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Status of Women: A Case Study of Chirang District [BTAD] of Assam, India.

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Abstract:

Women constitute almost half of the world population and they are an integral part of society. The contribution of women to the nation's development is no way less than their counterparts. Women represent an important sector of human resource that promotes national development. The greatest challenge today is to improve the status of women." Status of Women refers to the position of women in society in relation to men. It is determined to a great extent in terms of socio-economic indicators such as literacy, employment, poverty, health facilities etc. This paper highlights the status of women in respect of literacy, employment, demography, and her status. These indices are also vitally interlinked with the concepts of power and position. Thus, this paper is trying to look into different aspects that shape up the status of women in Assam.

"If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. Women empowered means mother India empowered."

- Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

Keywords:

Women, Status, Empowerment, Development.

Introduction:

Assam is one of the eight North- Eastern states of India. It is the largest state in the region in terms of population of 3,12,05,576 as per 2011 census out of which 1,59,39,443 are males and 1,52,66,113 are females. The sex ratio [females per 1000 males] is 958 and female literacy ratio is 63% as compared to male literacy which is 77.85%.

A nation is marked as progressive and successful if it is able to provide equal status to its entire citizen irrespective of sex, class, caste, religion etc. Though the entire Region including Assam is free from some of social evils like dowry, sati pratha, female feticide, child marriage because of the prevalence of tribal and indigenous culture, other forms of gender discrimination exist as revealed in various gender gap studies. NHDR [2002] reported higher gender inequality in the state as compared to all India situations. The state got 29th rank among 32 States and Union Territories in the country. According to Assam Human Development Report [Govt. of Assam 2003], the State lagged behind Manipur, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland.

Review of Literature:

Status is a very important factor in understanding the social differentiation and stratification of human society. In every society, the status of differentiation and stratification, hierarchy of social classes are the significant features of every type of human society. It is a necessary component of any society. The social and economic status of women in a society is guided by the social, economic and cultural structure of a society.

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S.M. Lipset and H.L. Zetterberg in their book: *A Theory of Social Mobility* have observed that women workers normally receive lower remuneration or wages than their male counterparts for the same work and are thus discriminated against. Their dual responsibilities as earners and as housewives and mothers leave them little or no freedom of thought and action that their male counterparts enjoy in Indian society.

Aline Wong feels that though women are engaged in the workforce, the majority of them are engaged in low prestige occupations. He also feels that rather than bringing about economic independence, employment in certain fields leads to the exploitation of women labour. Most of the women workers are uneducated and unskilled and are participating in manual occupations.

D.T Lakadawalla (1963) reported that in Bombay employment was limited to a few occupations which did not need much skill and training. Occupations were very important for the women. But in the occupational structure status, women were placed in a lower grade. They were exploited in terms of wages. A similar pattern was revealed by Sen S.N in his book *The City of Calcutta: A Socio Economic Survey*. He found that most of the women were engaged in unskilled manual work. Their position was low and their economic position was also very poor.

Banerjee (1985) had mentioned that majority of women were domestic servants and the rest were distributed in various unskilled and semi skilled occupations. She had surveyed 400 women workers. 25 percent were employed as piece rate workers. The women worked in low paid jobs. They were always subordinated in the hands of male persons. According to her "the middle man increased his percentage cut for giving the job to a particular worker when there were more candidates for the job. Two women engaged in beedi making had to accept a wage cut from rupees two per thousand beedis to rupees one and one half per thousand beedis and one of them had been doing this work since 1956. This obviously meant a fall in their net earnings."

(Banerjee, 1985: p, 25)

A study made by the Ministry of Labour, Government of India, New Delhi on the socio economic conditions of women labourers in building and construction industry revealed that women labourers engaged in the unorganized sector suffer from disabilities and exploitation.

Objectives:

The objectives of the paper was to study the status of women on the basis of various indicators such as sex ratio as a demographic factor, educational status based on literacy rate, enrollment ratio at different stages of education, employment status based on employment in various sectors, health status based on health institutions.

Data Sources:

- 1] Census Reports of the Government.
- 2] District Census Handbook.
- 3] National Family Health Survey.
- 4] NEDFI.
- 5] Statistical Handbook Assam

Brief Profile of the study area:

Chirang is one of the four new districts of the state Assam created after Census, 2001. This District falls under the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) which is a territorial privilege established according to the Memorandum of Settlement of February 10, 2003. This district was mainly carved out by bifurcating Bongaigaon, Kokrajhar and Barpeta districts in 2004 vide notification No.GAG(B)137/2002/PV/117 dated 30.10.2003. The area that falls under the BTC jurisdiction is called the Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD). It consists of 4 districts Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udalguri, and Chirang. The BTAD is created under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Kajolgaon is the headquarter of the district. The entire district is divided into two sub-divisions: Bijni and Kajolgaon. These sub-divisions are further divided into 6 revenue circles: Kokrajhar (Pt), Bengtol, Sidli (Pt), Bongaigaon (Pt), Bijni (Pt) and Barnagar (Pt) and under revenue circles there are Mouzas comprising revenue villages.

The geographical area of the district 1089.94 sq km. The district is located between 2602 N and 26054 N longitudes 89042 E and 90006 E and as a whole falls under Lower Brahmaputra Valley Agro-climatic Zone. Rivers like Champamati, Aie, and Manas are flowing through the district from north originating in Bhutan to the south and join the mighty river Brahmaputra. Besides many tributaries, small rivulets and streams are flowing in the district. In the overall ranking of districts of Assam by literacy rate, Chirang is in 25th place which is in bottom compare to other districts of the state. The main compositions of people are Bodo, Assamese, Koo Rajbangsi, Rabha, Saotal, Marwari, Bengali, Hindu, Muslims, Nepali, Garo, and other tribes.

Analysis and Discussion:

1] Sex Ratio:

Sex ratio is one of the important demographic factors that indicate the status of women. A social system with higher sex ratio itself shows the higher status of women. It reflects whether she enjoys those rights to survival, protection and development.

Table 1, General Information on Demographic Scenario of Chirang District:

| SL.No. | Particulars | Assam[State] | Chirang[District] |
|--------|----------------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 1 | Population | 31,205,576 | 482,162 |
| 2 | Male | 15,939,443 | 244,860 |
| 3 | Female | 15,266,133 | 237,302 |
| 4 | Density of Population {Persons per sq km} | 398 | 251 |
| 5 | Sex Ratio | 958 | 969 |

Source: District Census Handbook, Chirang, 2011.

From the above table it is clear that the district Baksa has higher sex ratio i.e. 969 than the state of Assam i.e. 958. It is indeed a positive development for the district.

2] Educational Status:

Education is a major catalyst in bringing changes in the status of women. Education is one of the important factors in determining the life style, occupation and behavior pattern of women to a great extent.

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extend. It increases the sphere of knowledge and gives direction to the development of self dependent personality. The educational attainment status of women both at the state level and district level can be analyzed through female literacy rate and enrolment ratio at different stages of education.

Table 2, Literacy rate of Chirang District:

| Literacy | Assam | | Chirang | |
|----------|------------|------------|---------|------------|
| | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| Persons | 19,177,977 | 72.19 | 259,902 | 63.55 |
| Males | 10,568,639 | 77.85 | 145,869 | 70.24 |
| Females | 8,609,338 | 66.27 | 114,033 | 56.65 |

Source: District Census Handbook, Chirang, 2011.

From the above table, it is clear that in Chirang district the percentage of female literacy rate is comparatively lower i.e. 56.65 % of females are literate as compared to 70.24% of males in the district which is lower compared to the state level i.e. 66.27% of females are literate as compared to 77.85% of males in the state.

Table 3, Females Enrollment in Different Stages of Education:

| Enrollment | | Assam | Chirang |
|---------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Lower Primary | Total | 2925349 | 50871 |
| | Females | 1485593 | 26010 |
| | Males | 1439756 | 24,861 |
| Upper Primary | Total | 1452728 | 26922 |
| | Females | 766106 | 13851 |
| | Males | 686,622 | 13071 |

Source: Statistical Handbook Assam, 2015-16.

The information presented in the above table tell us that enrolment for females is highest both in upper and lower primary both at the district and at the state level.

| Enrolment | | Assam | Chirang |
|------------------|---------|--------|---------|
| High School | Total | 908819 | 18033 |
| | Females | 476621 | 9056 |
| | Males | 432198 | 8977 |
| Higher Secondary | Total | 188288 | 3194 |
| | Females | 92458 | 1365 |
| | Males | 95830 | 1829 |
| Junior Colleges | Total | 176672 | 2425 |
| | Females | 85333 | 1146 |
| | Males | 91,339 | 1279 |

Source: Statistical Handbook Assam, 2013-14-15-16.

From the above table, it can be said that enrolment rate among the females is decreasing with the level of education both at the district and at the state level. Thus, it can be concluded that high drop out of female students is associated with higher level of education.

3) Employment Status:

Employment is another important variable which determines the social status of women in the society. It helps women to raise their living standard and it leads to empowerment of women. Therefore the study of employment of women is very essential for understanding their social economic status.

To analyze the status of women on the basis of employment, we have considered in this section percentage distribution of workers as Main, Marginal, and Non-Workers. Main workers are those who participate in the economic productive capacity for a major part of the year or more than six months. The marginal workers are those who participated for some time but not for the major part of the year.

Table 4, Category of Workers

| Workers & Non Workers | Assam | Chirang | |
|-------------------------|---------|------------|-------|
| Total | 193,894 | 40,21 | 38.36 |
| Main Workers [Marginal] | | | |
| | Males | 8,541,560 | 53.59 |
| | Females | 3,428,130 | 22.46 |
| Main Workers | | 8,687,123 | 27.84 |
| | Males | 7,034,642 | 44.13 |
| | Females | 1,652,481 | 10.82 |
| Marginal workers | | 3,282,567 | 10.52 |
| | Males | 1,506,918 | 9.45 |
| | Females | 1,775,649 | 11.63 |
| Non-Workers | | 19,235,886 | 61.64 |
| | Males | 7,397,883 | 46.41 |
| | Females | 11,838,003 | 77.54 |

Source: District Census Handbook, Chirang 2011.

From the above table it is seen that the percentage of women as main workers is very low both at the district and at the state level as compared to the percentage of men as main workers at both levels. Whereas, the percentage of women as marginal workers are higher both at the district and at the state levels as compared to the men at both the levels. Moreover, the percentages of women as non-workers are higher both at the district and at the state level in comparison to the men at both the levels. This shows the relative disadvantage of women in respect of employment.

3) Health Status:

Health is completely a physical and mental issue related to the social well being. According to the study conducted by Northeast Network [NEN] IN 2000 due to prevailing conflict in the

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Northeast, several primary health centres are seen to be dominant. The picture is the same in the Chirang district. The health status of the district can be understood from the following table.

Table 5, Number of Govt. Hospitals, Primary Health Centres, Community Health Centres:

| | Hospital | Primary Health Centre/ P.H.C] | Community Health Centre | Sub - Centre |
|---------|----------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| Assam | 25 | 1014 | 151 | 4621 |
| Chirang | 1 | 25 | 3 | 8 |

Source: Statistical Handbook, Assam, 2015.

From the above information given above, it can be seen that there is only 1 hospital, 25 P.H.C, 3 C.H.C, and 8 S.C in the district which is very poor in comparison to the state level. This clearly shows the scenario of infrastructure development in the district is very disappointing and has the crying need for health revamping programmes.

4] Political Participation:

Women's political participation is another factor to determine their status in the society. It is one of the factors that contribute to their well-being. Empowered women have political freedom which in turn translates into their decision making capacity both at the community and national level [Nayak, 2011].

In terms of political participation women of Chirang district occupied an inferior position in the entire electoral process. The political arena is dominated by males at every level. There is no seat reservation in the district for women. Though the percentage of women voter has considerably increased over time their participation in decision making has been minimal. The nature of their political participation indicates that women of these region need some more time to occupy a strong position in the realm of politics.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

Strengthening women's initiative in light of the above, certain measures could be taken up to mitigate problems faced by women's in the district:

- 1] Education of women is the foremost requirement in improving the status of women in the society. An educated woman can face the vagaries of life without any fear. Education creates modern outlook among women which in turn strengthens their claim for better status in the society.
- 2] Providing economic security is a must. As long as women feel insecure, she cannot come up in life. Therefore, the most important thing is to impart education and self employment to women and to make them economically independent. Economic independence creates confidence and provides social security.
- 3] Participation of women is low not only in the elected bodies but also in administrative posts. The over-all picture seems to be quite dismal. However, there are much possibilities and potential for increased participation of women of Assam in the national mainstream. Some strategic approaches for improving women's status in Assam can be taken up.

4] Developing positive attitude towards women is necessary. Women's empowerment would achieved only when the attitudes-ways of thinking, feeling and willing-as also ways of behaving men, women and society towards women become congenial and positive. This will help implementing the Governments actions & steps for removing gender inequalities, injustices and empowering women.

5] There is an urgent need to create awareness among the women in particular, of the social evils the society. Women are so much cocooned by various social customs and taboos, that they cannot and do not want to bring changes in their own traditional lifestyles, so there is a need creating socio-political consciousness among women.

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