

Challenges to Higher Education in Empowering Rural Women of North-East with Special Reference to Assam

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Abstract

For the development of any country education is very crucial. Education, in general, and higher education, in particular, plays a key role in the empowerment of women, one of the most important aspects for the development of a Nation. Higher Education means the education beyond the level of Secondary education. It is often assumed that education imparted by the colleges or universities is higher education. Women empowerment can be strengthened through higher education. Higher educated women play a significant role in building the nation, human capital and the overall socio-cultural, economic development of a country to make it sustainable. It helps in understanding societal norms; gives individuals self reliance and discourages gender discrimination. The current study highlights the major obstacles faced by rural women in procuring higher education, specially in Assam as well as provides some remedial measures in solving the problems for the better upliftment of the women in rural Assam. The main aim of the study is to understand the challenges for Higher Education in Empowering Rural women of Assam.

Keyword :

Women empowerment, Higher education, Gender discrimination, Socio-culture

Introduction

Education plays a catalytic role in a country's socio-economic development and is one of the principal means available for a deeper and harmonious form of human development reducing poverty, and exclusion. Higher Education, which is a training ground for a professional, research-based, career-oriented future, must be respected as a potential instrument for bringing about social transformation and ensuring the success of democracy. Empowerment actually is a process that addresses all sources and structures of power. Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills, and self confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. An important means of women's empowerment is economic independence. The UNESCO's World Conference on Higher Education (1998) and the World Education Forum (2000) made a commitment to the attainment of many goals for women's education and empowerment. Education is the tool that can help break the pattern of gender discrimination and bring drastic changes for women in developing countries as well as underdeveloped ones. Educated women are essential to end gender bias and gender discrimination in all aspects of life. Higher education can open up better paying jobs for women in a country like India. The longer the girl is able to stay in the field of higher education, the greater her chances to pursue a worthwhile employment opportunity. Higher educated girls can play proactive roles for women empowerment which is the challenge for 21st century.

Significance of the study :

Education is an area that can shape the future of not just a state or a nation but of the entire human race. Higher education is considered as it starts after the higher secondary (10+2) level of education, when it is expected that students would develop critical thinking and understanding of processes and phenomena. It has to play a significant part in making productive people as well as strong nation. Higher education is a definite imperative for a country's progress. As mentioned by Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, the knowledge society's development is a pre-requisite of developed India and building a knowledge society we need a very good higher education system.

Empowerment is the term widely used in the context of "development", particularly in the development of women. It is the process of building capacities, creating an atmosphere which enables people to fully utilize their creative potential in pursuance of quality of life. It implies a state of mind and attitude of a person. An empowered woman has a positive self-image and has greater ability to overcome restrictions imposed on her by customs, beliefs and practices. With self-empower women have become brave and proud and produced a great impact on society, putting an end superstitions and irreverent traditions, and taken the initiative of social and cultural change.

Higher Education is one of the greatest forces for change in women's lives. It will raise not only her own status but the status of the whole family. According to Jawaharlal Nehru "Education of boys is education of one person, but the education of a girl is the education of entire family". Similarly, the UNESO slogan-"Educated a men and you educated an individual, educated a women and you educate a family". Women constitute nearly half of the total population. They play a vital role in improving the quality of life individuals and also of a society. So, it is necessary that for all sorts of socio-economic development, women education consideration should occupy priority.

Objectives:

The present paper has been undertaken with the following objectives:

- a. Find out the major obstacles of rural women in higher education of Assam
and
- b. To give some measures for solving these problems for the better upliftment of the rural women of Assam.

Methodology:

The study is purely descriptive. No complicated models and tools were used. The study is complied with the help of secondary data have been collected from various books, journals and other relevant literature.

Major findings and discussion:

The Indian constitution provides equal rights and opportunities for men women, and also some special provisions for their development and upliftment of their socio-economic and political status. In spite of the facilities as enshrined in the Indian constitution and the various steps taken by the governments, the rate of women education in the rural areas of Assam is very poor. According to the census report 2001, Assam ranked 25th in literacy with 71.28% where female literacy was 54.61%. So in case of illiteracy, Assam ranked 11th India and ranked 10th in case of male illiteracy and 12th in case of women illiteracy. In such a situation for the development of rural areas, it much undivided attention for the development of women education of Assam.

The problems: $\frac{3}{4}$ of the Indian population live in rural areas. Most of the rural people are illiterate. There are several causes for much illiteracy in rural areas as compared to urban areas.

Poor economic condition : The planning commission estimated that in 1979-80, 48.4% or nearly half of the total number were of the BPL group. In 1993-94, in rural areas, the poor were 37.3% of the rural population while the poor's constitute 36% of the total population lived in BPL group. So, they cannot help sending young ones to take higher education. Rather they want the children to go in search of money.

Growth of population:

Rapid population growth causes rural illiteracy. There are no sufficient educational institutions to facilitate younger's. A few brilliant students able to get the chance to take higher education.

Social barriers:

Still now, the people of Assam are unsecular in mind. They do not send their girls for higher education together with other religious, castes, and class.

Early marriage system:

At present, also most of the rural families have the concept that after H.S.L.C or H.S. and so on the girls should get marry. According them marriage is universal. So, after marriage the girls busy in their-in-laws' houses and deprive from higher education.

More family members:

Due to more family members the girls of the rural areas have not get the priority to take higher education. Parents want to send their boys for higher education because after that they will be the source of income and security in the old age of the parents. The girls stay at home to perform the domestic works.

Conservative mind of the rural people:

The rural people have the idea that after the higher education their girls will get a good job, she has to move various places and interact with various caste, religious people. The conservative people of Assam cannot allow to do so.

Weak primary and secondary education system:

The quality of North-East school system in rural area is very poor. Most of the children of primary and secondary schools complete their schooling without undergoing adequate training, when they go for higher education they find difficulties. Most of the rural students, find it difficult to pass the competitive examinations like IAS, NET, SLET, Banking, Staff Selection and the like. Unless children are equipped with advanced knowledge and training at higher primary level their performance will be deteriorated at higher level.

Medium of instruction:

Another major problem of the students rural area is of medium in which they study. At present in most of the colleges teaching and learning is taking place only in regional languages. They find it difficult to study in English. International language is missing almost in rural areas. The rural students were failed to impress the interviewers at the time of selection for job or a seat in higher education institution.

Urbanization in higher education:

It is to be noted that our higher education system is urban oriented in the matters of location of facilities, allocation of finance and content of curriculum. University prepares the syllabus, frames examination and admission rules. Teachers in rural area rarely consulted. Policy framers hardly realize the difficulties faced by teachers and students.

Suggestions:

The following measures are made for solution of the challenges in higher education of women in rural areas of Assam.

- i. Special schemes for BPL students for their higher education.
- ii. Awareness among the rural women for getting higher education.
- iii. Adoption of modern technology based education system in the secondary and higher secondary schools in the rural areas of Assam.
- iv. The emphasis on English language and communication skills should be raised.
- v. The recruitment, retention, motivation and long term development of well –trained faculty.
- vi. Major steps to create a competitive environment in the rural primary and secondary schools, so that the rural students can get chance in the modern educational institutions.

Improve educational infrastructure, especially access to computer and also traditional infrastructure such as libraries, classrooms at both primary and higher educational level.

Conclusion:

“When women move forward, the family moves, the village moves.”So, from the forgoing discussion, it can be concluded that the need for financing of higher education for students especially those coming from rural areas need specially attention. If the Government, different voluntary organization likes NGO’s, SHG’s and educators etc. take special attention towards the upliftment of the rural women of Assam. These will definitely improve the qualitative education of rural women in the rural areas of Assam in the coming years.

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