

Higher education of women in Assam

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Abstract

Women, who are considered as backbone of a nation or a society, essentially should expose to the endless opportunities provided by Higher education. In this present era of growing crime and violence against women, education of women becomes the need of the hour. But, unlike male education, women education is always subjected to promulgation because of the presence of various deterrents. Although, in the post- independence period, Higher education of women in Assam has shown a developing trend. The purpose of this paper is to study the evolution of Higher education of women in Assam in the post- independence period and to analyze the present status of Higher education of women in general. In this regard, the researcher has opted for qualitative technique of study and has undertaken a content analysis based on secondary sources of information. After a detailed study, the researcher was able to show different development taking place in the field of Higher education of women in the State of Assam and thereby analyzed the present status of Higher education of women in comparison with the male population of the country.

Keywords: women, higher education, Assam, present status

1. Introduction

It is said that if we educate a man, we educate a man only, but if we educate a woman, we educate the whole family. This highlights the importance of women education. Women can be considered as backbone of a nation or a society, as the major responsibility of upbringing the posterity of society lies in their hands. Women have different major roles to perform in the course of their life as good daughters, good wives, good mothers as well as good citizens of a free democracy. Hence, it is necessary to give women a good quality education, in a free environment, which can make them aware of their rights and duties, understand the basic concepts of health, nutrition, family planning as well as can make the able to contribute in the process of nation building in the same way as men do. For this, girls should be exposed to the Higher education sector and its infinite opportunities. Higher education comprises of Under- Graduate Courses, Post- Graduate Courses as well as research courses.

Although, it is quite disheartening that till now, after near about seven (7) decades of independence, considerable disparity is found between male and female literacy rate in India. In India, from the ancient time itself, most women were given a status below than man. Therefore education of women is also lagging behind, when compared with their male counterparts. In Assam, it is the Britishers, who initiated female education in Assamese society. After the independence, Constitution of India also guarantees equal Rights of both the sexes on all matters including education. To implement this, various initiatives and schemes have also been operationalised under different Five- Year Plans, yet, the disparity between the male and female in Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) as well as in literacy rate, still exists. The purpose of this paper is to give an overview of the different developments that have been taking place in the field of

Higher education of women, since the independence of India.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Objectives of the Study

1. To study the evolution of Higher education of women in Assam in the post- independence period.
2. To analyse the present status of Higher education of women in general.

2.2 Method of the study

The researcher in this study has conducted a content analysis based on various secondary sources of information. The secondary sources include books on Women Education, different articles of research journals etc. that the researcher went through for developing insight and understanding on the topic under study.

2.3 Delimitations of the Study

The study is delimited to the development of women education in Higher levels of education only.

3. Results and Discussion

Prior to British rule in pre- independence period, formal education for girls in Assam was practically absent. It was only under British rule, female education was first started in Assam. Another important force in this regard is the Christian missionaries. They started schools as formal educational institutions for girls in Assam.

After the independence, the Indian government had given maximum importance on making Primary education universal and compulsory for attaining hundred percent (100%) literacy within the period of ten (10) years by launching a handsome number of schemes for its promotion. The improvement brought to female education at Primary stage, naturally

increase the number of female students in Secondary education in the post-independence era. Different Governmental efforts were made to strengthen the positions of women in Secondary stage also.

3.1 Higher Education Level

Coming to the Higher education level, after the independence, Higher education of girls in Assam has been found to make spectacular progress. Establishment of Gauhati University in 1948, just after the independence had opened up a new chapter for Higher education of the girls. Similarly, Dibrugarh University established in 1965 had stimulated the girls of upper Assam to take up Higher education at an increasing rate. In 1963, Assam Government had set up the Assam State Council for Women's Education, which had made valuable suggestions for improvement of women education at the Higher education level also. Such as, offering Post-Graduate & foreign scholarship for girls, establishment of at least one (1) college in each district with provision for both Science & Arts, appointment of lady Joint-Director at Head – Quarter at all levels including Higher education. Accordingly, the State Government had taken steps for implementation of these recommendations. In 1994, two Central University established in Tezpur & Silchar has been instrumental in maintaining regional balance regarding Higher education in the State. Consequently, it had also favourably influence the women Higher education in the State.

Again, after establishment of University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1956, on recommendation of Sargent Committee Report of 1944, different scholarship and fellowship schemes were launched exclusively for girls. It includes Post- Graduate Indira Gandhi Scholarship for Single Girl Child, Swami Vivekananda Single Girl Child Scholarship for Ph.D. scholars, launched from the academic sessions 2005- 06 and 2014- 16 respectively. For Post- Doctoral women scholars also, UGC launched Post- Doctoral Fellowship to Women Candidates in accordance with Eleventh (XI) Plan Guidelines, in 2010. Apart from it, for improving the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher education sector, a scholarship scheme namely 'Ishan Uday' was launched by UGC specially for the North- Eastern Region of the country from the academic year 2014- 15 for the Under-Graduate level. Thus, UGC is pouring a huge amount of finance for encouraging the girls to participate in Higher education sector.

Another boon to the field of women education is the establishment of Women's Studies Centres in different central and state universities in accordance with the XI Plan Guidelines. Accordingly, in Assam, Chandraprabha Saikiani Centre for Women's Studies was established in Tezpur Central University in 2009, Department of Women's Studies under Gauhati University was established in 2010, Assam Women's University was established in Jorhat, in 2013. In 2013, Rahtriya Uchchaatar Shiksha Abhiyan was launched by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, which again focuses on inclusion of women candidates in Higher education as per the XII Plan Guidelines for improving the equity in Higher education sector.

3.2 Present Status

Thus, all these initiatives help a large number of girls to get

them enrolled, not only in the General Courses of university education, but also in the professional courses of Medical Science, Engineering & Information and Technological Sectors. Although, in the rural and backward areas, due to various factors like gender stereotyping, poverty, societal prejudices, a considerable number of girls still not come under the ambit of literacy, let alone their Higher education. This resulted in the disparity not only in the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of male and female population in all India level, but also in the literacy rate. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of male population is 21.6% as against 18.9% of female population at the all India level (AISHE, 2011- 12). The literacy rate of India for the women is only 65.46% against 82.14% of men (Census, 2011). While in Assam, female literacy rate was 67.3% as against 78.8% male literacy rate (Census, 2011). These statistics show that education of female at different levels is still lagging behind when compared with the male population.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, it can be said that there is neither severe paucity of finance invested in Higher education sector of our country nor lack of initiatives taken to promote Higher education of girls. The rate of disparity of male and female participation in Higher education can be attributed to various sociological, psychological and economic factors. To remove these hurdles, focus need to be given on the core issues concerning women education in a particular locality. Above all, success of women education also demands active co-operation of community people with the Government authorities. Then only Government initiatives can be made practically worthwhile in enrolling and sustaining female population in different levels of education, including Higher education.

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