areas like Assam Nongovernmental Organization(NGO) and the Self Help Group(SHG) should be strengthened so that majority of women can take the benefits out of it. The collective support will facilitate in the progress and growth. Hence it is significant to provide women with nurturing support and supervision to become progressive achieve peaceful life and secured future.

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