

Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry (TOJQI)

Volume 12, Issue 3, June 2021: 4508 - 4516

Research Article

**Gender Discrimination in Indian Tradition and Mythology,
- with Special Reference of Assam.**

Miss Juri Nath¹, Dr. Malabika Bhattacharyya²

Abstract

India is a male dominant country where male recognizes as more capable than woman. From the very beginning men are considered as bread winners and women are expected to take care of the house and raise children. This paper throws light on the role played by gender discrimination in the forms of various socio-economic tradition, mythology and in the epic and literature about women's position degradation, gender discrimination in various field like, education, decision making power, experience of domestic violence and various schemes under state government for empowering women are discussed on special reference to Assam using secondary data obtained from various sources. The study reveals that development process in the state is not gender neutral, women enjoy quite inferior status to men. In comparison to other prevailing social problems in India, gender discrimination is not considered to be a very serious problem especially in Assam. But it has weakened the strength of the female community of India.

Key word: *Gender discrimination, mythology, education, employment, social evil, Legislation, empowerment, position of assamese women, proverb, mamoni, majoni, epic.*

¹Assistant Professor Dispur College, Guwahati, Assam. **Email:** jurinath50@gmail.com ,Contact No- 8638725393

²Assistant Professor Dispur College, Guwahati, Assam **Email id:** malabikabhattacharyya1@gmail.com, Contact No-9678294387

Introduction:

People in India worship Goddesses in the form of Durga, Katli, Saraswati, Kmamakshya, Lakshmi etc. from ancient period. From pre-Vedic age the women was given a special status on society, instead they were offered highest position in respective field. In Hindu mythology lord shiva is considered to be consists of two halves, one is himself lord Shiva and another is Parvati. Durga puja is celebrated all over, especially in the Eastern part of India as the major puja from

very ancient period. She is considered as the “Mother of Goddesses” and “Protector of Righteous”. She is worshiped in various forms in different place of India like Gouri, Amba, Sandika, Kamakhya, Parvati.

Gradually from Vedic period the religious and social status of women was declined. This discrimination extended further during Delhi Sultanate and climbed to the extremity in early British period. Besides Durga puja, Ambubashi mela is also celebrated in Assam. It is an annual festival held at Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati, generally in middle of the June which is the celebration of yearly menstruation course of goddess maa kamakhya.

After Mughal rule the gender discrimination took maximum extremity where social, educational, political rights of women was withdrawn and they were deprived from education, decision making, and other major activities considering that they were subordinate to male. Various form of social evils were practiced like Sati pratha, Child marriage, female infanticide, Purdah system etc.

Assam is one of the eight sister states of North East India. The majority of the population of this state belongs to Hindu, Muslim is the second largest population. This is a place where different tribes like bodo, mikir, kachari, ahom, chutia, moran, kuch rajbongshi etc with different culture and custom lives under a single roof of Assamese. So extension of gender discrimination is not too much unlike rest of Indian states.

Methodology

Empowerment of women is basically the manner of enhancement of social, economic, cultural and political standing of women, the conventionally disadvantaged, neglected ones, in the society. The research methodology is a systematic approach of resolution the research problem. When the research topic is distinctly explained, the following step is to select the proper research strategy, data collection and interpretation method. The main objective of this paper is to examine the gender discrimination in India On special reference of Assam in traditionally, Socio economically, and political context. The data required for the present paper was collected from secondary sources and on the basis of various investigation .this paper is trying to bring out the factors that are responsible for gender inequality and suggests measures to eradicate this problem.

Myths and Mythology in women’s position degradation

If a myth is a credence idea, then mythology is the carrier of those beliefs. To make the myths more tangible mythology embodies symbols, stories and rites. Indian Hindu mythology especially related with women has mainly associated with the deities and their human incarnations, sage’s wives, cusses or boons and the idea of karma about life. Forsooth substantiate morally indefensible attitude towards women man made stories, epics, folk stories and narrations made chastity, virginity, fidelity, obedience of women as good qualities and fickleness of women as a controllable element of women character to create faceless, self-sacrificing dump women who is absolutely ready for serving her husband and his family. By projecting the good and bad of

behavior forms through myths and mythologies related with women became the vehicles for the degradation of Indian women to a great extent.

Gender Discrimination in Indian tradition

Gender discrimination is one of the major problems in Patriarchal India. Here men are the owner of the property and women are subordinate to them. Here birth of boy child is considered as the achievement of honesty and reward from god, while birth of girl child is a kind of curse. For that reason, people are seen not to put emphasis on education of girl. They also have to be untold victim of household violence either from her parents-in-law or from her husband and sometimes from the neighbor or other family member. In any kind of critical situation only women have to tolerate and sacrifice more than men. The outcome of gender discrimination is reflected in various field. Some of those are education, employment, Decision making power of women, mythology regarding women etc.

Education-

The status and conditions of women were much better in the Vedic period than any other period. If any women wanted to acquire education and did not depict their consent in getting married, then too, they were permitted, without any restrictions. Most of the girls, belonging to well-to-do families had the privilege of acquiring education. The Upanayana or the initiation ceremony was organized for both, girls and boys. During the Aryan period, which is also called the poetical period, it can be stated rightly that education of women were being given recognition. There was not any prejudice regarding the education of women. The individuals were concerned regarding the righteousness of women within the social order. Through the Vedas, it has been noticed that the whole Aryan race was co-operatively aware in terms of promulgating codes and laws and in uplifting the conditions of women. It contributed to a major extent towards the collective creative forces of the general mass. Aryans were not merely aware in terms of gender power politics and conflicts at their time. The reason being, during that time, the society was still in a developing stage.¹

The Vedic period has witnessed many women scholars. They possessed adequate knowledge regarding the Vedas and texts. These women not only composed hymns but also learnt music and dancing. The women, belonging to lower strata or caste also mastered the skills of spinning, weaving, embroidery and needlework. There were many women poets and philosophers during the Vedic period. The Vedic period, witnessed many capable women like Apala, Ghosha and Visvavara, who performed the job duties of composing the mantras and rose to the rank of the sages or rishis. Lopamudra is one of the female teachers of this period, and is believed to have preached 179 hymns of the first book of the Rig Veda, along with sage Agasthya. Therefore, it can be stated that women were given equal opportunities in education, along with the male teachers to

prove their capabilities. This applied in the field of education, as well as in social customs and rituals. ²

Decision making power of women:In India women are generally considered as subordinate to men, so morally they are not allowed to take any major decision, regarding household affairs, economic or social decision is taken by men, even male society is seen to be interacted to some decision of their women like regarding to her health or such other personal matters. However the women in Assam can take decision to their own more independently comparing to the rest of India.

Social evils Related to women-

1. Devadasi system was another social evil which was prevalent among the Hindus. Beautiful unmarried girls were offered to images of God in temples where they passed their lives as maidservants of gods. It was not only serious injustice to their lives but also resulted in corruption in temples.

2. Daini or witch hunting system: It is a traditional system in Assam, where women are humiliated by society. If a mother did not have a boy child, or no child at all, she was considered as a devil in the society and it was believed that all wrong happening in that specific locality was only because of her presence. So, either she was forced to leave that area or tried to kill her by burning. Such women were considered as Witches or dainies and she was punished, raped and killed very brutally. Although people become educated for which such cases are very rare in Assam but we cannot say that it has eradicated totally

3. Dowry- The culture followed by most of the diverse Hindu communities in India is that the woman's family has to give dowry to the man's family. In Assamese traditions, the groom's family gives the trousseau to the bride before the wedding. It includes jewelry, clothes, accessories, shoes and household items, everything the bride would require in her new house.

On her wedding day the bride has to wear the attire the groom's family gives her. Similarly, the groom also has to wear the attire the bride's family gives him, but he is not entitled to any other gifts.

4. prostitutes- The term Vesya is referred to in the Tezpur grant of Vanamala. The Bargaon grant also mentions about vesya and varastri, who generally resided in the best streets of the city. ³ The Grant of Vanamala mentions that they were beautiful and attractive to all minds and they adorned themselves with various ornaments. The kings and nobles patronized these courtesans and they adorned many royal courts by their singing and dancing. According to B.K. Barua, they seem to have lived a life of cultured ease and pleasure.⁴ According to P.C. Choudhury, "The institution of vesyas or devadasis is nothing but a sacred prostitution, In its extreme development, the

institution has a parallel in the pre-marital communal life of the bachelors' quarters often Assam tribes". But the vesyas were not used as prostitutes like the modern times. They were actually appointed as dancers and courtesans in the Siva temples and the system was in vogue from 3rd century A.D., not only in Assam but in other parts of India also. The institution of vesyas developed in Assam under Tantrik influence as described in the YT.⁵

Gender inequality in Assamese proverb

Proverb is one of the genres of folk literature. In Assamese folk society proverbs play a vital role. In the Assamese proverbs, women are considered as weak, emotional, sacrificing, loving, caring or as cruel, jealous and selfish, (Moran). For that women are shown in relation to men or other women. Not only that, women are compared to other things also. Some examples are:

1. মাটি কিনিবা মাজ খাল
ছোৱালী আনিবা মাক ভাল

*(Mati kiniba Maaaj khal
Suwali aniba maak bhaal)*

Meaning: If anyone want to buy land for farming then it is necessary to look that the land's slopes towards the centre, and if anyone marry a girl then her mother's character must be good)

2. মাহেকে পষেকে দিবা টাও
তেহে দেখিবা তিৰিৰ ভাও
দাতত শান, খুৰত তিল
মাহেকে পষেকে তিৰিক কিল

*(Maheke pasheke diba tau
Tehe dekhiba tirir bhai
Datot xaan, khurot til
Maheke pasheke tirik kil)*

Meaning: A man should beat his wife time to time to control his wife. If the man unable to do so, the society will not accept the situation and it is shameful for the male society.⁶

Position of women in assamese society

The composite Assamese culture did not necessarily contain all the disgracing customs and obscurantist practices like *Sati*, Child marriage etc., prevalent at other parts of India under the major Aryan influence. So, women of this region were also not affected by those evil and rigid social customs and practices of the Aryans. It proves that the position of Assamese women was comparatively better than their sisters in other parts of India. In the social, religious or political

arena of the Assamese culture, women occupied dignified position and were considered in reverence as the pivots of the entire social organism.⁷

Various scheme for women in assam:

1. Arundhati Gold Scheme

Under this Arundhati Swarna Yojana, the state govt. will provide 1 tola gold to newlywed brides at the time of their wedding. All such communities which have tradition to provide gold at the time of their daughter's marriage will get gold.⁸

2. Mamata –

The 'Mamata' scheme seeks to reduce IMR and MMR, by insisting on a post-delivery hospital stay of 48 hours of the mother and the newborn. Any complication that may arise during this period is addressed by skilled doctors available at Govt. health institutions. During discharge from hospital, the mother receives a gift hamper called the 'Mamata' kit. This kit contains essential products for the baby powder, baby oil, a mosquito net, a flannel cloth etc. After 48hours of stay in government hospital, the 'Mamata kit' is given to the mother.⁹

Mamoni

Cash assistance to Pregnant Women for Nutritional support at Rs.1000/- in two instalments. "Mamoni" is a scheme of the Government of Assam that encourages pregnant women to undergo at least 3 ante-natal checkups which identify danger signs during pregnancy (needing treatment) and offer proper medical care. Under this scheme, at the time of registration, every pregnant woman receives a booklet on tips on safe motherhood and newborn care titled 'Mamoni'. During subsequent ANC checkup, the pregnant women are provided with an amount of Rs. 1000 (in two instalments, first for 2nd ANC an amount of Rupees. 500/- is given and second instalment of Rs.500/- for 3rd ANC as nutritional support) for expenses related to nutritional food and supplements. Every Government health institution offers these services for the women who have registered in their place. It is under "Assam Bikash Yojana".¹⁰

3. Majoni

Social assistance to all girl children born in the family up to second order is given a fixed deposit of Rupees 5,000/- for 18 years. On her 18th Birthday, the girl will be able to encase the fixed deposit. In case she is married before attaining 18 years of age, the fixed deposit will be

forfeited. This scheme is applicable to families who are limiting themselves to two children. It is under “Assam Bikash Yojana”.¹¹

Conclusion

The Indian society is Patriarchal in nature. Here men are given more preference and rights where contributions of women are underestimated. From Aryan civilization the gender discrimination is prevailing in India. In north eastern India it was flexible to some extent, because the Aryan civilization could not influence too much in this region. From Vedic period various malpractices had been seen in India like Sati-pratha, Purdah system, Child marriage, Infanticide, feticide etc. till the British period. After that a number of revolutions evolved and these systems had gradually abolished. Government also took lots of initiatives by passing various acts for education of girl child, by increasing the minimum marriage age up to 18 which prevented the system of child marriage. Still the Daini or the witch hunting system was prevailing in various parts of Assam to later. However, today it is not a visible phenomenon.

Although gender discrimination was prevailing in Ahom rule still, there were some ideal women who had shown their power, dare to fight, immense tolerance and ability to sacrifice themselves for their husbands, for the people and for the country, which proved that the subordination to women was unjustifiable. They came forward when men or their husbands failed to dominate enemy and defeated them in various ways.

The primary reason of discrimination was the right to property, which was mainly offered to the son from father. So the girls were considered as subordinate to boys and burden for their parents. However, in matrilineal society like in Meghalaya the right to property is given to the youngest daughter of the family from mother. So the women play major role in household and outside affairs. The male in this society become worthless and cannot take part in any kind of major activity. So, they are seen to be drinking, smoking and playing guitar all the day and die in early age.

Nowadays the Patriarchal system is gradually become flexible to some extent. The women are also giving equal status in the society; in education and in job also. Various reservation systems, age relaxation system, exemption of fees for girl etc. are being seen at present. Men and women are the two sides of the same coin. Both of them have equal contribution to their own life as well as to the society. So there should not be any system of discrimination, because men themselves are not completed without the contribution and support of women.

Bibliography

References:

1. Altekar- The Position of Women In Hindu Civilization, pp-214-215

2. Barua, B.K.- A Cultural History Of Assam, Published by Lawyer's Book Stall, 1969, Page -134-135
3. Choudhury, P.C. - The History of The Civilization of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century, A.D. Published by The School of Oriental & African Studies, London, 1st June, 1953. Page-326
4. Deka, Dr. Kabita- Status of women in Assamese Proverbs: Analytical Study, Published by International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI) ISSN (Online): 2319 – 7722, ISSN (Print): 2319 – 7714 www.ijhssi.org ||Volume 8 Issue 06 Ser. III || June 2019 || PP 51-53
5. Kapur, Dr. Radhika- Status of women in Ancient India, Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330220793_Status_of_Women_in_Ancient_India.
6. Kuniyath, Jayasree K & Sankaranarayanan, Dr. KC- Divine Gender Inequality: A Study of Mythological Degradation of Hindu Women in India. (SSRN2949781).
7. Marimuthu, Sivakumar- Gender Discrimination and Women Development in India, September 2008(<https://mpa.ub.uni-muenchen-de/10901/>).
8. Moran, Mridul- Gender Issues in Folklore: A Study with Special Reference to Some Assamese Proverbs, IJHSSI: ISSN (online) 23197722, ISSN (print) 23197714. Vol-8, March 2019.
9. Rao, C.N. Shankar- Sociology, Principles of Sociology with an Introduction to Social Thought, 2008, S.Chand & Company Pvt. Ltd.(AN ISO9001)
10. Roy, S - Educational Status of women in the Vedic Period: An Introduction.
11. Yashpal, & Tilak Raj (Ed.)- Sociological theories and Concepts, IGNOU, (ISBN 81-266-2111-7)

Citation (Website, Google source):

1. Arundhati Gold Yojana, Available at <https://vikaspedia.in/schemesall/state-specific-schemes/welfare-schemes-of-assam/arundhati-gold-yojana>, (visited on August 29, 2020)
2. Assam, Available at https://www.nhp.gov.in/assam_pg (Visited on August 29, 2020).
3. CHAPTER IV SOCIAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN ASSAM, Available at <https://www.google.com/search?q=shodhganga+chepter+iv+status+of+assamese+women&oq=shodhganga+chepter+iv+status+of+assamese+women&aqs=chrome..69i57.20531j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8> (Visited on August 29, 2020)
4. Kapur, Dr. Radhika- Status of women in Ancient India, Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330220793_Status_of_Women_in_Ancient_India
5. Position of Women during Mughal Period, Available at <https://www.google.com/search?q=Position+of+Women+during+Mughal+Period+Article+shared+by+%3A&oq=Position+of+Women+during+Mughal+Period+Article+shared+b>

[y+%3A+&aqs=chrome..69i57.1730j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](#) , (visited on August 29, 2020)

6. Status of women during British period, Available at <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/women/status-of-women-during-british-period/47393> , (Visited on August 29, 2020)
7. Witch-hunts in Assam: Criminalising the practice won't magically end it, Available at <https://scroll.in/article/737038/witch-hunts-in-assam-criminalising-the-practice-wont-magically-end-it> , (Last modified on July 14, 2015)