Status of Women Empowerment in Assam

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ABSTRACT
Empowerment involves an element of control and choice in power structures that exist in household communities, nations and worldwide. Women empowerment involves their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home and the ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order nationally and internationally. Employment can be a source of empowerment for women as it provides financial independence and thereby identity in the society and power structure in the family. This study reveals the employment of women in Assam with reference to other states of India as well as various districts of Assam. Demographic study gives us data about sex ratio too. Sex ratio indicates status of women in a society. Education of women is the most powerful tool to get a respectful position in a society. From this study it is noticed that female literacy rate is lesser than male literacy rate. The literacy rate of women also varies in different districts of Assam. Although initiatives are undertaken for development of education, employment status of women there is a need to create awareness to achieve the desired goal of empowerment in the state.

Key Words: Women empowerment, Employment, Demography, Education, Assam.

INTRODUCTION
The population of Assam is the highest amongst all states of North East region. According to the census of 2011, it is 31,169,272 out of which almost 50 per cent is female population. Therefore development of women folk is of utmost important for development of the state. Women empowerment is a term which is widely used irrespective of strata of society. The World Bank (2002) defined empowerment as the “expansion of the assets and capabilities of individuals to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives. Alsop and Heinsohn’s (2005) define empowerment as person’s capacity to make effective choices; that is, as the capacity to transform choices into desired actions and outcomes. Empowerment is multi-dimensional. Women’s empowerment involves their right to have power to control their own lives both within and outside home and their ability to influence the direction of social changes to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally. Women empowerment needs to occur across women’s own lives, in their homes and communities, society and its structures, national and international boundaries.

The term women empowerment was introduced in 1985 at the third international Women’s conference at Nairobi. Women empowerment is related to gain control over their own lives and thereby enhance their position in power structure of the society. To gain control over their lives it is necessary to develop educational opportunities, employment facilities as well as reduction in gender gap. The National Commission for women was set up by an act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights of women. Education and employment are two important tools to change economic and social status of female and women empowerment in near future as well as over a longer period of time. Sex ratio is also another important indicator of women empowerment in society.

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The objective of this research paper was to study women empowerment on the basis of the sex ratio as a demographic factor; education status based on female literacy rate, gross enrolment ratio, school dropout rates and employment status based on employment of female workers in various sectors, female workforce participation rate, average daily wage rate.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The secondary data were used for the purpose of the study. Data were mainly collected from the census reports of the Government, Economic Survey of Assam 2013-2014. Ranking method was used to find out the status of different variables related to empowerment of women of Assam in comparison to other states of India over the years. Rank was assigned from highest to lowest performing states/districts for positive indicators and vice versa.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Sex ratio**

The status of women in a particular society can be studied from the demographic factors such as sex ratio, infant mortality rate etc. It was noticed that Assam’s position in sex ratio (number of females per 1000 males) in 2001 was 17th (935) which has been changed to 15th (954) in 2011 which is a positive sign for a nation. In 2001 and 2011, Kerala was the state with highest sex ratio i.e., 1058 and 1084, respectively. The poorest sex ratio was found in Daman and Diu (710 and 618) during 2001 and 2011, respectively.

The ranking of districts of Assam by sex ratio in 2001 and 2011 showed that Baksa (974) and Morigaon (974) districts were in top most positions, respectively. Sex ratio was found lowest in Kamrup Metro (853 in 2001 and 922 in 2011) followed by Dima Hasao in 2001 with 884 and Darrang district in 2011 with 923. It has been observed that over the decades sex ratio in Assam was fluctuating but was found highest in 2011. Sex ratio has shown an improvement of about 2 per cent from 2001 to 2011. It was also noticed that out of 27 districts of Assam, 14 districts showed higher sex ratio during 2011 census while in 13 districts sex ratio was lower than the average sex ratio of the state. (Fig 1.)

**Educational status**

The education is the most powerful tool to bring a change in the status and to get a powerful status in the society for female. It reduces inequalities and gender gap in the family as well as society.

**Literacy over years from 1951 to 2011**

The growth of literacy in Assam has shown an increasing trend over the years from 1951 to 2011. Data (Table 5) showed a clear picture of the literacy rate of female over the years which was promising one, but female literacy rate was always lesser than male literacy rate.

**Table 5:** literacy over the years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>18.53</td>
<td>28.01</td>
<td>7.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>32.95</td>
<td>44.28</td>
<td>18.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>33.94</td>
<td>43.72</td>
<td>22.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>52.89</td>
<td>61.87</td>
<td>43.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>63.25</td>
<td>71.28</td>
<td>54.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>73.18</td>
<td>78.81</td>
<td>67.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ranking of districts in literacy rate in 2011

From table 6 it was evident that Kamrup (Metro 88.7), Jorhat (83.4), Sivasagar (81.4), Nalbari (79.9), Cachar (80.4), Karimganj (79.7) were the districts with high literacy both in male and female. Chirang (64.7), Darrang 64.5, Dhubri (59.4) were seen in the lowest side but female literacy rate was lesser than male literacy rate. In Kamrup (metro) in 2011 female literacy rate was 85.8 whereas for male it was 91.3 and in Jorhat, 78.2 for female and 88.4 for male.

Gross Enrolment Ratio

Gross enrolment ratio of children in class I to VIII of all the states of India was studied. It was seen that total enrolment was higher in Manipur (151.6), Arunachal Pradesh (146.3), Meghalaya (138.5) but lower in Assam (83.5). Assam was at 27th position. Girls’ enrolment ratio is always seen to be less than boys’ except in Meghalaya.

Drop Out Rates

Dropout rate was observed to be very high in Assam than many other states of India which is an alarming indicator as lower literacy impacts on women’s awareness levels regarding health, hygiene, technological developments thereby restricting their possibilities to improve their access to the available services for their well being.

Employment

The population in the age group of 15-59 is considered to be active for discharging different types of activities. According to NSSO survey conducted during July 2009 to June 2010 it was evident that self employment was more in rural areas of Assam than other parts of the country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Assam Rural</th>
<th>Assam Urban</th>
<th>Assam Rural + Urban</th>
<th>India Rural</th>
<th>India Urban</th>
<th>India Rural + Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self Employed</td>
<td>705</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>685</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Wage/ Salaried Employees</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual Labour</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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CONCLUSION

Empowerment needs to occur across many domains i.e., women’s own lives, in their homes and communities, in the society, in national and international environment. Empowerment must occur along economic, socio cultural, interpersonal, political, legal dimensions. Women face multiple barriers in terms of gender biasness, low wages, unequal access to education and other productive inputs etc. Moreover women need to face some more structural barriers due to economic development and globalization. The lower rate of Women’s participation in organized sector is an alarming factor in economic empowerment. The decline in women’s workforce participation rate is a matter for concern and has implications for overall economic empowerment. Women’s participation in income generating activities will lead to women’s empowerment as by having access to resources a woman can improve her bargaining position, increase in self esteem or self worth. Education is important to get employment in organized sector, jobs in higher prestige occupational categories and in positions of authority in any employment sector. Therefore it is necessary to increase decent work and productive employment with more opportunities for women in different sectors.

REFERENCES


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