
Impact of Patriarchy on Women Empowerment in North East India.

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Abstract: Women have always been considered inferior to men. As a result, women's socio-cultural position was lowered down and they were deprived of even the most basic rights which are necessary in leading a life in an orderly manner. The women were compelled to become the victims of the customs and traditions of the patriarchal society. In this social setting of patriarchy, they had to face many problems in the name of customs and traditions and become the worst victims of superstitions, blind faith, traditional ideas and evil customs of the society. Various social customs have compelled them to sacrifice even their basic human rights. In this 21st century world, where the abolition of all forms of gender based differences is the main concern, the patriarchal system in India poses a hindrance towards the empowerment of women. And gender based violence, discrimination, stereotyping, etc. still runs rampant especially in the rural areas of India. Considering this as the main issue, an attempt has been made to focus on the various impacts of patriarchy on women empowerment in North-East India.

Keywords: gender discrimination, patriarchy, gender equality.

Introduction:

In the 21st Century world, gender discrimination, gender stereotyping, gender equality and gender equity have been considered as the issues of great concern. In India, these issues have also been discussed in various platforms, particularly in educational institutions, NGOs, women study centres, research cells, etc. and yet they are not percolated to the family levels.

In most of the families the rule of patriarchy is still being practised even though the same people talk about gender equality and gender equity outside at seminars, universities and any other meetings or workshops. The reason is because of the patriarchal system of the society, where men have always enjoyed the rights and preferences to do basically everything except household work. This is patriarchy where everybody considers men superior to women. Women are always considered inferior to men and as a result women's socio-cultural position has been lowered down. They are deprived of having social, economic, political, and cultural freedom which are basic necessities of leading a life in an orderly manner. The women are compelled to become the victims of the ordinary customs and traditions of the society. In this social setting of patriarchy they have to face many problems in the name of customs, traditions and superstitions. Various social norms have compelled them to sacrifice their basic human rights.

Manu states the fundamental principle that all their life, women are to depend on the males of their families for the gratification of their every need. During her childhood, her father is expected to protect her; during her youth her husband is expected to protect her; and during her old age, this responsibility is naturally shifted to her son. According to Manu, women are unfit to be left independent. With her dependence on various people all her life being highlighted, it is one-sidedly generalized that her father, her husband and her son are supposed to shoulder all the responsibilities concerning her. And in this way the role of the females in the household are nonchalantly disregarded. This one-sided and ordinary practice served as the basis of establishment of male dominance and supremacy.

Empowerment is the process where a group of oppressed people takes legal control and actively tries to overcome obstacles. Empowerment especially refers to the collective action by the deprived and oppressed to overcome the obstacles of structural inequality which was previously the cause of their disadvantaged position. It is a continuous and multidimensional process by which women are able to realise their potential and overcome

the obstacles of discrimination. The parameters of empowerment are the development of the ability to think critically, build self-confidence, build up group cohesion, and foster decision making, action, and ensuring effective participation in social change. An empowered woman would be able to develop self-esteem, confidence and realise their potential. To empower women is to enable them to develop their talents, abilities and capacities and to realise their full potential and real identity as also freedom of thought, expression and action, and strength to handle every sphere of their lives. When we speak of empowering women, it actually means that they have to take that power from someone who has been using that same power for a long time. In simple words, it means equal distribution of power and opportunities among every gender. Generally, the term gender refers to both men and women. In today's world it is important to think of women and their rights since they have been deprived of their rights for centuries.

Women need resources that will help them to make decisions for their own lives. Gender study now requires more sensitivity from both men and women as it means reversing all theills that patriarchy has written and conditioning that everyone has been subjected to even in matrilineal societies.

The notion that men are stronger, more intelligent, that they are the protector, bread winners of the families and that they have greater rights to higher education and other opportunities has actually kept the women subservient. Nowadays parents have started to give their sons and daughters equal opportunities in education, but this concept has not percolated to all levels of society. The less aware are still perpetuating patriarchal principles in the way they think and behave. The lawyers representing the rapists in the Nirbhaya case are perfect examples of medieval mindsets that still dominate large parts of this country. This paper is a humble attempt to study the impact of patriarchy on women empowerment.

Provisions For Women Empowerment in India:

The National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2007) includes the following objectives-

1. Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize full potential.
2. The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres- political, economic, social, cultural and civil.
3. Equal access to participation and decision-making of women in social, political and economic life.
4. Equal access to women in healthcare, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.
5. Strengthening legal system aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.
6. Changing social attitudes and community practices by active participation and improvement of both men and women.
7. Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
8. Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and girl children.
9. Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organisations.

India has also ratified various international connections and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993.

Within the frameworks of a democratic country, our laws, development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the fifth five year plan (1974-78) onwards there has been a marked approach to women's issues from welfare to development. The 73rd and 74th Amendment (1993) to the Constitution of India have provided a reservation of seats in the local bodies of panchayats and municipal committees for women, laying a strong foundation of their participation in decision making. There are various provisions in the Indian Constitution to protect women's rights to a great extent. But these provisions are not

sufficient to make the women enjoy their rights. In spite of the provisions, violence against women are still going on. Theoretically women enjoy equal rights with men but in practice only a negligible portion of women can enjoy their rights properly.

Area of Study:

Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim are the eight states which comprise the Northeastern region. This region has a multiethnic and heterogeneous cultural background. The study will uncover the whole Northeast from these special aspects.

Data and Methodology:

The paper is an attempt based on secondary sources of data. To study the impact of patriarchy on women empowerment in the Northeast region on four fundamental areas like economic participations and opportunities, education, political participation and health have been taken as indicators.

Economic Participations and Opportunities:

For economic development of a country or a state, the productive efficiency of each member of society must be equal and increased. For this the first requirement is complete eradication of illiteracy and poverty. Only education is the proper instrument to make the people socio-economically conscious and make them politically and socially conscious. In a developing country like India, both male and female should get equal opportunities for economic participation. The following table will show gender inequality in employment in the different states of Northeastern India. The table shows the low labour force participation rate of women compared to men in Northeast India. It shows an unequal distribution of employment between men and women.

Table No. 1
State-wise Labour Force Participation Rate: 2011

Table 1.1- Rural

State	Female	Male	Total
Arunachal P.	39.5	48.5	44.1
Assam	23.7	53.1	38.7
Manipur	41.2	52.4	46.9
Meghalaya	35.0	47.0	41.0
Mizoram	41.9	53.9	48.8
Nagaland	52.3	55.7	54.0
Sikkim	44.6	61.0	53.3
Tripura	26.3	55.3	41.1

Table 1.2- Urban

State	Female	Male	Total
Arunachal P.	21.3	50.91	36.97
Assam	14.9	56.79	36.41
Manipur	33.2	49.87	41.41
Meghalaya	23.6	47.68	35.63
Mizoram	31.1	50.89	40.98
Nagaland	25.9	47.95	37.44
Sikkim	24.8	57.52	41.90
Tripura	16.0	56.97	36.78

Source- Census Report of India 2011.

Education:

To study the impact of patriarchy on women empowerment, the second indicator is education. Education has a dual role to perform: first it creates frustration in the individual with the existing situation. It prepares people to look for change. It promotes dejection. Thus, unconsciously, it prepares the people towards accepting change. Only education develops the capacity to understand the social, economic and political problems in a practical way.

Through education one can develop one's creative thinking, social feeling, and economic efficiency. Education removes superstitions and develops positive outlooks among the citizens. But if we discuss the literacy rate of women in Northeast India, there exists a sharp gender gap in literacy rate in the states. The following table represents the gender gap in literacy rate in the Northeastern states.

Table No. 2
State-wise Literacy Rates: 2011

States	Female	Male	Total	Gap
Arunachal P.	57.7	72.6	65.4	14.9
Assam	66.3	77.8	72.2	11.6
Manipur	72.4	86.1	79.2	13.7
Meghalaya	72.9	76.0	74.4	3.1

Mizoram	89.3	93.3	91.3	4.1
Nagaland	76.1	82.8	79.6	6.6
Sikkim	75.6	86.6	81.4	10.9
Tripura	82.7	91.5	87.2	8.8

Source- Census Report of India 2011.

Political Participation:

Democracy becomes successful only with political participation of both men and women. Women's equal participation in political activities plays a vital role in the development of the country's political system. Political participation is not just casting of vote, but it also means some other activities like contesting elections, membership of political party and representative bodies, election campaigning, attending party meetings, holding party positions, participating in decision making and policy making, and other relative activities. Already the status of women in terms of political participation is very low in India. Especially in Northeast India the women's participation in Lok Sabha and Assam legislative election is not satisfactory in comparison to male political participation.

Gender inequality exists in Northeast India in terms of access to education, employment and health and political participation both in the level of state and nation. The following table shows the participation of women in Assam Legislative Assembly Election in comparison to male political participation from 1952-2011.

Table No. 3

Table 3.1- Participation of Women in Assam Legislative Assembly Elections from 1952-2011

Years of Election	Total Contestants	Male Contestants	Female Contestants	Total Elected Males	Total Elected Females	% of Women Representation
1952	458	449	6	105	2	1.90
1957	312	304	6	102	5	4.68
1962	409	405	4	101	4	3.81
1967	492	486	6	121	4	3.17
1972	522	510	12	114	0	0
1978	938	916	22	125	1	0.79

1985	1133	1124	29	121	5	3.96
1991	1657	1607	50	121	5	3.97
1996	1228	1183	45	116	6	4.76
2001	916	861	55	116	10	7.94
2006	997	927	70	113	13	10.32
2011	981	896	85	112	14	11.11

Table 3.2- Participation of Women in Lok Sabha Elections from 1952-2014

Year of Election	Female Contestants	Total ElectedMale	Total ElectedFemale	% of Women Participation
1952	2	10	1	9.09
1957	2	12	0	16.29
1962	3	10	2	16.29
1967	2	13	1	7.14
1971	3	13	1	7.14
1977	3	12	2	14.29
1980	2	4	0	0
1984	0	0	0	0
1989	0	0	0	0
1991	7	14	0	0
1996	9	3	1	7.14
1999	9	12	2	14.29
2004	4	14	0	0
2009	11	12	2	14.29
2014	9	12	2	14.29

Source- Report of Election Commission of India, www.ijirssc.in

Health:

Table no. 4 represents the infant mortality rate in all the Northeastern states. It is observed that the female infant mortality rate is higher than that of their male counterparts.

Table No. 4
Infant Mortality Rate by Sex in Northeast India.

State	Female	Male	Gap
Arunachal P.	34	31	3
Assam	64	58	6
Manipur	18	14	4
Meghalaya	59	59	0
Mizoram	38	33	5
Nagaland	28	23	5
Sikkim	33	35	-2
Tripura	30	33	-2

Source- www.indiastat.com, *Gender Inequality in Northeast India* published at www.researchgate.net

Findings of the Study:

According to the study and tables presented above the findings are as follows-

1. In Table No. 1 where work participation rate is presented gender wise, it is observed that for all the Northeastern states, there exists a substantial gender gap.
2. Education is one of the important indicators of the study to determine the status of women. Taking into account the literacy rate of male and female, Table No. 2 shows that for all the Northeastern states the gender gap in literacy exists. Males are observed to be more literate than that of the females. Arunachal Pradesh had the highest gender gap in literacy rate.
3. Another indicator for the study is political participation of women in the Northeastern region. Table No. 3 shows that the number of participating female candidates and elected female members in the Assam Legislative Assembly is very negligible throughout.
4. The fourth indicator of the study is health. Health is one of the broad indicators in which gender disparity is seen all over the world. An improved sex-ratio always indicates a better status of women in the society. But Table No. 4 shows a vast gender gap in infant mortality rate which indicates that the status of women in the health sector is also low.

Suggestions:

In this study it is found that the gender gap and inequality in Northeast India exists in the four mentioned spheres. The spheres being economic opportunities and participation, education, political participation and health. As a result of the influence of male members of the family on the female members, the latter act as proxies of their male counterparts in the educational, economic and political domains. A few suggestions to

improve this structure are put forward below:

- 1) Equal property rights should be given to the female members in the families.
- 2) Access to equal employment opportunities for women.
- 3) Equal educational opportunities should be provided to every female child in the country.
- 4) A revolutionary change in the social and cultural values and behavioural patterns is necessary to foster in the process of gender equality.
- 5) Awareness programmes should be arranged in the urban as well as rural areas about gender inequality and its negative impacts on society.
- 6) The mass media should be skillfully used to raise awareness about gender equality.

Conclusion:

Male dominance within the domestic spheres is still very rampant and women still do the greatest share of household activities. The male children are being brought up with a hyper-masculine view of manhood. Therefore, gender education must be imparted to the male children to eradicate the patriarchal motive from their mindset. Again the practical reason behind the preference of male children is dowry and the marriage system where the girl has to leave her own parents' home. Because of this parents never want to educate their girl children. They consider it a waste of money. This notion should be eradicated from the mindset of the common people.

On the other hand, looking at the Khasi tribe which follows a matriarchal and matrilineal form of society, we get to know that births of female children are as much celebrated as are the births of male children. Taking the development of the Khasi society as an example, gender equality in our everyday patriarchal society can be promoted.

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