ROLE OF EDUCATION IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT ----------------------A STUDY ON ASSAM.

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ABSTRACT

*The paper is an attempt to analyze the status of women in Assam in comparison to the male counterparts and their empowerment in terms of various socio economic and political indicators. Assam is one of the eighth states of the North East India. It is one of largest state of the region in terms of population with a heterogeneous cultural background. Since it has been experiencing insurgency and ethnic strife for the last three decades, its economic and social set up is under threat. The worst victims in this process are the ‘WOMEN’. Though Assam is free from few social evils like dowry , sati system , female feticide , yet because it is largely dominated by tribal and indigenous culture, there exists a plethora of gender discrimination .Based on a study on collection of secondary data , it has come to light that the development process is not gender neutral . Women in Assam enjoy quite an inferior status as compared to the average women in India. Although the government has undertaken a number of steps to create gender equality, yet situation still remains gloomy because women in Assam are still over tied up with the baseless age old social customs .Hence there is a need to create awareness towards achieving the desired goal of women empowerment in the state. There cannot be a better tool than ‘EDUCATION’ to empower a women. The bread maker of the family is to be converted into the bread earner of the family.*

**INTRODUCTION**

ASSAM is one of the largest states of North Eastern Region .But its social- economic set up has been an impediment to its overall growth and development. In certain respects the position of women is weaker than that in any other states of the country. NHDR (2000) reported higher gender inequality in the states as compared to all India situations. According to Human Development Report (2003) the state has lagged behind Manipur Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland in terms of position of women in the society. So the need is felt to undertake an in-depth study on the status of women and their empowerment.

**METHODOLOGY**

The present study is based on secondary data from different sources. Analysis is done on three parameters like ---1) education, 2) employment, 3) political participation. In course of the analysis, the state is divided into three areas------

a) Lower Assam which includes Barpeta, Bongaigaon , Dhubri, Goalpara, Kamrup, Kokrajhar, Nalbari.

b) Central Assam which includes Cachar, Darrang , Hailakhandi, Karbi Anglong, Karimganj, Morigaon, Nagaon , N.C Hills and Sonitpur.

c) Upper Assam which includes Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, Golaghat, Jorhat, Lakhimpur, Sibsagar,Tinsukia.

**OBJECTIVES.**

1.To examine the status of women empowerment in Assam vis –a –vis India.

2. Identify the hidden constraints on women in Assam.

3. To provide suggestive measures on Gender Equality.

**STATUS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

‘Women’ is a feminine essence of biological factors------she is all that is female, her sexuality is the half of the reproduction process and propagation of our species, she is a lover ,a mate , a mother, a nest builder who abides by biological rules.

‘Empowerment of Women’ means the process by which women as a group become more independent, particularly in economic matters and their authority in decision making in the family is increased. The idea of ‘POWER’ is a wide connotation and it includes the following:

POWER OF -------- decision making authority, power to solve problems.

POWER OVER ----relationship of domination or subordination.

POWER WITH------involves people organizing with a common purpose to achieve collective goals.

POWER WITHIN----- refers to self self confidence, self awareness and assertiveness.

Hence to empower the women folk the following parameters are examined:

**1) EDUCATIONAL STATUS**: Educational attainment of women in Assam at district level can be analyzed through female literacy rate and female enrolment rate at different stages of education.

All the Upper Assam districts have high female literacy above state average except Tinsukia. Female literacy rate is highest in Upper Assam (60.35%) which is quite higher than state average (54.61%). Central Assam female literacy is (52. 61%) and lower Assam female literacy is (52.53%). Let us put forward District Wise enrolement of females by stages of education to have a insight about the educational status of women in the state.

**TABLE----( 1)**

**Area, Literacy, Per Capita DDP wise Female Enrolment in Assam, 2005-2006.**

**(figures in percent)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***CATEGORY*** | ***PRE-PRIMARY*** | ***MIDDLE*** | ***HIGH SCHOOL*** | ***HIGHER SECONDARY*** | ***JUNIOR COLLEGE*** |
| **Geographical Area :**  **Lower Assam**  **Central Assam**  **Upper Assam** | **49.69**  **49.43**  **48.54** | **45.52**  **46.97**  **46.78** | **42.53**  **43.47**  **46.52** | **33.30**  **36.51**  **40.08** | **37.93**  **39.29**  **42.63** |
| **Level of Literacy:**  **Low**  **Moderate**  **High**  **Higher** | **49.86**  **49.71**  **48.99**  **49.27** | **45.14**  **46.21**  **46.84**  **45.83** | **40.15**  **43.56**  **44.62**  **44.41** | **30.46**  **38.69**  **36.26**  **35.08** | **29.03**  **39.18**  **38.38**  **41.86** |
| **Per Capita DDP:**  **Low**  **Moderate**  **High** | **49.62**  **48.78**  **49.34** | **46.78**  **46.06**  **45.88** | **43.86**  **44.25**  **44.45** | **33.64**  **41.70**  **35.18** | **38.00**  **38.2**  **41.86** |
| **ALL ASSAM** | **49.32** | **46.38** | **44.11** | **36.27** | **39.53** |

Source: Census Of India 2001and Assam Hand Development Report 2003.

The Table clearly projects that enrolment is the highest in primary level, slightly lower in middle level. The proportion of enrolment decreases with the increase in the stages of education. In almost all the districts , in primary level, enrolment rate is almost 50%. In middle middle and high school level also the percentage of enrolment is around 45%. However in higher secondary and junior colleges the female enrolment is much lower i.e below 40%.

Female enrolment in Primary level in Lower, Central, Upper Assam are almost equal i.e around 49-50%.

In middle level, enrolment rate is slightly lower in Lower Assam in comparison to Upper and Central Assam.

Enrolment rate in high school level is much higher in Upper Assam (46.52%) as compared to Lower Assam (42.53%) and Central Assam (43.47%).

Female enrolment at higher secondary and at junior colleges are around 41%cand 43% in Upper Assam, as compared to 33% and 38% in Lower Assam, 37% and 39% in Central Assam.

**2) EMPLOYMENT STATUS**: To examine the status of women on the basis of their employment status, percentage of distribution of workers, workforce participation rate across different district groups are taken into account. Let us have a look on the percentage of workers belonging to both sexes.

**TABLE---2.**

**Area. Literacy, Per Capita DDP wise workers in Assam in 2001.(figures in percent)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **CATEGORY** | | **MAIN WORKERS** | | **MARGINAL WORKERS** | | **NON-WORKERS** | |
| **MALE** | **FEMALE** | **MALE** | **FEMALE** | **MALE** | **FEMALE** |
| **GEOGRAPHICAL AREA** | **LOWER ASSAM** | **43.23** | **7.31** | **5.59** | **7.85** | **51.34** | **84.84** |
| **CENTRAL ASSAM** | **42.38** | **8.33** | **6.96** | **9.50** | **50.64** | **82.15** |
| **UPPER ASSAM** | **41.68** | **15.62** | **11.47** | **39.55** | **47.63** | **66.90** |
| **LEVEL OF LITERACY** | **LOW** | **44.37** | **4.27** | **4.81** | **3.85** | **51.76** | **91.87** |
| **MODERATE** | **42.56** | **8.48** | **6.17** | **10.61** | **51.25** | **80.90** |
| **HIGH** | **41.91** | **11.09** | **8.45** | **12.04** | **49.62** | **76.76** |
| **HIGHER** | **43.39** | **10.68** | **7.62** | **10.74** | **48.97** | **78.56** |
| **PER CAPITA DDP** | **LOW** | **42.51** | **8.60** | **7.42** | **10.92** | **50.17** | **80.47** |
| **MODERATE** | **42.01** | **10.75** | **7.54** | **11.38** | **50.44** | **77.70** |
| **HIGH** | **43.30** | **11.77** | **7.20** | **9.99** | **49.48** | **78.22** |
| **ALL ASSAM** |  | **42.45** | **9.82** | **7.41** | **10.89** | **50.13** | **79.28** |

**Source: Census Of India 2001.**

The data above throws some light on the gender structure of workforce in the economy. In case of Main Workers ---- percentage of females is much lower than that of males irrespective of districts whereas more females are engaged as marginal and non- workers as compared to the male counterparts. Hence the women folk are at a disadvantageous position in the state in respect of employment. From the table it is also clear that in Upper Assam district, proportion of female workers as main and marginal workers are relatively higher than the proportion of female non- workers. The districts in Central and Lower Assam exhibit almost same pattern of having low proportion of female Main and Margjnal Workers and high proportion of female non- workers. The data also reveals that there is a positive relationship between overall literacy rate and percentage of female workers. Dhubri, the low literacy rate district shows the highest proportion of female Main and Marginal workers and lowest proportion of female non- workers (91.96%) and lowest proportion of female main workers (4.27%) and Marginal Workers (3.85%).High literacy rate districts has the highest proportion of Female Main and Marginal Workers and lowest proportion of female non-workers. Now, let us examine the work force participation rate in Assam. As analysed on the basis of geographical location, we find that most of the Upper Assam-districts show high proportion of total workforce participation as well as high female workforce participation, implying the development of the area in Assam in 2001**.**

**TABLE-----3**

**Area Wise Work force Participation Rate**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **CATEGORY** | | **PERSON** | **MALE** | **FEMALE** |
| **GEOGRAPHICAL**  **AREA** | **LOWER ASSAM** | **32.49** | **48.66** | **15.16** |
| **CENTRAL ASSAM** | **32.23** | **49.05** | **14.42** |
| **UPPER ASSAM** | **42.98** | **52.36** | **32.90** |
| **LEVEL OF LITERACY** | **LOW** | **28.73** | **48.23** | **8.12** |
| **MODERATE** | **34.36** | **48.74** | **19.09** |
| **HIGH** | **37.20** | **50.37** | **23.13** |
| **HIGHER** | **36.89** | **51.02** | **21.43** |
| **PER CAPITA DDP** | **LOW** | **35.11** | **49.82** | **19.52** |
| **MODERATE** | **36.29** | **49.55** | **22.13** |
| **HIGH** | **36.83** | **50.51** | **21.77** |
| **ALL ASSAM** | | **35.78** | **49.87** | **20.71** |
| **CATEGORY** | | **PERSON** | **MALE** | **FEMALE** |
| **GEOGRAPHICAL**  **AREA** | **LOWER ASSAM** | **32.49** | **48.66** | **15.16** |
| **CENTRAL ASSAM** | **32.23** | **49.05** | **14.42** |
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| **HIGH** | **36.83** | **50.51** | **21.77** |
| **ALL ASSAM** | | **35.78** | **49.87** | **20.71** |

**SOURCE: CENSUS OF INDIA** 2001.

Further the district Lakhimpur exhibits highest percentage of total workforce participation (55.99%) and high percentage of Female Workforce participation (49.87%).However, male workforce participation rate does not differ much across district- groups. Male workforce participation rate does not vary much with literacy rate. But the percentage of female workforce participation significantly varies and it is positively related with the literacy rate. Dhubri, which exhibits low literacy i.e below 50%, shows a very poor participation of females (8%) in the total workforce. High and Higher literacy rate districts show relatively high percentage of female workforce participation. To examine the nature and status of women employment in the public sector of the state, it is important to know their class wise distribution.

**TABLE--------4**

**DISTRIBUTION OF GOVERNMENT WOMEN EMPLOYEES IN ASSAM**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **CATEGORY OF EMPLOYEES** | **NO. OF EMPLOYEESIN 1994** | | **PECENTAGE OF WOMEN EMPLOYEES** | |
|  | **TOTAL** | **WOMEN** | **1994** | **2000** |
| **CLASS I** | **8.145** | **713** | **8.75** | **N.A** |
| **CLASS II** | **6.242** | **374** | **5.99** | **N.A** |
| **CLASS III** | **2,36,916** | **41,025** | **17.31** | **N.A** |
| **CLASS IV** | **53,532** | **3,582** | **6.69** | **N.A** |
| **TOTAL** | **3,04,835** | **45,694** | **14,98** | **16.65** |

**SOURCE: Assam Human Report—2003 (Statistical Hand Book of Assam 2007).**

The table shows the number and percentage of total women employee in 1994. The data reveals that only 14.98% of total government employees were women. The women folk were mostly employed in class III category of government services. This shows a very disappointing picture about status of women employment in Assam. As per the statistics of the Government of Assam (20007) there were only 16.65% of women employees in the Government jobs. There has not been any significant increase in the percent of women government employees in a period of 12 years from 1994 to 2000.

**3) STATUS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION.**

Women’s Political Participation is another input to their empowerment. This factor contributes to their well-being. Political participation of women gives them sufficient freedom in their decision making capacity, both at the community and national level. However, measurement of women’s political empowerment through their political participation in the context of India and her constituent states including Assam poses a doubt sometimes on the efficiency of the empowerment variable. This is because of the fact that strong family- based structure of Indian politics makes it difficult for women to assert independent political choices. Therefore, judging women’s political agency on the basis of their representation in political bodies is hazardous. Women standing proxy for men are quite common in India.(Assam Human Development Report).A Table may be presented on the percentage of women voters and elected women members of Assam.

TABLE 5

PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN VOTERS AND MLA IN ASSAM.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| YEAR | VOTERS IN ASSEMBLY ELECTION | | ELECTED WOMEN MEMBERS OF LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY |
| MALE | FEMALE |
| 1972 | 58.46 | 41.53 | 0 |
| 1978 | 58.08 | 41.91 | 0.8 |
| 1983 | 58.43 | 41.56 | 1.83 |
| 1985 | 54.10 | 45.89 | 3.97 |
| 1991 | 54.07 | 45.92 | 3.97 |
| 2001 | 53.82 | 46.15 | 7.94 |
| 2006 | 52.08 | 47.84 | 10.32 |

SOURCE: ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA.

From the table ,it is clear that the percentage of female voters though has increased overtime , it has always been less than that of male voters . In 1972 ,there has not been a single women MLA. The situation however, has changed in 2006, less than 11% of MLA’S were women.

TABLE 6

A COMPARISON BETWEEN ASSAM AND INDIA

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| State/Country | Percentage of women who usually make specific decisions alone or jointly with their husbands | | |
|  | Own health care | Making major household purchase | Making purchase of daily requirement |
| Assam | 80.0 | 72.0 | 70.6 |
| India | 62.2 | 52.9 | 60.1 |

The percentage of total women in Assam who participate in decision making on health care, major household purchases, visiting relatives and making daily purchases are better in Assam i.e 60.5% as compared to 37% in all India level. For economic empowerment control over resources is more important .In Assam women have less financial autonomy as compared to all India level.Only 26.9% of total respondents in ASSAM take decision by themselves about the use of their resources as compared to 50% in case of India.Domestic Violence is another factor which affect the process of women empowerment .Relatively less women (24.7%) in Assam experience physical violence as compared to all India situations (26.9%) .However women of Assam are more prone to both physical and sexual violence (36.5%) than India as a whole (35.4%). (Source : G.I.O. NFHS--- III)

HIDDEN CONSTRAINTS ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT.

Constraints on women empowerment may be social, economic, political and psychological.

SOCIAL CONSTRAINTS INVOLVE:

1. Lack of gender based academic institutions causing women literacy.
2. Social taboos, superstitions, traditional customs hinder in women empowerment.
3. Weak physical structure and dependable nature of women suppress them in their empowerment.

ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS INVOLVE:

1. Hinderances in implementation of women rights for sharing in family property.
2. Ownership of family income and finance are generally in male hands.
3. Lack of Agro- Based and rural industries for income generation and employment of women.

POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS INVOLVE:

1. Harrasement and exploitation of women leaders by officials, social workers and others ,who dishearten them in their empowerment.
2. The ill motive people misguide the women leaders in their self interest and thereby weaken the women.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSTRAINTS INVOLVE:

1. Lack of knowledge about the women rights for their empowerment.
2. Shyness in women behavior inhibit their exposures for empowerment.
3. Reward, appreciation, and recognition of women are generally overlooked which discourage them in their empowerment.

SUGGESTIVE MEASURES ON GENDER EQUITY:

Gender Equity and women empowerment are the two sides of the same coin.Few measures are are suggested here to promote gender equity:

1.Gender differences in birth must be controlled.

2. Promotion of Gender Equality in Education, eliminating gender differences in access to education and educational attainment are key elements on the path to attain gender equality and reducing disempowerment of women.

3. Employment can also be an important source of empowerment for women employment, particularly for cash and in the formal sector, can empower women by providing financial independence, alternative sources of social identity, and exposure to power structures.

4. Women should have freedom and access to media. Media is an important source of information and exposure to new ways of thinking and doing things.

Radio listening, television viewing and reading newspapers or magazines are important leisure activities. Hence by providing information and exposure to the world outside media exposure has the potential to promote women empowerment.

5. Women should have free access to spaces outside home to go to the market, health care centre, movie watching and community gathering.

6. Women should have sufficient access to health care. Factors like need for permission, getting money for treatment, having to take transport, or distance to the health facility can be hurdles for both men and women. However, these hurdles are likely to have a gender component, because, being female, women have limited freedom of movement and access to income.

7. Women should have perfect access to their own earnings. They should have independence to open and operate their self-account and freedom to spend the money as per their desire.

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