



EDUCATION AND LITERACY RATE OF WOMEN IN ASSAM

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Abstract: Education is the backbone of the social and economic development of the nation. Spread of literacy is generally associated with important traits of modern civilization such as modernization, urbanisation, industrialisation, communication and commerce. Education system helps us to obtain and develop logical thinking to make independent decisions. Education is the gateway to economic security and opportunity particularly for women in India and Assam as well. Women are part of socio-economic system and they uphold rich cultural and traditional values. Educated women not only tend to promote education of their girl children, but also can provide better guidance to all their children. Despite governmental programmes, India's literacy rate increased only 77 Percent. The literacy rate of women is much low compared to the male members which is a matter of concern in contemporary times.

Key words - Education, Literacy rate, Assam, India, Women Component, formatting, style, styling, insert.

I. INTRODUCTION

The 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights stated that everyone has a right to education yet it is denied to millions of children. Education is the backbone of the social and economic development of the nation. Spread of literacy is generally associated with important traits of modern civilization such as modernization, urbanisation, industrialisation, communication and commerce. Education system helps us to obtain and develop logical thinking to make independent decisions. Every member of the society must be given the opportunity to learn and educate themselves in order to get empowerment. Despite governmental programmes, India's literacy rate increased only 77 Percent. Knowledge is a distinguishing characteristic of human beings with a tremendous capacity to acquire and transfer knowledge from one generation to another. Education is the gateway to economic security and opportunity particularly for women in India and Assam as well. Women are part of socio-economic system and they uphold rich cultural and traditional values. Their progress is equated with the progress of the nation. Indian women play a major role in acquiring knowledge. It can produce high level professionals; technical and managerial personnel generate new knowledge. Through education there will be a new invasion of knowledge in the society. It not only helps in the development of resources, but also improving the quality of life at home and outside. Educated women not only tend to promote education of their girl children, but also can provide better guidance to all their children.

Education enables women to uplift themselves from their plight of injustice in the society. It equips women to explore the world, manipulate it for their survival and establish themselves with the potentialities and enables women to cultivate confidence, good habits and develop the right attitude to work and life as good citizens.

Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. It provides opportunities to women to fulfil their needs and desires. Women empowerment is one of the fundamental issues as it links to the status of women in society. But many countries of the world exhibit gender inequality in education, employment, welfare, health, etc. For example, girls and women in South Asia and China largely suffer from discrepancies in education. The rate of drop-out of female children from schools is higher than boys. It was reported in the year 2000, that in a nation like Mali, 84% of girls have never attended schools, of those who attend 60 percent dropout in primary grades. In India, 50% of the girl's dropout before completing the 5th standard. According to the report one billion illiterate adults in the world, 2/3 are women living in South Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle-East and India. In more than 29 countries, less than 30% of women are literate. The female literacy rate as a percentage of male literacy rate is only 28% in Sudan 39% in Somalia 46% in Cambodia and 75percent in Guatemala.

In India it is found that girls are being discouraged to go to higher education that is college and University level education and also for professional and technical education. There are regional imbalances also. In states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Punjab and Maharashtra female education is encouraged and also given equal importance. Whereas in states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, etc. education of girls is neglected even today also. It is also observed that literacy level in general is higher in the urban areas than in the rural areas. Some differences is also observed at the level of women.

Equality can only be attained by giving women more opportunity to learn themselves through education, by facilitating quality education as well as higher education in every sphere. Empowerment of women would help them in liberating them from the clutches of traditional bondage and exploitation. It will help to create a new social environment in which women can take decisions and make choices of their own, either individually or collectively. To achieve our desire status, we must have to win our battle. In this paper an attempt has been made to study education and literacy rate of Women in Assam.

II. OBJECTIVE

1. To focus on the women education in India
2. To understand the literacy rate of women in India.
3. To understand the education and literacy rate of women in Assam.
4. To find out the measures to remove hindrance in the way of women education.

III. METHODOLOGY

The required information's are obtained from secondary data. The data are collected from books, journals, magazines, pamphlets and other archival records both official and non-official. Educational statistics on women in the state and in the country for various years are also used in this study.

IV. WOMEN EDUCATION IN INDIA

Women constitute half of the population in India, yet they continue to face deprivation in various aspects of society. One crucial demand highlighted by women's movements is the urgent need for women's education. The diverse cultural tapestry of Indian society often confines women to the confines of their homes, where their primary role is to manage the household, while men venture outside to earn a living.

Education emerges as a pivotal factor in breaking down these barriers and empowering women. Acknowledging that the foundation of society lies within the family, it becomes evident that educating a girl child has a ripple effect, positively influencing the entire family. Education imparts knowledge, shapes character, installs good habits, and hones skills within the family unit.

The transformative power of education is particularly evident in the role of an educated mother. She possesses the ability to mould the character of her child in a more profound and enriching manner compared to an uneducated mother. Education equips women with the tools to envision and pursue their future goals, enabling them to contribute significantly to the well-being of the family.

Furthermore, education acts as a safeguard against the dissolution of homes. It instills a sense of responsibility and awareness, reducing the likelihood of destructive choices that could jeopardize familial harmony. By educating women, we not only elevate individual lives but also strengthen the very fabric of society, fostering a more enlightened and equitable future.

In the Vedic age, women in India enjoyed equal status and educational opportunities. However, their societal standing took a downturn with the advent of Manu smritis and further declined during the Islamic invasion of Babur and the subsequent Mughal Empire. The influence of Christianity during this period also contributed to curbing women's freedoms and rights. The medieval era witnessed a deterioration in the position of Indian women due to various customs and conventions.

Despite the challenging circumstances, some women managed to excel in diverse fields such as politics, literature, education, and religion. However, overall, the status of women continued to erode during the medieval period.

The arrival of the British colonial rule marked a turning point, coupled with the efforts of social reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Jyotiba Phule. These reformers dedicated themselves to the upliftment of women, vigorously advocating for the elimination of harmful practices like sati, child marriage, polygamy, and the mistreatment of Muslim women and widows.

Their persistent efforts, combined with social and religious movements, sought to improve the conditions of women in India. The struggle against oppressive practices gained momentum, contributing to a gradual transformation in societal attitudes towards women and paving the way for improved rights and freedoms.

Since achieving independence, women in India have actively participated in various spheres, including education, politics, media, art, culture, and science. The country has seen notable female leaders, such as a Prime Minister who governed for fifteen years, a female Lok Sabha speaker, and a former female President. Constitutional rights were equally guaranteed to both men and women, leading to increased female involvement in social movements during the 1970s and 80s.

Although this period lacks substantial data on women's literacy and empowerment, India's higher education system ranks third globally. The University Grants Commission (UGC) plays a crucial role in connecting the Union and State Governments with higher learning institutions. The government has initiated numerous measures to address women's issues and promote socio-economic development, including legislative acts like the Hindu Succession Act, the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, and MGNREGA.

The Ministry for Women & Child Development, established in 1985 under the Ministry of Human Resource Development, focuses on the comprehensive development of women and children. The 73rd and 74th Amendments of 1993 mandated 33% reservation for women in local bodies, empowering them in decision-making roles. In 2006, the department gained ministry status,

with the authority to formulate plans, policies, and programs, coordinating efforts between governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Initiatives like the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) provide services like supplementary nutrition, health check-ups, and immunization. The ministry emphasizes women's safety and health, recently launching the Saakshar Bharat Mission to reduce female illiteracy in rural areas. Economic development programs, such as Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK)¹, were introduced in 2001, designated as the "Year of Women's Empowerment."

India has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to ensure equal rights for women. Despite government efforts, challenges persist in areas with high illiteracy and lack of awareness, where women may face disrespect. Government policies like Beti Bachao Beti Parhao aim to raise awareness and empower daughters through education, reflecting ongoing efforts to address these issues.

Male –Female Literacy Rates in Major States of India in 2001 and 2011

States	2001			2011		
	Male	Female	Total Literacy	Male	Female	Total Literacy
U.P. and Uttar Pradesh	71	44	58	83.78	64.98	74.67
Bihar and Jharkhand	62	35	49	75.92	54.77	65.72
Rajasthan	76	44	61	80.51	52.66	67.06
M.P. and Chhattisgarh	77	51	64	80.99	60.30	70.83
Haryana	79	56	69	85.38	66.78	76.64
Assam	72	56	64	78.81	67.27	73.18
Gujarat	80	59	70	87.23	70.73	79.31
Orissa	76	51	64	82.40	64.36	73.45
Maharashtra	86	68	77	89.82	75.48	82.91
Punjab	76	64	70	81.48	71.34	68.00
West Bengal	78	60	69	82.67	71.16	77.08
Karnataka	76	56	67	82.85	68.13	75.60
Andhra Pradesh	71	51	61	75.56	59.74	67.66
Tamil Nadu	82	65	73	86.81	73.86	80.33
Kerala	94	88	91	96.62	91.98	93.91

Source: Census of India 2001 and 2011

According to National Family Health survey (NFHS-5) 2019-21 male literacy at India level in 2021 stands at 84.4 percent and female literacy stands at 71.5 percent Male –Female gap at the all-India level is 12.9 percent points with male literacy at 84.7 percent and female is the smallest in Kerela at just 2.2percent. Delhi stood second with 88.7percent.

States with Highest Literacy Rate

Sl. no.	State	Male	Female	Average
1	Kerala	97.4	95.2	96.2
2	Mizoram	93.72	89.4	91.58
3	Delhi	93.7	82.4	88.7
4	Tripura	92.18	83.15	87.75
5	Uttarakhand	94.3	80.7	87.6
6	Goa	92.81	81.84	87.4
7	Himachal Pradesh	92.9	80.5	86.6
8	Assam	90.1	81.2	85.9
9	Maharashtra	90.7	78.4	84.8
10	Punjab	88.5	78.5	83.7

Source: Survey by National Statistical Office 2011 census.

¹ Sinha Harendra and Zorema J., "Empowerment of Women in north East India: Socio –economic Perspectives", 2012, Concept Publishing Company Private Limited.p-13

V. EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN ASSAM

Literacy rate 1951-2011

Year	Persons		Male		Female	
	India	Assam	India	Assam	India	Assam
1951	18.33	18.53	27.16	28.01	8.86	7.58
1961	28.30	32.95	40.40	44.28	15.35	18.62
1971	34.45	33.94	45.96	43.72	21.97	22.76
1981	43.57	-	56.38	-	29.76	-
1991	52.21	52.89	64.13	61.87	39.29	43.03
2001	64.84	63.25	75.26	71.87	53.67	54.61
2011	72.99	72.19	80.89	77.85	64.64	66.27

Sources: Statistical handbook of Assam 2014, Census Report 2011

In India, since 1947, literacy rate has shown a substantial improvement. The total literacy rate which was only 18.33 percent in 1951, rose to 52.21 percent in 1991 in India. In Assam it was 18.53 percent to 52.89 percent. It further increased to 72.99 percent in Assam to 72.19 percent. In 2001, the literacy rate of male is 75.26 percent and female is 53.67 percent in India. 71.87 percent male in Assam and female is 54.61 percent. According to 2011 Census, the literacy rate of men is 80.89 percent and female is 64.64 percent. 78.81 percent male and that of women is 67.27 percent in Assam but it is seen that women are now pursuing higher education and holding prestigious posts in government offices and private organizations. During the last two decades, there has been a significant rise in the involvement in the field of education².

Literacy rate of male and female in Assam of 2001-2011

	2011	2001
Literacy	72.19 percent	63.25 percent
Male Literacy	77.85 percent	71.28 percent
Female	66.27 percent	54.61 percent
Total Literate	19,177,977	14,015,354
Male	10,568,639	8,188,697
Female	8,609,338	5,826,657

VI. BARRIERS OF WOMEN EDUCATION

A combination of cultural factors, gender stereotyping and disadvantages shuts the door to most women, even as they strive to scale the educational ladder.

1. The prevailing patriarchal structure of society persistently confines women and girls to conventional roles, primarily as wives and mothers, tethered to domestic responsibilities with limited scope for personal ambitions. This entrenched system, reinforced by patrilocal marriage customs, inhibits opportunities for girls to pursue higher education. Additionally, entrenched ideals of hypergamy, where spouses are expected to have differing levels of education or caste status, pose challenges for highly educated women in securing suitable partners.
2. The emphasis placed on marriage as a priority is a key contributing factor. While early marriage is commonly identified as a barrier to women's education, in Assam, where child marriage isn't widespread, it's not the primary causal factor. Nonetheless, despite the absence of child marriage, there are still constrained advancements in women's education in the region.
3. Another contributing factor is the significant dropout rates among girls, stemming from their struggles to adapt to the demands of the educational system. This challenge arises from various issues, including the overwhelming academic workload, insufficient parental involvement and encouragement, as well as the necessity to balance domestic obligations and caring for siblings.
4. Girls encounter financial barriers when pursuing higher education. In urban settings, this could be attributed to the proliferation of private institutions that offer superior education, albeit at a higher expense. The insufficient sanitation and other facilities within the school like the quality of teaching, the neglect of the need for more women teachers, inappropriate curricula, and the fact that girls may need special attention to help them overcome social and cultural barriers are other limiting factors.

² Statistic Handbook of Assam 14, 2011 and 2021

5. One of the obstacles hindering the development of women is the parents' lack of awareness about the importance of educating their daughters, particularly in terms of providing higher education opportunities.

VII. MEASURES

1. Introducing discounts or special provisions for women's studies across educational institutions in India can play a pivotal role in advancing women's education.
2. Prioritizing the development of women entrepreneurs within society is essential for fostering women's empowerment.
3. Distance education and open learning platforms offer women the opportunity to pursue various educational pathways from the comfort of their homes.
4. Empowering women through vocational skill development initiatives is crucial for enhancing their socio-economic status, as training in diverse skills enables them to engage in economic activities more effectively.
5. Conducting research on women's development by universities is imperative to address the multifaceted challenges faced by women, with a particular focus on enhancing women's education.
6. Upholding respect for women within society is essential, and their contributions should not be disregarded or overlooked.
7. Encouraging the inheritance of property rights among women is vital for promoting gender equality within society.
8. It is essential for the government to take proactive measures to ensure the effective enforcement of regulations pertaining to girls' education.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Education serves as a critical tool for empowering women by equipping them with essential skills, knowledge, and self-confidence. It enables women to break free from societal constraints and assert their dignity and strength. Through education, women gain the ability to make informed decisions and effectively manage their families. Additionally, educational policies play a crucial role in dismantling the historical barriers of social injustice that have marginalized women for generations. Overall, education empowers women to overcome various forms of oppression and emerge as empowered individuals capable of shaping their own destinies. Thus, it is seen that women are in the way of developing themselves in Assam along with other states of India.

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