



EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN NORTHEAST INDIA:

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Abstract: In today's world it is believed that women can do anything they want but still sometimes they face gender discrimination in the form of inequality, favouritism and their voice is suppressed by man. This project work summarizes the need for the upliftment and empowerment of women in the Indian society, where for a long time women have been considered to be the inferior gender and are not provided equal opportunities and working conditions as compared to that provided to man. In this report emphasis has been laid towards the women of the North-eastern states of India and how these women have not only been empowered but also their voice has been amplified in this region from past few years with the help of government and NGOs that run for the betterment of women. The study reveals that in some parts of northeast India still activities like polygamy, substance abuse, violence against women at home etc. are practised and women are constrained to their homes though in other parts of the northeast women are much independent and are considered to be the head of the family and decision makers, have their say in the society and are free to work for themselves and their families wellbeing. Further there has been use of secondary data from reliable and authorised sources in support of this research work.

Index Terms: Empowerment, Women, Government, Violence, Participation, Northeast India, Leaders.

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW:

Introduction:

As said by Eleanor Roosevelt "A woman is like a tea bag- you never know how strong she is until she gets in hot water." Women have been for a long time considered to be the backbone behind the success of every man and hence the success of the nation. A female is considered to be the strongest form of living creature not only because she can give birth but also because of her strength to face situations with courage. She is the one who takes up different roles at once with ease be it of a mother or the CEO of a multinational company. Women have proved to be perfectionists in every field in the current scenario, traditionally jobs were provided on the basis of gender and the opportunities provided to women were very limited. In society for long women have been taken up as the weaker gender and their work had been limited to the household chores and miniscule jobs but now women are excelling in every field and walk of life be it the armed forces, the research work scientists, CEOs of big companies, sports, social service, politics and what not. There has been a very long history of violence against women not only within the family but also in the community. Even teasing and sexual harassment of women were considered as a symbol of manhood. Even reproductive rights are denied to some women.

Therefore in 1985, the concept of women empowerment was introduced in Nairobi at the UN's third world conference on women. Women empowerment is a very huge journey from what is wrong to what is right. In the conference women empowerment was stated as "A redistribution of social and economic powers and control of resources in favour of women." In easy words the term women empowerment refers to the process of empowering the females all across the world and providing them authority to make their own decisions and acceptance of those decisions by the society, giving them equal rights with no limitations or restrictions on the opportunities coming their way be it in the form of education, profession or lifestyle, etc. Empowerment of women includes actions that help in raising the status of women in the society through awareness campaigns in all parts of the country, providing education to all, training from primary classes for self-development etc. In the present world, women

empowerment has turned out to be an important topic for debate and discussion in development as well as in economics. For the improvement of the economic status of women and bringing about sustainable development of a country, it is of great importance to achieve the dual goal of woman empowerment and gender equality. It is strongly believed by leaders, economists and scholars all over the world that the goal of sustainable development cannot be reached without keeping in mind that everyone is equal and should have similar prospects. It is time to cut lose all the taboos and empower the gender that has not only for long been suppressed by the male driven society but also has given up her ambitions and dreams for the sake of her family and attached responsibilities. Though India is one of the classic examples of socially backlashing women where practices like child marriage, sati, polygamy, dowry, prevention of education for the girl child, debarring of property rights etc. had to be faced by the women, but now gradually by transforming laws and awakening of social consciousness equal rights have been provided to both men and women.

On the other hand in ancient times our country has also set an example for the empowerment of women. In ancient India women held a strong position in the society as great importance was given to the mother and wives of the rulers and noblemen. Our mythological literature also proves the prominent role of women as equal importance was given to goddesses as to gods. For example, Goddess Laxmi, Parvati, Saraswati, Durga and many other are worshiped with devotion. The year 1848 India witnessed "Savitribai Phule" as the first woman educator who broke all the social norms related to education of the girl child. In the struggle for freedom against the British, Netaji Subhash Chandra Boss formed the Azad Hind Fauj in which there was a platoon called Rani of Jhansi Regiment that solely comprised women as fighters as well as the leader and these women proved that females can even fight hand in hand with men. This movement had a grave impact on the people of our country and later India accepted the leadership of a woman i.e. Indira Gandhi, who became the first female Prime Minister of our country thus leaving an impression that effort and determination, can make a person achieve their goal. This lady had a new vision and great plans for our country to reach new heights. Also not to forget Kalpana Chawla became the first Indian female to travel to space and hence proved that even sky is not the limit for each and every person who has determined to do something great with their life.

Empowerment in Northeast India:

Northeast India is the eastern most region of our country that in total comprises 8 states that are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura and Sikkim. The north eastern states cover area of around 2,62,179 km square with a population of around 45,772,188 approximately. Some of these states have been prominently mentioned in our mythology and history. There are many ethnic groups in Northeast India, people speak different languages, have different beliefs, customs, traditions and a very vibrant history. For long we have observed that in the north eastern states men and women have worked hand in hand for the development of the states. But there are still certain norms that restrict the women from taking part socially and certain customs and traditions still prevail that women have to follow blindly. Still it is believed that the tribal women of northeast India enjoy a better position in the society as compared to other women. Some of the social and economic problems these women have to face are that of illiteracy, drugs, poor health, poverty, alcoholism, domestic violence, difference in the wage earnings of men and women etc. In the recent past the people of northeast India were facing problems like that of violence, armed conflict, tribal wars, terrorism, law and order etc. It is true that whenever situations like these prevail, women and children are affected the most but there is no way out. But lately conditions in northeast have improved substantially due to policies of development and growth implemented by the central government. Now women living in the north eastern states understand their rights and are empowered and provided equal rights as provided to men. Women in the state of Assam as compared to the women living in other north eastern states have suffered from less harassment and social boundaries. In the middle and late 1950's Assam become the first state in northeast to have its own "Mahila mandals" in which the women were engaged in activities such as weaving, knitting, and other such activities in order to be independent and earn more for the sake of their family since in most of the houses women were the sole earner as they were either single parent or widow. Further there are some problems that are being faced by the women in the northeast which are not discussed like absence of women in government bodies; women are not made part of core commitments no matter how dedicated they are justice issues, protection of the interest of women etc. Though in the recent times it is being observed that steps are being taken up by the government to support the masses and NGOs, whose work are transparent and for public welfare, have been provided aid in the north eastern part of India so that women can excel in all walks of life whether personal, social or economic and live their life freely. In the empowerment of women great emphasis has been put on the education of the females and it is being observed that our society is becoming acceptable as well as understanding and the people of northeast- who were considered to be self-centred and quite- are now sending females out of northeast for higher education in hope of their bright future. Primary education is made compulsory for each and every female due to which they get to understand more and expand their knowledge.

Empowerment of women is being preached and followed in the north eastern states of India and issues and grievances are being raised by women all over the states. There has been establishment of various NGOs and organisations that are working towards the upliftment and empowerment of women in the north eastern states. Taking example of few of these; Naga Mothers Association is one amongst the renowned organisations, solely run by women that have played a crucial role in bringing about peace between the government of India and Nationalist Socialist Council of -substance violence etc. The Aa Nagas organisation has given huge support to the females who have filled their names to be nominated for the office in the state legislature. By their support the women of the state have been empowered. It is further observed that the women who are able to support their household economy in any way are supported by the family members so as to earn more and hence improve their standard of living. If not earn from outside, since agriculture is practiced in most of the regions, women help her family in the agriculture work so as to establish that she is also a driving force. They have in the recent time proved to the whole nation that they are capable of any work be it in the field of education, sports, education, science or any other thing. Taking some examples we have world class boxer Mary Kom who has made the country proud at several occasions. The government of India made her the national observer of boxing seeing her achievements. Sanjukta Parashar also known as the 'Iron lady of Assam' was the first appointed IPS officer in the state. There have been several such examples too. The North-Eastern states of India in the past has witnessed the formation of some schemes related to upliftment and betterment of women but is still need for the formation of more women empowerment related schemes that should be sponsored by the state and central government. Under these schemes women should be taught in both the rural and urban areas as to what their rights are and how to bring a balance between their personal and professional life. They should be encouraged in each and every decision they make so that they gain confidence that they are not alone and hence can identify what is right and wrong. Women of the northeast should speak up against the domestic violence that they are facing, which is the story of nearly every 10th house today. Women of the northeast are blessed and highly talented in knitting, weaving, making goods like baskets and crowns out of wood etc. so they should be supported not only by their families and society but also by the government to prosper in the field so as to boost the self-esteem and confidence of these women. Moreover it is observed that most of the NGOs that are for women are being supervised by male members but the decision making power should lie in the hands of women committee members as it is said that nobody can understand a woman better than another woman and hence decision should not be based on what everyone thinks. Though at several occasions women in the northeast have faced discrimination in the current times steps have been taken up so as to provide these women with their rights and empower them. There has been stress put upon education of girl child, care is being taken place to provided better and proper healthcare facilities and many other steps are being taken up to improve the conditions of women.

Since independence the central government did not give much importance towards the development of northeast states due to which the people living there felt alienated and faced many difficulties like that of road connectivity, transportation, essential services etc. People also faced terrorism at the hands of local goons and also terrorist organisations of neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar but the present government has increased their budgetary allocation many fold for the development of Northeast states. Dedicated projects for this region have been conceived to uplift the standard of living and education. Railways for the first time are working in full swing to connect northeast with rest of the country. Standard infrastructure projects like Bogibeel Bridge and many others have helped a lot in movement and development. The army is also dedicatedly working to wipe out terrorism completely from the state. All these development has led to drastic decrease in harassment of women as they now feel more secure and connected with their counterparts and rest of the country.

Literature Review:

In order to conduct the research affectively many research papers were analysed in order to form a strong base for the topic. The main focus in papers was put towards northeast India and emphasises about the role of women in government bodies, social participation and economic development. The focus of attention was put towards giving the word empowerment a new meaning and understanding its need at the times of conflict. The paper drove output relevant to both academic and policy related and further linked these outcomes with women empowerment goal and a prominent role can be played by the females for bringing out peace in the society. It could be formulated that women and men of the north east should be equally treated and women should be provided opportunities and roles of responsibility so that they can show their leadership skills. Women should also be provide with equal pay as that given to a man violence against women at home as well as by the society should stop and they should be treated with respect. During the past some years the states of northeast were observing various strikes and fights due to which there was a social unrest in the state leading the women and children were being affected the most but this scenario is rapidly improving now. The difficulties faced by women in the northeast therefore cannot be said to be less as that of women in other parts of the country. At some point women have to go through all the blames and still act strong. Furthermore the topic of equality has also been placed before the reader where it is clearly stated

that the status of women in the society in north-east is less as compared to men though in the recent times there has been increase in the education level, health conditions of women in the northeaster parts of India Therefore the papers provided a framework that helped in analyse the situation prevailing in the northeast in a better way.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The project work summarises use of secondary data for the data analysis. The research has helped a lot to learn about the improvement in health conditions and standard of living of women in the northeast India. All the research has been done from authorised government websites and hence data has been collected from it. Further the analysis of the data has been done on the basis of individual knowledge

DATA ANALYSIS:

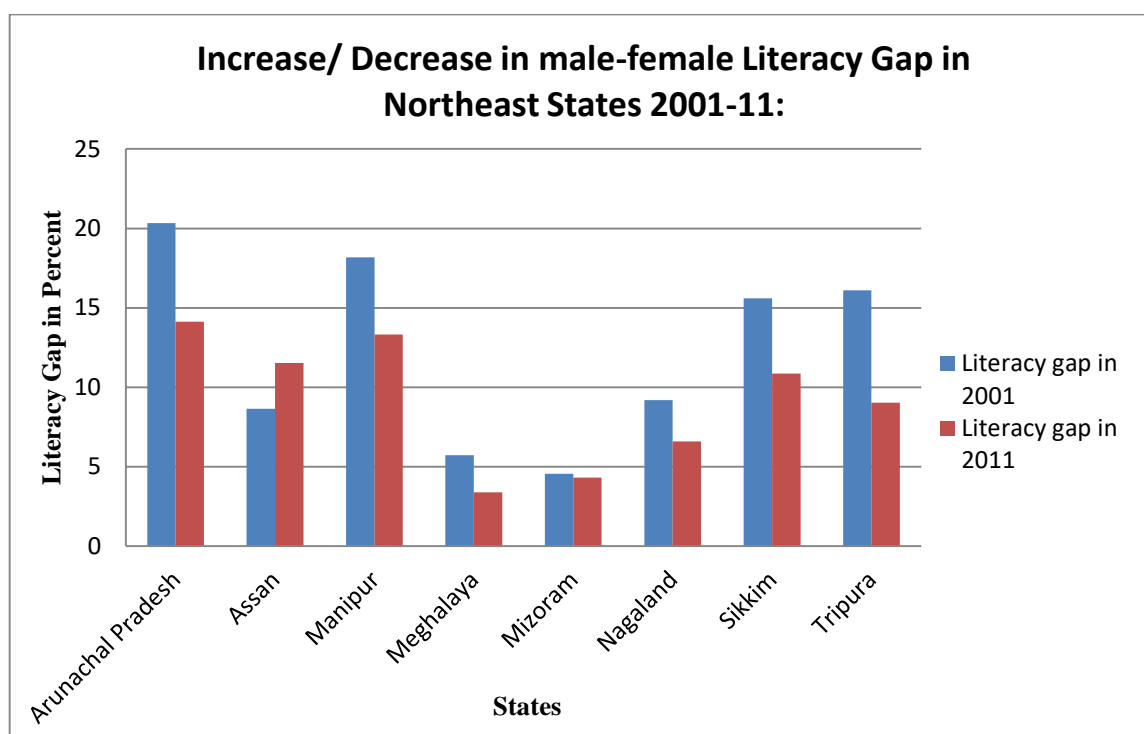
1. Education:

- One of the most important parameter to observe the changes that have been done to empower and uplift the women is education. It has been observed that the literacy rate of women has improved in the past some time.
- There has been observation of a huge gender gap tilted towards males with reference to the literacy rate in all the states of the northeast region though the gender gap in literacy is comparatively less in Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland with 3.39, 4.32 and 6.60 respectively.
- The report has been based on the 2011 census report and then there were very fewer females educated due to family pressure and other issues but with the formation of policies in the current scenario the education rate of females has been improved.
- The gender literacy rate also observed to decrease in all the northeast states except Assam like in Tripura in 2001 the gender literacy gap was 16.11% and in year 2011 the gap was reduced to 9.03% as the literacy rate of women increased from 64.91% to 83.15% in 2011.
- On finding out the attendance rate of females it was observed that nearly all women till the age of 14 year go to schools though this percentage decreases as females grow. It was further noted that the attendance rate of women in Arunachal Pradesh is quite low even for women of 14 years i.e. nearly 68% in rural areas and 79.9% in the urban areas according to 2011 census.

Literacy rate of women in Northeast India as in 2011:

<u>State</u>	<u>Census (%)</u>
Sikkim	76.43
Arunachal Pradesh	59.57
Nagaland	76.69
Manipur	73.17
Mizoram	89.40
Tripura	83.15
Meghalaya	73.78
Assam	67.27

Source: Census of India 2011



Source: National Human Development report 2001 and www.indiastat.com

2. Female Workforce participation:

- Female workforce participation is quite low in the states of northeast because of the violence and harassment they have been facing from many years.
- Better work ethics can be generated by women through proper education, awareness and training which will boost the confidence of females and enhance their working skills.
- For the empowerment of women it is necessary to start working from grass root level so as to bear fruits of improvement.
- From the below table it can be observed that the female workforce participation rate in the rural areas is better than that in the urban areas the main reason being the tribal women are more independent and are equal participant in any social activity and help their family in agriculture practices too.
- The state of Sikkim has the highest female workforce participation rate both in the rural and urban areas i.e. 69.9% and 39% respectively.

Female Workforce Participation Rate in Age Group 15-59 as in 2011-12:

State	Census (%)	
	Rural	Urban
Sikkim	69.9	39
Arunachal Pradesh	42.4	19.5
Nagaland	39.7	19.1
Manipur	38.7	25.4
Mizoram	60.7	36
Tripura	31.7	15.8
Meghalaya	62	29.7
Assam	17.8	12.2

Source: NSS Unit level data of Round 68th 2011-12

3. Health Conditions Of Women:

- As it is said that if you are healthy you have everything, therefore one of the parameters that can bring about the empowerment of women are the health conditions. If the factor of health is fulfilled then the women can be more powerful.
- The National Family Health Survey – IV clearly states that data was collected keeping in mind women empowerment and it was found out that generally in the northeast women both pregnant and those involved in household duties have low iron content in their bodies which is a grave issue and it affects the immunity of females.
- Further there have been many initiatives taken up by the government to form schemes that will give a boost to female's health care in the north eastern states.
- In the entire country nearly 50% of women are anaemic. It was even found out that anaemia has been persisting among the women of northeast which is shown in the table below. Anaemia was found highest among the women living in Tripura i.e. 54.5% and in the state of Mizoram there were only 24.8% cases of anaemia reported for women. Anaemia is also said to vary according to the maternity status.

Anaemia faced by the women of northeast:

<u>States</u>	<u>Census (%)</u>
Assam	46
Arunachal Pradesh	43.2
Meghalaya	56.2
Manipur	26.4
Nagaland	27.9
Tripura	54.5
Mizoram	24.8
Sikkim	34.9

Source: National Family Health Survey- 4

4. Women Participation in Decision Making:

- A important aspects about women empowerment is that women are allowed and given the full freedom to make her own decisions related to health, social movement and participation in decision making.
- As compared to the rest of the country it is observed that women of the northeast experience more liberty and their voice has been amplified due to greater support from their families.
- The below data has been taken from National Family Health Survey IV which clearly states that nearly 90.7% of the women in Nagaland make their own decisions or decisions jointly with her husband which is highest in the entire country.

Percentage of Women who usually make decisions alone or jointly with her husband.

<u>States</u>	<u>Census (%)</u>
Assam	71.0
Arunachal Pradesh	76.9
Meghalaya	77.3
Manipur	77.0
Nagaland	90.7
Tripura	77.5
Mizoram	79.0
Sikkim	89.4

Source: National Family Health Survey- 4

SUGGESTIONS:

Some ways through which the women in north eastern India can be empowered are by; giving females the roles related to leadership so as to provide them with an upper hand in the society. Women should be accepted readily by the people as leaders and should coordinate with them for better functioning. Women in the northeast should not only be provided with more job opportunities but the state government and investors should invest in projects and activities that are being performed and conducted by women entrepreneurs both technically and financially. Moreover, the activities of the women should be guided, monitored and mentored by strong female personalities in

both social and professional life. Local handicraft, culture and food should be properly showcased at both national and international level. Connectivity with other parts of the country should be made easy and fast

CONCLUSION:

To conclude I would like to say that there is a need to uplift and empower the women in the northeast so as to not only provide a better picture of the country but also for improving the lifestyle and conditions of the women. Women of today are very strong. She has gone through many changes and is now becoming more independent, focused and outright. It is time for the women of northeast to come together and be an inspiration for each and every women of this country showcasing that determination and dedication are the key for achieving any milestone. Further there are various steps taken up by the government to empowerment women in the country by making education compulsory for all females, providing them with equal job opportunities, assistance in setting up their own enterprises, promotion of women in national politics etc. Various health related schemes dedicated to women have been introduced by the government for their wellbeing. The government is playing its role and it is also the duty of citizens to acknowledge and encourage the equal participation of women in development of northeast states. Further the north eastern states have witnessed numerous strong women movements which have resulted in more alignment with mainland India and has also promoted nationalism and democratic believe along with dialogue and political negotiation so as to bring peace and development in the region.

In India women empowerment has gained a lot of significance in the past few decades. Indian women have excelled not only within the country but have also marked their presence globally and have earned laurels and fame to the country.

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