

Women empowerment through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Kokrajhar District of Assam

Mridula Debi

1. Introduction:

Empowerment is the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights. In spite of phenomenal growth in science and technology, the condition of women especially in the underdeveloped and developing countries is very poor. In these countries, women suffer from malnutrition, ill-treatment, discrimination in education and economic aspects. The social system is mainly responsible for all types of discrimination against women.

In the year 1953, the government of India set up the set up the Backward Classes Commission and the Commission classified the women of India as a backward group. In addition, the Commission suggested that the Government should give utmost care to women so that, they can be a developed group and take part in development equally with their male counterparts. In these countries, they suffer from malnutrition, ill-treatment, discrimination in education, economic rights and all other aspects. For all types of discrimination against women, our social system is mainly responsible.

Education is the key element for attaining gender equality and removing disempowerment of women. Moreover, higher education of women has connection with lower fertility; infant mortality, better child health and nutrition of women and their families. Higher education has the potential to empower women with knowledge. It helps them to understand how they are manipulated in the society and help them to raise their voice against it. Higher education of women improves their position in the society; it eliminates superstitions, helps in evolution, independent decision-making, healthy life style, using new technique to improve productivity, which in turn help to develop a nation. Women comprise 50% of world's population; society's benefit will be accelerated by expansion of women education. Regarding the impact of women education in the society, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru elaborates as

“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”.

PT. JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

By way of this quotation, he gives a new dimension to expand women education in India and explains beautifully the multiple benefits of educating women in the society.

The economic structure in rural areas is such that, girls are required to help household works, carry food to their parents in agricultural field, take care of their younger siblings and other such works. Moreover, in India the girls get married at an early age. According to the UNICEF publication, ‘International Centre for Research on Women’, India’s child marriage rate have been estimated to be 47% from small sample surveys of 1998. Because of the reasons mentioned above, a number of girls do not even go to school and many drop out of schools and colleges without completing the courses. It leads to high dropout rate among girl students.

According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, the enrollment of SC and ST children increased by 37.49% and 37.29% and their annual drop out percent has declined by 3.27% and 2.23% respectively between 2001 to 2011. Among the boys belong to SC, dropout rate is 51.41% and among the girls, the dropout rate is 52.16% annually. Among the ST, dropout rate of boys is 59.86% and for girls is 61.32% annually. It indicates that the dropout rate between ST and SC is very high.

Around 47 million young men and women in India dropped out of secondary and higher secondary school level in the year 2016 according to UNESCO. The high dropout percentage in our society is a burning problem, so to take initiatives to control the problem is very important.

Expanding the quality education amongst those people who could not get the opportunity of formal higher education is one of the main aims of Open University system. The dropout students can take the advantage of ODL to pursue their education further. ODL is very much fruitful for those women who dropout midway as distance education or distance learning is the education for the students who may not always be physically present at the institution. After doing their household activities they can manage their studies in ODL.

Kokrajhar is a Scheduled Tribes dominated district and the Ministry of Education consider Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Women as the three most backward groups in education. Moreover, in the rural areas of the district, early marriage is very common. The girl child needs to help in household chores, take care of her younger siblings, help in agriculture and weaving and as a result, many of them are compelled to dropout before completion of their education. According to Assam Human Development Report, dropout rate in Assam at secondary level was 26.77% and at Higher Secondary level, it was 4.96% in the year 2014. In Kokrajhar, pass percentage in HSLC examination was 41.1% and it ranked 21st out of 23 districts of Assam in the year 2006. The position of the district in the success of examination is not satisfactory. As the girl dropout rate among STs is very high in India according to the Ministry of Education, it can be assumed that in Kokrajhar also it will be high (data not found). Therefore, here arises a need to expand open and distance education that can help the students who dropout to achieve their educational goals and it can lead them towards empowerment in each field. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL) have opened their branches to overcome the problem in the district. By empowerment of women, we mean to make them strong economically, politically and socially. The gap in the social status of men and women, which is very common in our society, can be lessened by expansion of women education. Therefore, expansion of education, higher education among women may be the milestone to remove the gender-disparity and only then, we can get a developed society in the real sense. In Kokrajhar, gender disparity is very common in the political, social and economic fields. The female politician's representation in the state and BTAD area is less in number; mainly female are the victims of witch haunting while most of the male population enjoy the top ranked jobs. Expansion of education amongst women in the area can mitigate the gender gap in every aspect.

Kokrajhar District is the most important district of Bodoland Territorial Area district (BTAD) as it is the headquarter of BTAD. Kokrajhar has become the centre of education of BTAD. It has 20 numbers of provincialised colleges including a Government College i.e. "Kokrajhar Government College". There are also some technical and professional Colleges such as, Bineswar Brahma Engineering College, Central Institution of Technology (CIT), Kokrajhar, PGGT College Kokrajhar, Law

College Kokrajhar etc. and a Autonomous State University (Bodoland University). Some of the colleges of BTAD also have the facilities of Open and Distance Learning (ODL). All these institutions have important role in the development of education of the area.

The main theme of the paper is to analyse the women empowerment through open and distance learning in the Kokrajhar district. The paper also examines importance of open and distance learning in the district.

2. Objectives of the present study:

The main objectives of the study are-

- i. To study the importance of distance education.
- ii. To study the benefits of distance education in women empowerment.

3. Research Methodology:

Basically, secondary data have been used in the study. Secondary data are collected from different colleges where they have a centre for distance learning, newspapers, magazine, internet, statistical handbook etc. Simple statistical tools like table, percentage etc. will be used to discuss the research findings.

4. Open Learning and Its Advantage for Women:

Open Learning is an approach, which provides learners with flexibility and choice regarding what they learn, when they learn, how they learn and where they learn. Various modes like e-learning, video conferencing, e-mail etc. are used to access ODL education.

Women education plays a vital role in the overall development of the country. Women occupy almost half of the total population of the globe, so when they are educated, whole family and society is educated. Education enhances ability of women in all aspects and as a result they perform better in family management and the whole family members get benefit of her education. Due to education, they become more eligible to get job or take part in any economic activities and hence are empowered economically. Highly educated and skilled human capital is essential for continuous economic development of a country, so when a girl gets an equal chance to get educated they also get a chance to contribute towards the development of a nation. Therefore, a developing country like India cannot become developed if only a single gender gets

the preference. ODL can do better job in human capital formation by providing education to these deprived women of our nation.

In India, the literacy rate according to 2011 census is 74.04% out of which female literacy rate is 65.46% whereas the male literacy rate 82.14%. In the same census, literacy rate of Assam is 72.1% out of which female literacy rate is 66.27% and male literacy rate is 77.5%. Total enrollment in Higher Secondary schools and Junior Colleges in Kokrajhar is 10320 out of which the number of female is 4420 whereas and male is 5900.

In the above-mentioned data, we can clearly understand how number of females getting education is significantly less than the number of males. Anyone can easily deduce the scenario of gender disparity in education from this data in BTAD, Assam and India as a whole, which is not good for a healthy society. So as a rescue of this problem of women education ODL was introduced. ODL not only came as a source of light to these deprived women but also became a source of hope for someone who could not complete his/her studies.

Some of the objectives and advantages of ODL education in empowering women are discussed as follows:

- In distance education, they do not need to attend their classes physically or even if some ODL institutes provide classes there scheduled only on the weekends. As the women cannot spend much time away from home, education by way of ODL is suitable for them.
- Open learning model helps in continuing studies while taking care of other commitments (family, relatives, community, household chores and work). They can study and fulfil all family and social responsibilities under ODL mode at the same time.
- ODL is more flexible where one can learn at their own pace and time.
- Open Learning model provides a conducive learning environment to adult learners.
- Professionals such as, teachers, self-employed businessmen and businesswomen, accountants, politicians and engineers can continue educational development through ODL.

- ODL education is delivered in user-friendly and self-learning materials (printed or electronic modules).
- Increases access of all individuals to formal (and non-formal) education in a manner convenient to their circumstances.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation:

From the data that was collected from KKHSOU Study Centre, Science College, IGNOU Centre Kokrajhar, and IDOL Study Centre at Kokrajhar Commerce College, the following results have been obtained.

Table 1.1: Learner’s enrolment at KKHSOU Study Centre, Science College, Kokrajhar for BA Courses

Yearly Batch	Total Enrolment	Male	Female
2008	80	68	12
2009	98	58	40
2010	75	45	30
2011	233	121	111
2012	206	93	113
2013	212	112	100
2014	265	140	116
Semester			
2015	117	55	62
2016	155	73	80

Source: Database maintained by Science College, Kokrajhar

At KKHSOU Study Centre, Science College, Kokrajhar, the enrollment of students for BA in the year 2008 was 80 out of which 12 were and in 2009 total student became 98 nos. out of which female students 40 were girl. In 2010 total of students were 75 out of which 30 were female students. Similarly, in the year 2011 total number of students were 233 nos. out of which 111 were female. In 2012, total students were 206 out of which 113 were female. In 2013, total students were 212 out of which 100 were female. In the year 2014 total number of students were 265 out of which 116 were female. If the share of female is seen in the 2008 is 15%, in 2009 is 40.16% in the year 2010 female percentage was 40%, in 2011 female percentage is 48%, in 2012 female percentage was 55%, in 2013 female percentage was 47% and in 2014 female percentage was 44%. In the Semester in the year, 2015 female percentage was 53% and in the year 2016, female percentage became 52%.

Table 1.2: Enrollment Trend of MA Students' during Different Years

Year	Total Enrolment	Male	Female
2011	31	17	14
2012	16	9	7
2013	20	11	9
2014	43	33	10
2015	30	13	17
2016	45	20	25

Source: Database maintained by Science College, Kokrajhar Science College

In 2011 female enrollment was 45%, in 2012 it reduced to 44%, in 2013 it again increased to 45%, in 2014 it dropped down to 23%, in 2015 it increased to 57% and in 2016 it again dropped to 56%.

Table 1.3: KKHSOU Study Centre, Science College, Kokrajhar Enrolment of Students for MCA

Year	Total Enrolment	Male	Female
2010	02	01	01
2011	12	09	03
2012	01	01	Nil
2013	01	01	Nil
2016	07	06	01

Table 1.3 shows MCA student participant was less in 2011 enrollment was highest 12 and female participant was 3, in the year 2011 and 12 female enrollment was nil. In 2010 and 2016, female enrollment was 1 each year. As a backward area female are not much related to Computer education.

Table 1.4: Enrolment of Students for MBA at KKHSOU Study Centre, Science College, Kokrajhar

Year	Total Enrolment	Male	Female
2016	02	02	Nil

Source: Database maintained by Science College, Kokrajhar

For the same reason female enrolment is nil as they generally go for traditional subjects like Education, Political Science, etc.

Table 1.5: Enrolment of Students for BMC at KKHSOU Study Centre, Science College, Kokrajhar

Year	Total Enrolment	Male	Female
2011	01	01	Nil
2013	01	01	Nil

Source: Database maintained by Science College, Kokrajhar

No female enrollment found for BMC; only one male enrollment for the years 2011 and 2013.

Table 1.6: Enrolment of Students for BCA at KKHSOU Study Centre, Science College, Kokrajhar

Yearly Batch	Total Enrolment	Male	Female
2008	16	13	03
2009	14	11	03
2010	13	09	04
2011	05	05	Nil
2012	05	02	03
2014	02	01	01

Source: Database maintained by Science College

As far as BCA is concerned, female enrollment percentage in the year 2008, 2009 and 2010 were 19%, 21% and 31%. In 2011, there was no female enrollment, in 2012, it was 60%, and in the year 2014, the enrolment was 50%.

Under IGNOU enrolment of student found for a number of subjects. Therefore, to make the table short, only the subjects where enrolment is more are taken and less enrolment subjects are taken under other.

Table 2.1: IGNOU Term End Examination December 2015

Yearly Batch	Total Candidate	Male	Female
2015	363	223	140
Name of course			
BDP	241	120	121

BED	19	13	6
BPP	40	18	22
Other	143	125	18

Source: Database maintained by Kokrajhar Govt. College

In the year 2015 total candidate was 363 out of which 140 were female so, in percent female was 39%.

Total candidate under BDP was 241 out of which 50.2% are female. Total candidate under BED was 19 out of which 32% are female. Total candidate under BPP was 40 out of which 55% are female. Total candidate under other was 143 out of which 13% are female.

Table 2.2: IGNOU Term End Examination December 2016

Yearly Batch	Total Candidate	Male	Female
2016	317	176	131
Name of course			
BDP	167	92	75
BED	15	10	5
BPP	84	52	32
Other	51	32	19

Source: Kokrajhar Govt College

In the year 2016 total candidate was 317 out of which 131 were female so, in percent female was 41%.

Total candidate under BDP was 167 out of which 45% are female. Total candidate under BED was 15 out of which 33% are female. Total candidate under BPP was 84 out of which 38% are female. Total candidate under other was 51 out of which 37% are female.

Table 3.1: Total Admission IDOL 2012-13

Subject	Total Enrolment	Male	Female
Ass., Eng.,-----	157	88	69
Assamese	9	4	3
Bengali	6	1	5
Bodo	42	25	17
Economics	6	3	3

Edu	31	12	19
Eng	5	2	3
History	5	3	2
MCOM	12	7	5
Maths	13	7	6
MCA	1	Nil	1
MCJ	5	5	Nil
MSC IT	2	2	Nil
PHILOSOPHY	4	4	Nil
Pol Sce	13	10	3
PGDCA	3	1	2

Source: Commerce College, Kokrajhar

Table 3.1 shows total enrolment in the year 2012-13 was 157 out of which female candidate was 69 so the share of women was 44%. Assamese female share was 33%, Bengali 83%, Bodo 40%, Economics 50%, Education 61%, English 60%, History 40%, MCOM 42%, Math 46%, MCA 100%, MCJ 0%, MSC-IT 0%, Philosophy 46%, Political Science 23% and PGDA 67%, respectively.

Table 3.2: Total Admission IDOL 2013-14

Subject	Total Enrolment	Male	Female
Ass., Eng.,-----	314	156	158
Assamese	32	12	20
Eng	26	14	12
Eco	20	12	8
History	21	14	7
Poi Sc	45	28	17
Maths	8	3	5
MCOM	28	19	9
Bengali	2	Nil	2
Edu	112	38	74
PGDCA	6	5	1
PGDHRM	7	4	3
MSC IT	3	3	Nil
BCA	2	2	Nil
MCA	2	2	Nil

Source: Commerce College, Kokrajhar

IDOL total enrolment in the year 2013-14 was 314 out of which 158 female so female share was 50.3%. Subject wise: Assamese 63%, English 46%, Economics 40%, History 33%, Pol. Sc. 38%, Math 63%, M.Com. 32%, Bengali 100%, Education 66%, PGDCA16%, PGDHRM 43%, MSC-IT 0%, BCA0% and MCA0%, respectively.

Table 3.3: Previous year IDOL 2013-14

Subject	Total Enrolment	Male	Female
Ass., Eng.,...	167	96	71
Bodo	149	82	67
Philosophy	11	9	2
Nepali	1	1	Nil
MCJ	2	1	1
History	4	3	1

Source: Commerce College Kokrajhar

Table 3.3 shows enrolment of Previous year IDOL and total enrolment was 167 out of which female student was 43%. Subject wise female enrolments were Bodo 40%, Philosophy 18%, Nepali 0%, MCJ 50% and History 25%, respectively.

Table 3.4: Total Unapproved Students in Com. Col. Koj IDOL for 2012-13 Session

Subject	Total Enrolment	Male	Female
Ass., Eng.,-----	261	152	109
Assamese	27	10	17
Bengali	16	1	15
Bodo	1	1	Nil
B Sc IT	6	3	3
Economics	20	11	9
Edu	95	43	52
Edu 2 nd Sem.	1	1	Nil
English	10	3	7
Maths	15	11	4
MCA (LT)	2	2	Nil
MCA	4	4	Nil
MCOM	24	15	9

PGDBFS	1	1	Nil
PGDBM	2	2	Nil
Pgdjmc-mcj	2	2	Nil
Philosophy	4	3	1
Pol Sc	31	25	6

Source: Commerce College, Kokrajhar

In **Table 3.4**, student enrolment was 261 and female percentage was 42%. Subject wise female enrolment in the state was: Assamese 63%, Bengali 94%, Bodo 0%, BSC IT 50%, Economics 45%, Education 55%, Education 2nd Semester 0%, English 70%, Math 27%, MCA (LT) 0%, MCOM 38%, PGDBFS 0%, PGDBM 0%, Philosophy 25% and Pol. Sc-19%.

Table 3.5: Total Unapproved students in CCK IDOL for 2014-15

Subject	Total Enrolment	Male	Female
Ass., Eng.,...	390	219	171
Assamese	32	11	21
Bengali	5	Nil	5
Bodo	97	55	42
Economics	13	12	1
Edu	90	42	48
Eng	35	15	20
History	3	2	1
Math	3	3	Nil
MCOM	27	23	4
Nepali	1	1	Nil
Pgdbm	2	1	1
Pgdca	9	6	3
Pgdjmc-mcj	4	4	Nil
Philosophy	6	4	2
Pol. Sc	63	40	23

Source: Commerce College, Kokrajhar

Table 3.3 student enrolment was 390 and female percentage was 44%. Subject wise female enrolment was Assamese 66%, Bengali 100%, Bodo 43%, Economics 8%, Education 53%, English 57%, Math 0 %, MCOM 15%, Nepali 0%, PGDBM 50%, PGDCA 33%, Philosophy 33% and Pol. Sc 37%.

Now from the study it is found that in KKHOU total enrolment in yearly course in BA, increased from 80 nos. to 265nos. and female increased 12 nos. to 116 from the year 2008 to 2014 and the female share increased from 15% to 44%. In semester system in the year, 2015 and 2016 female share is more than males' share i.e., 53% and 52% respectively. Under MA, also female share increased from 45% to 56% from the year 2011 to 2016. Of course the courses like MCA, MBA, BCA etc. female share is very low and even some year nil, as female of the area did not opt these subjects. Recently girls are also gradually opting these subjects.

Under IGNOU, total student on the Term end examination in the year 2015 was 363 out of that female was 140 and female share was 39%. In the year, 2016 total student was 317 and female was 131 and as share female have 41%.

In the year 2012-13 IDOL total enrolment in the year 157 and female was 69 so, 44% share. Year 2014-15 enrolment increased to 390 and female increased to 174 but female share remains 44%.

The tables show that the overall female enrollment is in increasing trend and percentagewise also they are increasing. In subjects like Assamese, Bengali, English, Bodo, Education female enrolment is much more than male. Even in other subjects like Pol. Sc, History, Math women enrolment is satisfactory. We can also see from the tables that the popularity of ODL is high among the women who were deprived from formal education. Because of this kind of education, women are not only getting knowledge but are also getting qualified through which they are able to get economic benefit. Moreover, they become eligible for different job due to this educational qualification. In addition, the qualifications, which they achieved, help them to get promotion if they are already in a working field. Education makes them a stronger competitor in job market. Women gets job in University, school and reputed companies after completing their education ODL. Some women join politics and social welfare activities. Therefore, we can establish that ODL has important role in economic, political and social empowerment of women in the area.

Weakness of the Study: The study could not cover up all the open and distance learning centres of the area. Moreover, during the study, the researcher could not contact the student of the institution due to shortage of time and as the student are not easy to contact.

6. Conclusion:

The Open and Distance Study is expanding world –wide because of its popularity in the present society. The enrolment of students in various courses shows increasing trend due to its pattern of education as it fits the present busy society where many person have to take responsibility to manage their family. These institutions have contribution in fulfilling the dreams of many of the deprived students. In case of women, it is like a blessing and as a result, the whole ODL education is giving tremendous contribution on empowering women.

References:

Hemraj Meena, Kanta Meena. (2011). *Women Empowerment and Self Help Group*.

Murali Dhar Majhi. (2011). *Micro Finance and Women Empowerment*.

P.C. Dash & Tarali Nayak. (2015). *Witch Hunting in Assam*.

S.K. Panneer Selvam. (2011). *Empowerment of Women*.

Statistical Handbook 2011, 2012, 2014.

Njaya, Tavonga (2015). Women Empowerment through Open and Distance Learning in Zimbabwe. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol., 20 Issue-2, PP/83-90.

Ramesh Pandia. Dropout Percentage of Schedule Caste & Scheduled Tribe Children. In *India: A Decadal Analysis up to Secondary level*.