



CURRENT STATUS OF WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN ASSAM, AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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Abstract- Education has always been a foundation for social development and it will be essential for the knowledge of the 21st century. Every issue that our society faces is like a link of a chain. Each issue is connected to another either directly or indirectly. Lack of Education and illiteracy is the mother of all issues as it gives birth, to many other issues like poverty, unemployment, child labour, population burst and many more. Education in India is a key of social progress. Education of girls is vital not only on grounds of social justice but also because it accelerates social information. Level of literacy and educational attainment are important indicators of development of any given society and we cannot exclude women in the development of any society as they contribute about half of the human race. Reflecting into the “Vedas Purana” of Indian culture, women are being worship such as LAXMI MAA goddess of wealth, SARASWATI MAA for wisdom, DURGA MAA for power. Literacy and proper education is a game changer in the effort to advance women’s standing in the third world in women and literacy. Vivekananda said, “It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of the women improves. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing”. The present study mainly focus on the women’s status in educational field with reference to Assam.

Key Words : Women, Education, Higher Education, Empowerment.

I. INTRODUCTION

The best creation of God on the Earth is man and woman. The selective moments presented to man and woman by the creator is equal rights to both. Therefore there must be equal participation between man and woman and respect for human dignity must permeate all activities. Swami Vivekananda had said “ A bird cannot fly only on one wing, no society can make progress unless its women too join men in all activities”. This statement has rightly made clear the importance of women in our society. Women constitute 50% of the total population and therefore there cannot be happiness and full development, as long as women remain depressed and exploited. Women are the partners in development, but their contribution as wives, mothers, income – earners and community members, often goes unrecognised and undervalued. The movement for improving women’s status all over the world has always emphasised education as the most significant instrument for changing women’s subjected position in society. Education influences a woman’s chances of paid employment, her earning power, her age at marriage, her control over child bearing, her exercise of legal and political rights, and even her ability to care for herself and her children. Increased access to education is often the forerunner to a host of expanded opportunities for women. Education is considered to be the most effective instrument of bringing about social and economic change. It is a fact that education as a source of social mobility, equality and empowerment, both at the individual and collective levels, is imperative for women, who constitute the half of the humankind. It is rightly said, “ To awaken the people, it is women, who must be awakened, once she moves, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves”. In a democracy like India Women must be given equal opportunities and responsibilities in the society and this is possible only if they are provided education.

Higher Education comprises of Under – Graduate Courses, Post Graduate Courses as well as research courses. Although, it is quite disheartening that till now, after about seven decades of independence, considerable disparity is found between male and female literacy rate in India. In India, from the ancient time itself, most women were given a status below than man. Therefore education of women is also lagging behind, when compared with their male counterparts. In Assam, it is the Britishers, who initiated female education in Assamese society. After the independence, constitution of India also guarantees equal rights to both man and woman in all matters of including education. To implement this, various

initiatives and schemes have also been operationalised under different five year plans, yet the disparity between the male and female in Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) as well as in literacy rate, still exists. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the different developments that have been taking place in the field of women education since independence in Assam.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- I. To study the evolution of Higher Education of women in Assam in the post – independence period.
- II. To analyse the present status of Higher Education of women in Assam.

III. METHOD OF THE STUDY

The research study is conducted on a content analysis based on secondary sources of information. The secondary sources include books on women education, different articles on research journals etc.

IV. DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The present study is conducted only in the Higher education sector of women in Assam.

V. HIGHER EDUCATION LEVEL

Before the British introduced the new system of education, women education was not popular in Assam. Only women from the rich families received education at their homes. The learned wife of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Srimiti Mahindri Devi could easily read and write very well. The illustrious daughter of Mahindri Devi, Smriti Padmavati Devi Phookanani was the first woman novelist who wrote two novels. Some educated men of Assam also tried to make the general people aware about the necessity of women education. Rai Gunviram Boruah, Jaganath Boruah, Anandaram Dhekial Phookan and others were among the pioneers of female education in Assam during its early period. After the British came to India, the Missionaries set up various schools, colleges and contributed a lot for the education of the Indian people. After the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, Assam became a part of British India and the Missionaries extended their activities in this region too. They started schools as formal educational institution in Assam. After the independence Indian government had given maximum importance on making Primary education universal and compulsory for attaining 100% literacy by launching a large number of schemes for its promotion. The improvement in women education Primary stage, naturally increase the number of female students in Secondary education in the post independence era. Different government schemes were also launched to strengthen the positions of women in Secondary stage also.

After independence Higher education of girls in Assam has been found to make spectacular progress. Just after the independence in 1948 Gauhati University was established and a new chapter for Higher education of the girls was opened up. Dibrugarh University was established in 1965 had stimulated the girls education in upper Assam. Assam medical college in the year 1947 and in the year 1960 Gauhati medical college was established giving a new opportunity to the girls for taking professional courses for study. Likewise Assam Engineering college and Jorhat engineering college was established respectively in the year 1955 and 1960. Assam state council for women's education was established by Assam state government, which had made a valuable contribution for improvement of women education at higher level of education also. Such as, (1) establishing at least one college in each district with provision for both Arts & Science. (2) Offering post graduate and foreign scholarship for girls, (3) Appointment of lady joint- director at Head – Quarter at all levels including Higher education. In 1994, two Central University established in Tezpur & Silchar has been instrumental in maintaining regional balance regarding Higher education in the State. Consequently, it had also favourably influence the women Higher education in the State.

University Grant Commission (UGC) was established in 1956, different scholarship and fellowship schemes were launched exclusively for girls. It includes Swami Vivekananda Single Girl Child scholarship

for PhD scholars (2014 -2015). Indira Gandhi Scholarship for single girl child(2005 -2006), UGC has special schemes for promotion of women hostels in universities and colleges and establishment of day care centres. Apart from it to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher education sector named as “ Ishan Uday” was launched by UGC from the academic year 2024-2015 for the under graduate girl students. Thus UGC is taking a huge responsibility or launching finance for improving girls education in Higher education. Moreover The All India Council For Technical Education is implementing the “PRAGATI” scholarship scheme for assistance of girls pursuing technical education.

The National Policy for Women Empowerment 2001 also advocated equal access of women to health care, quality education at all levels, employment etc. Chandraprabha Saikiani Centre for Women;s studies was established in year 2010, Assam Women’s University was established in 2013 in Jorhat,, Ratriya Uchachaatar Shiksha Abhiyan was launcjed by the Ministry of Human Resource Develoment, Government of India, which again focuses on inclusion of Women candidates in Higher education as per the XII plan guidelines for improving the equity in Higher education sector.

5.1 Present Status

Thus all the initiatives help a large number of girls to get enrolled, not only in the General courses of university education, but also in the professional courses of engineering, Medical Science, Agriculture, Information & Technological sectors. Although in the rural and backward areas ,due to various sectors like social prejudices against educating girls, disadvantages of early girl marriage, restricted decision – making power, poverty and any other gender stereotype factors many girls still not come under the ambit of literacy, let alone in their Higher education. This is resulted in the disparity not only in the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of male and female population in all levels of India, but also in the literacy rate. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of male population is 21.6% as against 18.9% of female population at all India level (AISHE, 2011-2012). The literacy rate of Female in India is 65.46% against 82.14% of male. In Assam, Female literacy rate is 67.3% against 78.8% of male population. (Census 2011).These show the female education rate at different levels is still lagging behind compared male population. A table showing the gender gap in literacy rate is also prepared below,

LITERACY RATES IN ASSAM, 1961 -2011

Census Year	Persons	Males	Females	Gender gap in literacy Rate
1961	35.58%	44.28%	18.61%	25.67%
1971	33.32%	42.96%	22.31%	20.65%
1981	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A
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%

VI. CONCLUSION

In the conclusion we can be said that our government is giving more importance in primary sector of education for making education universal for all the children ,But there is neither severe paucity of finance invested in Higher education level nor lack of initiatives are taken for promoting higher education for girls especially in the backward areas. To remove the hurdles of women education there should be periodical inspection at higher education sectors, focus should be given in the concerning issues & demands particular in the locality and a co- operation between the public community and government sector is needed. Only then we can make practically worthwhile in enrolling and sustaining female population in different levels of education, Higher education also.

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