



A Study on Women Empowerment And Its Challenges In Assam

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Abstract

Women empowerment is a crucial topic in the present context and an important variable for social change. The present paper attempts to analyze the status of women's empowerment based on various indicators based on some data from secondary sources. The study explains that the women of India are less empowered than their male counterparts and they enjoy lower status than men despite numerous efforts undertaken by the government. The paper finds that there is a huge gender gap prevailed in access to education, employment, and household decisions. Household decision-making power and freedom of movement are considerably varied with their age, educational attainment, and employment status. Fewer women have their say in the important household decision which is a major cause of women's backwardness. Women's less control over their property is also observed in the study which is a major concern for women empowerment. Rural women are more prone to domestic violence because rural women are comparatively less educated and unaware of their domestic rights. The study observes that the major cons of women empowerment in India and Assam are lack of quality education lack of employment opportunities for women, social barriers, and negative attitude of society towards women empowerment.

Keywords: *women empowerment, household decision, domestic violence, the gender gap.*

Introduction:

Women empowerment is the most important element that contributes to critical issues of gender and development. While discussing the status of women in society one has to confront the issues coming in the way of women in their march towards de-facto equality. One has to think why despite progress in education, economic and social consciousness, there is gender discrimination and gender injustice. It is important to analyze the situation from a women's perspective and assess the status of women with some definite parameters. In a country like India with a diversity of languages, customs and cultures, and hierarchy based on caste and classes and variety of religions and sectors it is very difficult to draw a simplified, common conclusion on the parameters of women empowerment. The dignity and status of a society can be measured from the facilities enjoyed by women in that society. The empowerment of women is found to be a significant key for the solution to many social problems. The empowerment of

women is best described by the maxim stated by the first prime minister of India Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, "To awaken the people, it is women who must be awakened; once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves and nation moves."

Review of Literature:

Venkata Ravi and Venkatraman (2005) focused on the effects of SHG on women's participation and exercising control over household decision-making.

Subrahmanyam, H (2011) makes a comparative study on existing women education in India with the past scenario. The author highlighted that there is considerable progress in the overall enrolment of girl students in schools from primary level to secondary level. He states that the term empowers means to give lawful power or authority to act in a way they deem to be essential.

Doepke M.T (2011) observes that female empowerment promotes economic development. This study analyses and suggests that finance concentrated in the hands of mothers gives more benefits to children. This study developed a series of non-cooperative family bargaining models to understand what kind of frictions can give rise to the observed empirical relationship.

Dufo E. (2011) study observes that the interrelationships of Empowerment and Development are probably too weak to be self-sustaining and that continuous policy commitment to equality for its own sake may be needed to bring about equality between men and women.

Sarmah, Nath, G (2012) surveyed in Lakhimpur District of Assam wherein 200 SHGs members were discussed and used Focused Group Discussion tool to explore various socio-economic and institutional difficulties related to women empowerment of different social groups under SHGs and suggested some practical measures to overcome these hurdles.

Puhazendhi (1999) explored the functioning of SHGs in terms of sustainability, empowerment of women, the economic impact on the members' and future potentialities related to sustainable development. The study revealed that SHGs in Tamil Nadu are performing well in much way that has brought about a positive change in the socio-economic conditions of the members of the SHGs.

Satish (2001) finds that necessary care should be taken to ensure homogeneity of socio and economic status of the members while forming SHGs and at the time of formation of SHGs a systematic measure is to be followed for smooth functioning of the groups in the future. The study emphasized the spread of SHG experiments throughout rural India instead of the regional concentration of SHGs.

Objectives:

To study the challenges in respect of women empowerment in Assam the following objectives are defined:

- ❖ To highlight the importance of women empowerment in India
- ❖ To study the challenges faced by the women.
- ❖ To explore the government schemes implemented for women empowerment.
- ❖ To suggest some measures to solve the problem for the development of women.

Methodology:

Considering the nature of the topic, this paper is based on both descriptive and analytical methods. In this paper, an attempt has been made to analyze the empowerment in India the data acquired and used in it is purely based on secondary sources according to the need of the study.

Women empowerment:

In simple words, it is the creation of an environment where women can make independent decisions on their capabilities as equal as men in society.

Women are supposed to be treated as equals with men as they contribute equally in household activities with that of men. This can only happen if there is a considerable change in the mindsets of the members of the towards empowerment of women.

Women Empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political, and legal awareness of the women, to ensure equal rights to women, and to make them confident enough to claim their rights, such as:

- (1) To live freely their lives with a sense of self-worth, respect, and dignity;
- (2) To gain control of their lives, in all important aspects of day to day life;
- (3) To play a substantial role in making choices and decisions;
- (4) Have equal rights to access to social, religious, and public activities like their male counterparts.
- (5) Enjoy equal social status in the society;
- (6) Have equal rights for social and economic justice;
- (7) Determine financial and economic choices;
- (8) Get the equal opportunity for education;
- (9) Get equal employment opportunity without any gender bias;
- (10) Get access to a safe and congenial working atmosphere;
- (11) Women have the right to get their voices heard etc.

Endeavors are being made to change the existing situation by different measures undertaken by women and society. It is with this changed scenario, we are at least in a position to bring women's issues to the central stage. After independence, the Indian democracy showed its commitment to the empowerment of marginalized sections of the society, especially Dalits and women. In an emerging middle class, with its enormous strength as well as limitations, women's issues become significant. In this contemporary world, women need to gain the same amount of power that men have. In India, women are still facing different obstacles in male-dominated countries. With the power of education and employment, there emerged a new woman aspiring for the dignity of equality and freedom of spirit. Here

assertion for gender justice and equal rights gave new tensions. By the end of the 20th century, the ideals of a socialistic society have been overpowered by a new political and social order. We are destined to adopt a free-market economy and be a part of globalization. Newmarket forces and their tools of technology and management are determining the contours of national development, including women's issues. The political, administrative, and ideological changes have raised some substantial questions for the deprived sections and women. The need to look for an answer has become more important because of the spurt of violent conflict around regional, religious, caste, and community identities. With the gradual withdrawal of the state from the vital areas of education, health, environment, and social welfare program, the suffering of the deprived sections has deepened. Gender justice has been diverted visibility of some women in the corridors of power does not necessarily enhance the status of the mass of women.

There can be several methods to study the development of a society. The most important one is the assessment of the quality of women's life. The parameters like women's education, women and employment, their position in family and society, and women's participation in decision-making institutions can provide not only a clear picture of women's status but also the level of development of society. Women's action group plays a significant role in the empowerment of women collectively these action groups can question the patriarchal system, analyze the women's movement, build solidarity among women and provide a vision of the future.

Discussion:

Despite different significant measures that have been adopted by the government of India still, we can observe the pathetic scenario of women empowerment even after 77 years of independence. We may be proud of women in India occupying the highest offices of dignity like President, Prime Minister, Lok-Sabha Speaker, leader of the opposition, Chief Minister or women occupying highest positions in the corporate sector but the fact remains that we still witness dowry deaths, domestic, violence, and exploitation of women.

Female feticide is not an uncommon phenomenon. Although the male-female ratio in India has been improved as per the latest data still there is a scope to improve it. It is 940 women per 1000 males for India in some states it is as much lower as 877. Despite reservation being granted to women in Panchayat's election after 73rd and 74th constitution amendment, in many Panchayats the male chauvinism does not allow them to function independently.

Women are engaged in various works in our society. Women run a household and look after children and work on farms and factories to support their family in a significant manner but their contribution is counted up to the mark. They perform economic and non-economic activities within a family but mostly their working hands remain invisible. If a woman remains at home and is not engaged in any regular salaried job, it is considered that they do not have their monetary contribution in their households.

It is often said that women's work in the private sphere cannot be accepted as a contribution to the national economy as it is not paid. It is also said that they are not capable of hard physical labour and for this reason, women workers are poorly paid in agriculture and factories, in comparison to their male workers and we see disparity in wages.

The issue of women's work is very complex and it is difficult to compute accurate data of women's work participation. It shows that the statistical invisibility of women is a reality mirroring a deep-rooted social bias against women. Women's contribution to the economy remains hidden, especially in agriculture and the unorganized area. This happens because there are two types of work for which payment is made and work for which payment is not made. Women usually do unpaid work, engaged in activities inside and outside the home and in agriculture for which payment is not made. Consequently, their work is pushed outside the area of the definition of work.

Challenges

As far as women empowerment in India and in Assam numerous challenges are being faced in this respect, some major challenges are discussed as under:

(1) Education: - As far as education is concerned, there is a huge gap between women and men in rural India which is a major hurdle in the empowerment of women. While 82.14% of adult men are educated, only 65.46% of adult women are known to be literate in India. The situation of illiterate women in India is considerably a miserable one as they have to depend on the male members of their family for their needs that have lowered their status in their society. Bridging this gap and educating women about their status enjoyed by the women at the international level is an important step that will largely contribute to the development of the existing situation of intolerance, negligence, and exploitation of women.

(2) Poverty in India: - About a third of the country's population lives on less than 1.25USD per day. The GINI index keeps increasing gradually over the years, indicating that the uneven distribution of wealth in the country is increasing, currently advancing a little close to 33.9.

Poverty is considered the greatest threat to peace in the world, and eradication of poverty should be a national goal as important as the eradication of illiteracy. Due to grinding poverty, women are found to be exploited in domestic help and women having meager and irregular income are prone to the domination of male members of the family. In addition to this, it is evident that sex slaves are directly associated with the elements of poverty which is a curse for society.

If poverty is lowered in a society then their girl child will have the opportunity to chase their ambition without being victimized by sexual exploitation, a domestic violation.

(3) Health & Safety: - The health and safety concerns of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a country and are an important factor in gauging the empowerment of women in a country. However,

there are major causes of concern regarding where maternal healthcare of rural women in India. UNICEF report 2009 came up with shocking figures on the status of new mothers in India. The maternal mortality report of India stands at 301 per 1000, with as many as 78,000 women in India dying of childbirth complications in that year. Today, due to the explosion of population of the country, that number is about to get increased considerably. The main causes of maternal mortality are:-Hemorrhage: 30%, Anaemia: 19%, Sepsis: 16%, Obstructed Labour: 10%, Abortion: 8%, Toxaemia: 8%.

Although numerous programs have been set by the Government of India and several organizations in the country, there is still a substantial gap prevalent in this issue

(4) Professional Inequality: Professional inequality is practiced in employment and promotions. Women face countless handicaps in male customized and dominated environments in Government Offices and Private enterprises.

(5) Morality and Inequality: Due to gender bias in health and nutrition, there is an unusually high mortality rate in women reducing their population further especially in South East Asia and Africa.

(6) Household Inequality: Household relations show gender bias in infinitesimally small but significant manners all across the globe, more so, in India e.g. sharing the responsibility of household chores, childcare, and menial works of so-called distribution of work.

Grinding Poverty and age-old illiteracy of women worsened these complications and remedies to problems that women are far-reaching without proper measures. The empowerment of women is closely associated with a guarantee of their health and safety.

(7) Source of livelihood: - Total female work participation, 90% women are in the unorganized sector. Out of this, 80% are in agriculture area and rest 20% are in the field of construction, factories and household labour.

A substantial number of women are engaged in the unorganized sector for long hours in poorly managed working conditions with meager wages and without any safety tool of redressal of their grievances and legal protection against exploitation. Women are found to be more sincere and productive in their assigned duties as compared to men and contribute significantly to nation-building. Women from rural and tribal areas migrate to urban areas and are reported to be prone to insecure and unorganized sectors like construction labourers, stone-cutting, food processing, selling vegetables/ fruits, etc. Consequently, women are seen increasingly in house-based work, related to the production of food or items for household use and even industrial use. They engage in economic activities like roll bidis, roti preparation, and selling and papads, grind masalas, prepare pickles and food packets, and make bindis and small items used by women. They also are engaged in the garment industry, their nimble fingers busy with cutting stitching lace making, and embroidery work.

Government Schemes undertook for women empowerment:

The government program for women's development began as early as 1954 in India but the actual participation began only in 1974. At present, the Government of India has over 34 schemes for women operated by different departments and ministries. Some of these are as follows;

1. Rastria Mahila Kosh (RMK) 1992-1993
2. Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY) October, 1993.
3. Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) 1995.
4. Women Entrepreneur Development programme was taken up to give top priority in 1997-98 by the government of India.
5. Mahila Samakhya is being implemented in about 9000 villages.
6. Swayasjdha.
7. Swa Shakti Group.
8. Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women(STEP).
9. Swalamban.
10. Crèches/ Daycare center for the children of working and ailing mothers.
11. Hostels for working women.
12. Swadhar.
13. National Mission for Empowerment of Women.
14. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) (1975),
15. Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescence Girls (RGSEAG) (2010).
16. The Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme for Children of Working Mothers.
17. Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) (2009-2010).
18. Dhanalakahmi (2008).
19. Short Stay Homes.
20. Ujjawala (2007).
21. Scheme for Gender Budgeting (XI Plan).
22. Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP).
23. Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM).
24. Prime Minister's RojgarYojana (PMRY).
25. Women's Development Corporation Scheme (WDCS).
26. Working Women's Forum.
27. Indira Mahila Kendra.
28. MahilaSamitiYojana.
29. Khadi and Village Industries Commission.
30. Indira PriyadarahiniYojana.
31. SBI's SreeShaki Scheme.
32. SIDBI's MahilaUdyamNidhiMahilaVikasNidhi.

33. NGO's Credit Schemes.

34. National Banks for Agriculture and Rural Development's Schemes

The efforts of the government and its different agencies are ably supplemented by non-governmental organizations that are playing an important role in women's empowerment. Despite the combined efforts of governments and NGOs, there is still a considerable gap prevailing in the elements of women's empowerment. Although there is a substantial change is observed in respect of women empowerment still miles to go to reach up to the mark.

Finding of the study:

- (1) Globalization, liberalization, and socio-economic forces have given some respite to a large proportion of the population. However, there are still a considerable number of rural areas of Assam where women's empowerment is still not considered to be important.
- (2) There are several government programmes and NGOs in the countries, there is still a wide gap that exists between those under protection and those not.
- (3) Poverty and illiteracy add to these complications, the Empowerment of women being ensured with a guarantee of their health and safety.
- (4) Empowerment of women could only be achieved if their economic and social status is improved. This could be possible only by adopting definite socio and economic policies with a view of the total development of women and to make them realize that they have the potential to be strong human beings.
- (5) To create a sustainable world, we must empower the women as that men

Suggestion for women empowerment:

(1) **Development of Education:** Education development is the backbone of our women's empowerment. The government provides some special facilities for women, especially for the girl child. Priority should be given to the education of women which is the grass root problem Nehru also said about the importance of women's education that 'education of boy is the education of one person, but the education of a girl is the education of the whole family'.

(2) **Health awareness:** The government of India announces various schemes for health, especially for women. So happy family life mostly depends on the good health of the women.

(3) **Political Participation:** The government provides more opportunities for participation of women in politics or in the administrative system by providing reservations up to 33 percent

(4) **Employment of women Association:** Different women Association at the state level, national level, and international level has been playing an active role in securing women. So, the

government of India also must encourage and provide necessary assistance to the women associations for empowering them.

(5) Expansion of Cottage Industry: The government must give more importance to the expansion of various kinds of small and cottage industries in rural areas to provide more employment opportunities to women. So that, they can earn more economy for better self-development.

(6) Expansion of Mahilya Bank Branch: The Government of India newly announced to open Mahila Bank for women especially in few cities in India and expanding their branches in various cities; towns and village areas then the women get more benefit for their empowerment.

(7) Special Women Security Force: The government must give importance to the establishment of a special Women Security Force by a constitutional provision in the country with special power to take immediate and necessary actions against the persons involved in any kind of violent activities against the women in the society.

(8) Awareness programmes need to be organized for creating awareness among women especially those belonging to weaker sections about their rights.

CONCLUSION

In the concluding remark, it is drawn that it is a matter of serious concern that if women of a country like India are not empowered the whole country shall have to suffer in respect of the important indicators of Human Development. As half of the total population in the country consists of women so without empowering their nation cannot progress. It is difficult to understand how slow-moving the cultural exchange of the world is when we find out that there are several places across the country where some undesirable customs are practiced that are detrimental to women's empowerment and social change.

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