



STATUS OF WOMEN AND EDUCATION: A SPECIAL REFERENCE IN ASSAM CONTEXT

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Abstract

Status defines position in terms of enjoyment of rights and obligation within a society. This term is meaningful when it compares others. Thus, to define the women status in a particular society it always compares with the men in various fields like education, health, employment, political participation etc. on an equity basis. Because of the gender-discriminated position of women in India, it pushes them to a low participation in the education field. It is believed that women in north-eastern states get a better position than other parts in India. But the real situation defines that like other north-eastern states in Assam, women participation in the educational field, whether professional or general, is quite low compared with the men. Recently, the Assam government takes some incentives like the 'Pragyan Bharti Scheme' to boost self-confidence and improve their position in the education field. Thus, this study attempts to define the status of women in Assam and their participation in the education field and government role to improve their status in the field.

Key words: Assam, Education, Status, Women

INTRODUCTION

“Unity is meaningless without the accompaniment of women. Education is fruitless without educated women, and agitation is incomplete without the strength of women.”

-Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

This quotation has been defined by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar that without equity-based education it does not help to progress for the development of a particular society. Thus, it is necessary to provide education for all despite their caste, race, gender etc.

The status of women in different societies has often been defined through their complex and myriad roles in various fields such as social, economic, cultural and political etc. Their roles within a society reflect their position of such particular communities, states and countries. But various emergent researchers have been focused on the narratives of women's marginalisation and domination. In such a way, it is an important issue to define their status within a society.

Different factors such as family, kinship system, education, health, participation in social institutions or economic occupations etc. define the status of a particular society. Status means the position of a particular individual or section compared with others in terms of their enjoying rights and obligations. Women in India reflect a lower position than men. It happened because of the presence of patriarchy domination, i.e. a standard set by men. This patriarchy has been continued from earlier times to till today through traditional

cultural customs and norms. This patriarchy affect their position and create gender discrimination in socio-economic and political field. It creates subordination of women in such fields.

Education is a key agent of social change and creates development of a particular society. It is an important tool to change the patriarchy mind set of the people in India and replace a better position of women in this society. The status of women in north-eastern region is slightly better than rest of the parts in India. Assam is a north-eastern state where women get a better position than other parts in India. But in reality here women also face a subordinate position. Thus, although women literacy rate is good but it is not satisfactory compare with men. In such a way, Assam government takes some incentives to improve the women participation in education field and tries to growth the development of the state.

OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to define the women status and their participation in educational field. The proposed study particularly focus women status and their participation in educational field in Assam context.

The limitation of this study only defines formal education and limited on the status of women and their education in Assam perspective only.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this paper is based on descriptive and analytical methods to understand women status in Assam and how this position reflect their participation in educational field. Descriptive method has been used to describe the background of women education and their status particularly Assam. Analytical method has been used to analysis how various societal tools determine women position within this state and its influence in the educational field.

The study is based on qualitative nature and include some data. This proposed study is based on secondary sources.

WOMEN STATUS AND EDUCATION IN ASSAM

The north-eastern women get a better position in comparison to those living in the rest of the India. In Assam, as a north-eastern state here status of women also high in comparison other parts in this country. This may be happened because of the presence various factors like absence of purdah, absence of rigid caste based occupation, absence of dowry and tribal work pattern involving large women's labour and female entrepreneurship etc. ("The Status of women in Assam ", 1970, para.10). In present day it is not doubt that some evil practices also increasing in this state like dowry system but to some extent women also get a better status in this state. Assam follows agricultural pattern society. So, here woman consider as an important part both social and economic way. And child marriage and widow burning (sati) etc. are also considered historically absent here and subsequently seen as indicators of Assamese women enjoying more opportunities than other Indian women.

However when we define status of women in a particular society or state, first to consider various factors to determining their status high or low in such state. These factors are crime rate against women, sex ratio, women in the field of education, female work participation etc. Assam is not represent as the worst among major states of India in terms of human development and gender equality but in reality it ranks quite low (The Status of women in Assam, 1970, para.7). Study of Shivkumar (1996) revealed that on the basis of differential gender attainment of 16 major Indian states, Assam ranked in the 10th position (Nayak & Mahanta, 2013, p.2). Thus, it has been defined that there is also a gender inequality tendency present here. Increasing crime rate against women in Assam and largely drop out the girls from school reflect a gender discriminated position here.

The report reflected that 3.6 percent of girls in the age group of six to 14 years were either drop outs from the school or had never enrolled for elementary education (Karmkar, 2016, para.9). This discontinuation of girl's education has been prominently seen from the secondary level education and it affect fewer girls involving in professional and technical education (Karmakar, 2016, para.9). Thus, it has been shown that women participation in education field is not so much good in this state. To more know about the women in education in Assam, there is need first to overlook a historical outlook in this state.

The origin of female education in India was in the British Regime. Basically, this education was limited only to primary level education and only small section of people enjoyed this facility, so the literacy rate for women increased from 0.2% in 1882 to 6% only in 1947 (Bora, & Teron, & Baro, 2019, p. 572). Prior to the coming of British there was present of informal education for female which was limited to teach them household responsibilities. The collective efforts of the Christian missionaries, the British Indian Government and the social reformers during that time created an educational opportunity for women in India (Bora, & Teron, & Baro, 2019, p. 573). Thus, female education takes important during the British regime.

To look into earlier Assam history, there was also present a gender discriminated education system. In fifteenth-sixteenth century, after the Vaishnavite movement in Assam, common women get an opportunity to learn spiritual education through satras and namghars but formal education during that time was an imaginary concept. The British rule in Assam after the Yandaboo treaty in 1826. It leads to help to came up American Baptist missionaries who greatly contributed towards female education system in Assam. Mrs. Brown established a girls' school in Sadia in 1838 (Moran, 2019, p.40). In 1839, Mrs. Kattar and in 1841 Mrs. Warker set up girls' school in Sadia and Sivasagar respectively (Moran, 2019, p.40). Although missionaries were tried to improve the female education but it was not so much successful due to the cause of poverty, superstitions, grant policy of the government and most importantly following the patriarchal pattern society. However, in 1889, there were 2414 girl students in total 185 schools in Assam (Moran, 2019, p.41). Apart from missionaries some other Assamese personalities also tried to improve the female education here such as Haliram Dhekial Phukan, Jajnaram Khargharia Phukan, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunabhiram Barua etc. They created awareness female education through publishing magazines and other various activities. Thus, this historical outlook defines that women education in Assam was not very much high in ancient time.

In present day scenario, although reflect the increasing rate in female literacy is quite satisfactory but it is not equal position with the male counterparts (Haloi, 2015, p.58). According to the 2011 census study the total literacy rate of Assam is 72.19% and male literacy rate is 77.85% and female literacy rate is 66.27% ("Assam At A Glance| ASSAM GOVERNMENT", 2019, para. 5). In this context, it has been seen that although Assam ranks fifth in literacy rate in India still women education does not so much satisfactory. Patriarchy is the root of this discrimination. The word patriarchy, as stated by Kamala Bhasin in her book 'What is Patriarchy,' literally means the rule of father or the 'Patriarch' and originally, this term refers to reflect 'male-dominated society', exist members are father, mother, husband, wife, brother, sister, children, domestic servants etc. where ultimate control under the hand of men whether elder or younger (Rao, 2008, p.120-121). Through the gender socialisation process it establishes its legitimacy. Thus, this patriarchy leads to various factors which serving as impediments to deny the women participation in the education field. Traditional cultural values and norms where consider women are confined to the private domain not public, early marriage, son preferences, superstition, making the girls more domestic household work etc. are some factors retarding the progress of women's education.

Thus, to solve out such problems there is needed to break up such patriarchy based stereotypes traditional customs and practices. Women are more aware about their rights and against the patriarchal domination which is the main cause to create marginalisation of their status in society. Education is the basic tool to create social change and social progress of a society. In such way, there is need proper education for women to become more aware about their rights and domination. It is also help to all the people whether male and female in society to changing their stereotypical mind set. In this context, government initiatives takes a major role play to improve the women's education. Various schemes and policies are adopted by the Assam state government regarding improvement the women's education in this state such as mid-day meal, providing money for buying books etc. Especially they take an important scheme 'Pragyan Bharati' to develop the higher studies only for women. The government under the scheme would provide scooter to meritorious girl students who have passed the higher secondary examination with first division in 2020 (Singh, 2020, para.4). The state government will incur an expenditure of Rs. 144.30 crore for this purpose ("Assam Government To Launch Rs 100-A-Day Incentive For School- Going Girl Students", 2021, para.1). However government also launched Dr. Banikanta Kakaty Merit Award in 2017-18 and presented scooters to 1000 girl students who secured first division (Singh, 2020, para. 10). To define this scheme Chief Minister of Assam argued that the scheme would transform the lives of many girl students boosting their self-confidence besides inspiring many more to take up studies seriously (Singh, 2020, para.5). Thus, government incentives in Assam takes a major role play to development the women participation in the education field. But only government incentives could not provide a fruitful way for the achievement of large women participation in the education field. It is successful only when people are consciousness about the girls' education and equality treated both boy and girl rather

gender discrimination. It has been seen that in contemporary time a tremendous growth of education in India. Thus, in future there will be hope that a quality based education system developed in India where both men and women equally participation.

CONCLUSION

Education is a basic tool for create women emancipation. It develops the equal status for both men and women. Although in present day a tremendous development of education in India. But in reality a gender disparity present in this field. It happens because of the following patriarchal customs and norms which binding women within the four wall of the home and exclusion from this field. A general conception present that women in Assam get a better status than other rest of the part in India. But actual picture define that patriarchy plays a major role to create domination of women in this state also. So, here also see a gender gap in the literacy level. Thus, it is necessary both government incentives and people give importance to improve the women participation in the education field. Because without the growth of women who belong half of the population in a society could not develop of such community, society, state and country. Swami Vivekananda rightly said that, "It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing." Thus it can be say that we cannot think about the overall development of society without the development of women.

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