

Higher Education And Women Empowerment In North East India

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Abstract

A nation or a society can make development in the truest sense only when both its male and female population is efficient and effective in making contribution in all the aspects of life. India is the second highest populated country in the world where women constitute half of the population. Thus, by developing and empowering our womenfolk, India can make progress easily in almost every sphere. North East India is one of the most beautiful and important parts of our

motherland and is better off than that of the nation as a whole in terms of gender equality. However, in some parts of this region women are relatively disempowered and possessed somewhat lower status than their male counterparts. In this regard, higher education can play a significant role in the process of women empowerment in North East India. The present paper makes an attempt to examine the role of higher education in making the women of North East India empowered in different fields of life.

Keywords: Higher Education, Women Empowerment, North East India.

Introduction

“Empowering women is key to building a future we want”-AMARTYA SEN.

The concept of empowering women or women empowerment is gaining popularity day by day. In simple words when we say ‘empowerment’ we mean the process of making an individual able to make his or her own choices and to think and to perform any work autonomously. Thus, ‘women empowerment’ is the process of making the womenfolk aware of their rights and to help them to make their own decisions and choices. It is associated with gender equality. The concept of women empowerment was introduced at the international women’s conference held in the year 1985 at Nairobi. This conference defines women empowerment as ‘redistribution of social powers and control of resources in favour of women’.

Need of Women Empowerment

A nation or a society can make development in the truest sense only when both its male and female population is efficient and effective in making contribution in all the aspects of life. India is the second highest populated country in the world where women constitute half of the population. Thus, by developing and empowering our womenfolk, India can make progress easily in almost every sphere. Women empowerment is needed in order to build gender equality and for the improvement of female sex as a whole. The process of women empowerment helps in positive thinking which is very much needed for positive social change. It can improve the leadership qualities among the womenfolk so that they can excel in different fields of life. In this respect, education more particularly higher education can play a significant role in making the women aware of their rights and abilities and can provide various opportunities for the upliftment of women in various fields.

Objective of The Study

To highlight the role of higher education in empowering the women of North East India and the main challenges of the same.

Data Collection and Methodology

This paper is purely based on secondary data which has been collected from various books, journals, magazines, websites etc.

Status Of Women In North East Region Of India-

The north east region of India (NER) is one of the most beautiful regions of the country consisting of eight states namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. Generally, the NER of India is regarded as one of the backward regions in terms of growth of per capita income but in case of gender equality it is quite better than many North Indian states and also India as a whole.

In this paper, in order to present the status of women of North East India, female sex ratio, female literacy rate and female work force participation rate have been used as indicators.

**Table 1 Showing The Female Sex Ratio of Ner
(A Comparison Between The Year of 2001 and 2011)**

S. No.	STATES	Year of 2001	Year of 2011
	ALL INDIA	933	943
1	Arunachal Pradesh	893	912
2	Assam	935	958
3	Meghalaya	972	989
4	Manipur	978	992
5	Mizoram	935	976
6	Nagaland	900	931
7	Tripura	948	960
8	Sikkim	875	890

Source: Census of India, 2011.

Thus, it has been seen that the female sex ratio of North East India has increased from the year 2001 to 2011. Five states out of the eight states of NER have shown higher female sex ratio than that of India as a whole.

Table 2 Showing The Female Literacy Rate Along With The Male Literacy Rate of NER

S. No.	States	Male	Female
	ALL INDIA	82.14%	65.46%
1	Arunachal Pradesh	72.55%	57.70%
2	Assam	77.85%	66.27%
3	Meghalaya	75.95%	72.89%
4	Manipur	83.58%	70.26%
5	Mizoram	93.35%	89.27%
6	Nagaland	82.75%	76.11%
7	Tripura	91.53%	82.73%
8	Sikkim	86.55%	75.61%

Source: Census of India, 2011.

From the above table it has been seen that though the female literacy rate is lower than that of male literacy rate in the NER States, but it has to be noted that 7 out of 8 NER states have higher female literacy rate than that of India as a whole. Only the state of Arunachal Pradesh have lower female literacy rate than the national level.

**Table 3 Showing The Female Work Participation Rate of
North East Region of India
(A Comparison Between The Year of 2001 and 2011)**

S. No.	STATES	Year of 2001	Year of 2011
	ALL INDIA	25.6 %	25.5 %
1	Arunachal Pradesh	36.5 %	35.4 %
2	Assam	20.7 %	22.5 %
3	Meghalaya	35.1 %	32.7 %
4	Manipur	39.0 %	38.6 %
5	Mizoram	47.5 %	36.2 %
6	Nagaland	38.1 %	44.7 %
7	Tripura	21.1 %	23.6 %
8	Sikkim	38.6 %	39.6 %

Source: Census of India, 2011.

From table 3 we have seen that the rate of female work participation has increased in 4 of the 8 NER states from the year 2001 to 2011. The state of Assam and Tripura are found to be below the national level of female work participation, however the other six states of NER are above the national level.

Higher Education and Women Empowerment

In India, higher education refers to the post secondary education which is provided to the students through colleges and universities. Higher education helps individuals to

become self-dependent and provides various employment opportunities thereby making them economically productive and socially desirable member. Higher education can be regarded as one of the most important means of empowering women with the asset of knowledge, skills and self-esteem. It can reduce dependency among the women by providing with various career opportunities. Our government has also encouraged higher education for women empowerment through various schemes like Post Graduate Scholarship for single girl child, PRAGATI- Scholarship for girls for technical education, SHAKSHAM- scheme for providing guidance for women safety in campuses, women scientist programme in Department of Science and Technology and Department of Biotech (DBT). According to the data of AISHE, there has been an overall increase of female enrollment in higher education in the north eastern states of India from 2015-16 to 2019-20. However, female enrollment in professional and technical course is lower in comparison to the academic course. Also we have seen that though the female literacy rate is better in North East India than the other states but it is lower in comparison to the male literacy rate.

Colleges and universities are the main centres of higher education and they can support women empowerment in the following ways-

1. By putting greater emphasis on modern technology based education for the girls.

2. Modifying the higher education curriculum and introducing skill oriented education and new professional course for the girls.
3. By offering add-on courses and short term courses along with the regular degree course so that the girls can get access to vocational, technical and professional studies.
4. Proper career guidance and counseling should be provided to the girl students so that they can properly choose their subjects and also their vocations.
5. Motivational programs should be organized in order to motivate and inspire the girls to move forward in their careers and also to dream high.
6. Encouragement should be provided to the meritorious female students by offering scholarships.
7. Higher educational institutions should establish their relationship with the local industries.
8. Communication skills of the students should be developed in the higher educational institutions. Along with the regional language, English language should be given due importance since it is the international language and it is used in many job interviews.

Common Challenges of Higher Education in Empowering Women

1. **Poor economic condition of the parents-** Female students belonging to the family of low socio-economic status cannot fulfill their higher educational needs.

2. **Rapid population growth-** Due to the rapid population growth there has been increased in the demand of higher educational institutions. The present number of institutions has become inadequate to fulfill the demand.
3. **Lack of motivation-** It has been observed that female students of rural areas are generally not motivated enough for pursuing higher studies. There is absence of ambitions among them.
4. **No scope for training in competitive exams-** There is lack of training for various competitive exams like NET, SLET, UPSC, other state public service commission, banking, staff selection etc. in the higher educational institutions.
5. **Social barriers-** Sometimes particularly in the rural areas conservative minds of the family members stand as a barrier for the girls in pursuing their higher studies. Those parents do not allow their daughters to leave their homes for higher studies.
6. **Lack of parent's education-** It has been seen that if the parents are not educated then they become incapable to understand the value of women education at the higher level.
7. **Early marriage-** Generally the girls of rural areas get married quite early after they passed out their HSLC and higher secondary exams neglecting their higher studies.
8. **Negligence of English language at undergraduate level-** It is generally seen that in the college level education, regional languages are used as medium of instruction more particularly in the rural colleges. Used of

regional language is appreciable but total negligence of English language should not exist. Due to this reason only many of our students failed in many competitive exams of national levels.

Conclusion

In conclusion we can say that women empowerment is required not only for the self development of the females but also for the development of one's family, society and nation as a whole. Higher education greatly helps in the total process of women empowerment. The status of women in North East India is quite satisfactory when we compare with the status of women of India as a whole, but we have also noticed that the female sex ratio, female literacy rate and work participation rate are low when we compare them with their male counterpart. Also in some NER states these rates are low in comparison to all India level. There also exist some common challenges while providing higher education for women empowerment in this region. Thus, it should be the joint responsibility of the public and the government for empowering the women so that they can be aware of their potentialities. Mass motivation is required in this regard. Higher educational institutions should put emphasis on providing vocational, technical and professional courses along with the regular degree courses for the girls. They should prepare the students for facing various competitive examinations both at the state and national levels and should also be encouraged for self employment.

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