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**HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND GENDER INEQUALITY INDEX,  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ASSAM**

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## PREFACE

This is an endeavour to encourage research in diverse areas of human interest in the context of the community and society. This research activity underlines not only latest academic excursions into the world of ideas but underscores its pragmatic possibilities and applied relevance. While poverty is a pan-Indian reality, it is discrimination and inequality which demand proactive measures. These things can be addressed by different media and there is an intrepid exemplar in an Assamese fortnightly Prantik, a socio-literary journal that has stood the test of time and created a niche in the popular Assamese mind. Education exploiting the available technologies with a view to making it accessible to all is the thrust of technologically equipped societies. This necessary emphasis is highlighted in papers dealing with, among others, our own institution of open education, KKHSOU.

The focus of the papers ranges from alternative journalism to distance education to ethical media exploitation and the ubiquitous discriminations practiced in the Indian scene and the inequalities which continue with different faces. Reality in India continues to be religious and communal by and large. The divine juxtaposed with the carnivalesque can definitely yield fresh insights into our reality. Even after owning the persistence of discrimination and inequalities, the identification and appropriation of spaces in the context of ethnic assertion and identity have also been adequately looked into in one of the papers. This is quite close to the existing exclusivity of even trade union organisations in certain sensitive areas like tea estates. The sad annals of tea and its commodification in Assam by the colonisers had only been added to by native planters till certain initiatives taken by the government. In the perspective of the socialist democratic polity, all organisations especially dealing with labour must be entirely inclusive. This aspect is also emphasized in one of the papers.

The papers are distinct because of a holistic exploitation of the available means of education and learning and the faith that informs them is accessibility and inclusivity. This is no utopian wish but a pragmatic reality in institutions like ours which challenge discrimination and not only advocate but practice accessibility. This is a humble step which I believe is in the right direction. While acknowledging the individual efforts of the researchers, I also would like to congratulate them on their emphasis on realities which are not merely academic but which inform our very existence as individuals and as members of the community.

Dr. Arupjyoti Choudhury  
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# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND GENDER INEQUALITY INDEX, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ASSAM

## Abstract:

In a democratic country, Human Development means to lead a meaningful life, which can help the society to develop economically, educationally, socially, culturally and so on. Human Development also means that the people of a society must be educated and be able contribute to the economic development with a good health. In fact, Human Development indicates towards making the people productive human resource and human capital. In this context, it is well defined by HDR in 1990 that Human Development is a process of enlarging people's choices, leading a long and healthy life, and becoming educated and being able to enjoy a decent standard of living. For estimating and ranking human development, various indices such as Human Development Index, Gender Development Index, and Gender Inequality Index have been developed. Gender Inequality Index measures inequality in achievement between men and women in terms of three dimensions: (a) reproductive health in terms of maternal mortality ratio, (b) empowerment that includes women's share of seats in national parliament and in higher education, and (c) women's share in the labour market or women labour force participation rate etc. For enhancing the pace of growth and development, access to equal rights should be guaranteed to all. However, in reality, we get a negative picture of the same in the context of Gender Empowerment Measures. Whenever we talk about the status of women, it has been found that more than 90% of them are engaged in the unorganised sector, their works are not officially counted, they get lower wage than that of men for the same work, and they have comparatively poor health status, low educational status, lower skill than men and so on. They are generalised as a vulnerable and marginalised section in all spheres viz. in educational field, in social situation, in economic activities and political fields and so on. Considering the above mentioned issues, this paper seeks to examine (i) The status of women in the context of Gender Inequality Index in Assam, (ii) How does Gender Inequality play a role in Human Development?, and (c) The ways of accelerating capacity building among the women, particularly in a state like Assam. The method of the paper is purely descriptive. However, this paper is also analytical and based on the extraction of data from various secondary sources.

**Keywords:** *Gender Inequality, Human Development, GII and its Reality*

## **Introduction:**

**W**omen constitute half of the total population, yet they suffer from educational rights, economic rights and human rights. Women are still relatively deprived of equal rights and privileges as enjoyed by men. There are rampant gender differences between men and women in terms of wages specifically in the unorganised sectors. Women are deprived of proportionate job opportunities in the administrative offices. They suffer badly in the educational field, and their suffering is visible from the very low percentage of their enrolment in higher education. The level of education, rate of work participation, usability and enjoyment on profits etc. are some of the areas which show the lower status of women compared to that of men. Women usually get lower wages than that of men for the same work. Comparatively, they also suffer from poor health status, low educational status, and lower skill compared to men. In a male dominated society, the activities of women are considered belonging mainly to the private domain, whereas the activities of men are considered part of the public domain.

Today one is talking about inclusive growth, formation of human capital, and also about the MDGs. Improving women's productivity and quality of life implies a multidimensional contribution to the overall growth and development of a country. Women's earning has a positive correlation with children's health, nutrition and education. It is rightly opined by Nehru that "you can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women." But, women in our society are abused economically, educationally, socially, politically, psychologically and so on. Large-scale inequalities still prevail in the efforts made for the improvement of their capabilities in different spheres of life. Regarding the status of women as a whole, it has been found that they represent 50 percent of the total population; 30 percent of them are engaged in the labour force and perform more than 60 percent of all working hours. But, they receive only 10 percent of the world's total income, and own even less than 1 percent of the world's property (ILO Report, 2006). Besides, there is a big gender gap in terms of literacy between male and female in the different states of India. More than 90 percent women are engaged in the unorganised sectors (HDR, 2014), which are not officially counted. At the same time, their work is rarely recognised. Generally, the activities of women

are considered part of the private domain which is not officially considered, recognised, and counted as economically productive.

In a patriarchal society, the working capacities of women are subordinated and de-recognised by the male members and the heads of the households. The activities of women like cooking, cleaning, rearing the child, taking care of the husband, and other types of household works are under-valued and rendered invisible. In the traditional society, it is believed that the major role in the family should be played by a man, because he is the bread-winner, while a woman must be a career and nurturer. Women, particularly in the rural areas, often face restrictions while taking decisions on their economic choices themselves. They are also unable to take control over the resources. It has also been found that in the employment sector, there prevails sexual division of labour. For instance, women get lower wage than that of men. Men, not women, are mostly engaged in the employment of organized sectors.

The customary practices prevailing in society also impose a subordinate status on women. In a traditional conservative society, the tradition of taking the left-over food by women after everyone in the family finishes his/her meal is still going on in nearly all houses. Preference to stay at home, negligence for education for the girl child, poor economic condition of the parents, lack of social exposure, practices of infanticide and feticide due to preference to a male heir, thus deeply influence women's health. Although women have so much potentiality to work, or to empower themselves socially, economically, culturally, the attitudinal concept of social constraints, social traditions, and poor economic condition of the parents create many problems in realizing the potentialities of women.

Women are also not in a favourable position in the labour market, since patriarchal ideologies influence perceptions of the women workers. The patriarchal cultural norms relegate a woman into the secondary status in their family and society. The domestic chores and care giving activities performed by women remains unpaid and undervalued. Besides, women are deprived of getting their suitable jobs due to various other causes. For instance, it has been seen that women workers supposedly have high rates of absenteeism and turnover. Besides, they lack flexibility with reference to over-time, night work, working on leave days and

so on, that turn them into “high cost” workers. Sometimes, women have to leave their job for family reasons, which directly and indirectly affect the profit of the employers, and thus, women are not in a position to get a suitable job although they have the necessary qualifications. In the primary sector, there is relatively good pay and work conditions in terms of job, more job security and career advancement. But, the employers prefer male employees mainly because of the associated “cost employees” in matters of female employees. Consequently, there is a greater likelihood of women workers crowding into secondary sector employment, where wages and working conditions are low and have little upward mobility.

But, India being a democratic country, everyone has the right to enjoy equal rights and opportunity, equal chance to access the various resources constitutionally guaranteed to all. The implementation of the rights under the social sectors such as—right to education, right to employment, right to equal pay for equal work, right of access to health services, right to participate in the political life of one’s community, etc. have been launched for bringing in the necessary upward mobility of the different sections of the people in the country. Besides, for the long-term benefit as well as the development of a country, economic security, social security, educational security, the security of life etc. among the members of the country are very essential. Therefore, it is right time to rationalize critically the share of women’s contribution into the developmental aspects of a society or the nation that will ensure the Human Development Indices in the country.

Apart from these, India as a developing country needs to rationalise the progress of the challenges like **inclusive growth<sup>a</sup> and MDGs<sup>b</sup>** etc, which are being implemented for ensuring the welfare for the people of the nation.

### **Objectives of the Study:**

Through this paper, some basic challenges are sought to be examined:

- The present status of women in terms of education, health and employment particularly in the state of Assam,
- How does Gender Inequality play the role for Human Development?, and
- The ways of reducing Gender Inequality and accelerating capacity building



among the women, particularly in a state like Assam.

### **Methodology:**

While writing the paper, descriptive research methodology has been used, and analysis has been done based on the data extracted from the secondary source of information. The sources like Report of Census 2001 & 2011, Human Development Report of Assam 2003, India Human Development Report 2011, Human Development Report 2014, 2015, Economic Survey 2013-2014, NFHS-I, II and III, Report of 11<sup>th</sup> Five Years Plan, 12<sup>th</sup> FYP etc. have been used for relevant information.

### **Human Development and Its Indices:**

In a democratic country, Human Development means to lead a meaningful life which can help the society to develop economically, educationally, socially, culturally and so on. It means that the people of a society must be educated and be able to contribute to the economic development with a good health. In fact, human development indicates toward making the people productive as human resource and human capital. Subsequently, ideas of Human Resource Development have come to mean enlargement of the people's choices, their skills, capacities, attitudes etc., and people must be well-acquainted with need-based skills, have adequate awareness on their basic rights and duties, have a mind with the power of critical thinking, have the capacity to judge the right and wrong happening in the surrounding, and so on. In this context, it is well-defined by HDR in 1990 that Human Development is a process of enlarging people's choices, leading a long and healthy life and becoming educated and enjoying a decent standard of living.

For the first time, Human Development Report was developed by the Indian Economist Amartya Sen and Pakistani Economist Mahbub ul Haq in 1990. On the basis of that Report, it was possible to get the position of the countries of the world in terms of education, health and employment (indicators of Human Development) so that the needful efforts could be made from time-to-time for bringing the welfare of the country. For estimating and ranking Human

Development, various indices have been introduced over the years in different Reports such as Human Development Index, Gender Development Index, Gender Empowerment Measure, and Human Poverty Index. But, in 2010, the GDI, GEM and HPI were removed from HDR and 3 new indices such as Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI), Gender Inequality Index (GII) and Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) were introduced in a wider perspective. The HDR of 2015 is made considering 5 indices such as HDI (which is applied for 188 countries), IHDI for 151 countries, GII for 155 countries, GDI for 161 countries and MPI for 101 countries for assessing the ranks of the countries of the world.

### **Gender Inequalities in India:**

In a developing country like India, for ensuring the welfare for all, the Central Government has implemented various schemes and other developmental programmes as part of the means of providing human and social security to the people after the economic liberalization of 1991. It is because, welfare can be ensured only when a country is able to protect the people, provide important opportunities, and make them empowered in every aspects of their life.

We all know that India has a rich demographic dividend, because the country has 54% of population below the age of 25. It means that the young age of the people, the number of school-going people within that age group, and the level of the work force in that period, are to be considered an asset for the entire country. If proper form of skill-based education could be given to the members of this group of population, then it could contribute a lot for enhancing the positive social transformation through social and economic mobility, and creating the knowledge-enabled population in the country. Therefore, it is right time for the country to provide skill-based learning opportunities to all and transform them into productive citizens.

But, unfortunately, the fruits of these opportunities are not reaped equally; as women are mostly deprived of rights e.g. right to education, right to employment, right to social and health services etc. which are constitutionally guaranteed to them. There are rampant gender differences in terms of education, employment

and labour market, health care and so on. India ranks 130 out of 188 countries in terms of Human Development Index, which put the country in the Medium Human Development category. Besides, in terms of Gender Inequality Index, India's rank is placed in the 130<sup>th</sup> position out of 155 countries for the year of 2014. (HDR, 2015).

Although, demographically, India as a country has great potential, the growth of man power and the level of its engagement in productive activities are yet to be fully harnessed. The literacy rate in India is rather low compared to that of the developed countries. Besides, within India, there are considerable differences among the states and regions in terms of employment, gender differences in all stages of education, regional disparities in Gross Enrolment Ratio and literacy level, enrolment in various subjects etc. In terms of literacy in India, according to the Census of 2011, the literacy rate of men is 82.14%, and of women is 65.46% with the gap of 16.68%. Female workers often get less wage for the same work done by their male counterparts. Although women constitute half of the total population, they are always underprivileged both inside and outside their house, their works are rarely recognised and counted in monetary terms. If all activities including maintenance of kitchen gardens and poultry, grinding food grains, collecting water and firewood etc. are taken into account, then 88 percent of the rural housewives and 66 percent of the urban housewives can be considered economically productive. This situation prevails mainly because of the invisibility of women's work. In fact, the activities of women are considered part of the private domain, whereas the activities of men are considered part of the public domain. This proves how women are deprived of the human rights as well as of the socio-economic recognition.

### **Gender Inequality plays a role for Human Development:**

The study is limited to the assessment of Human Development by taking the indicators of GII only. Gender Inequality is one of the major hurdles for ensuring the socio-economic mobilisation of a country. When the value or rank of inequality increases, the loss of human development also increases. Again, the countries with high gender inequality also experience more unequal distribution of human development. Therefore, for assessing the level of empowerment of women,

there is the need of analysing each indicators of GII so that the real picture in terms of Gender Equality can be depicted. For improving the rank of Human Development, the countries of the world has to ensure Gender Equality in terms of education, health and employment which provide a decent standard of living. Again, everybody has the right to enjoy equal rights and opportunities which are constitutionally guaranteed to them. Therefore, **Gender Equality<sup>c</sup>** is an urgent need for ensuring the positive social transformation of a nation like India.

### **Gender Inequality Index and Human Development in India:**

Gender Inequality Index measures inequality between men and women in terms of three dimensions: reproductive health in terms of maternal mortality ratio, empowerment that includes women's share of seats in national Parliament and higher education, and women's share in the labour market or women labour force participation rate. If we calculate the progress of these three dimensions as well as their development indicators, it is seen that still there is a high maternal mortality ratio in India compared to many developing countries in the world. The MMR in India is about 190 against per 100,000 live births, for pregnancy related causes. Besides, in terms of the percentage of women in the national Parliament, in India, it was 10.9% in 2013, which is not more than 18% in all the medium Human Development Index countries in the world. If we look at the population of our country above the age of 25 and older, it seems that 50.4 percent men and 26.6 percent women could get secondary education from the year 2005 to 2012. The adolescent birth rate is 32.8 births per 1,000 women of ages 15-19.

Besides these, a country can be developed when the people are engaged in some vibrant works and productive activities. However, in a country like India, the working forces are not properly engaged, and eventually the problems like unemployment, underemployment and brain drain are rising day-by-day. Besides, more than 90 percent women are engaged in the unorganised sectors, as most of them work for their day-to-day living, which remain uncounted and unrecognised. Around 27 percent women in the age of 15, and above occupy the labour force participation rate, on the other hand, men have hovered around 79.9 percent in 2014. In comparison to India, Bangladesh and Pakistan are ranked at

111 and 121 respectively on this index. (Human Development Report, 2015) Such inequalities in terms of Gender Inequality Index in India has posed a challenge in front of the country for taking immediate action for ensuring sustainable economy and providing equal opportunities to all for the inclusive growth and development and for having a gender-equal society for all.

### **Present Status of Women in Assam: A Critical Analysis:**

The economy of Assam is mainly agro based. The population of the state is 26.66 million of which 12.85 million are female. In terms of the sex ratio, the number of female is 935 per 1000 male (Census of India, 2001), and it increased to 954 female per 1000 male in the census of 2011. There is a general concept that women in Assam are more liberal, they are free from the various social constraints and social evils like dowry, purdah system etc. compared to those in states like Bihar, Rajasthan or the Northern and Southern belt of India. The predominance of the tribal economy or a long-standing influence of tribal work pattern, where the economy revolves around women labour, is the major factor for which the mobility of women in Assam and in the North East in general is considered far higher than it is in the other parts of the country. However, this does not mean that women in Assam are on an equal footing with men. In a state like Assam, capacity building among the women is still a bigger challenge before us. Besides there is a rampant gender disparity in all human development sectors. It is a fact that in Assam, the social exclusion is due to the class system rather than the cast. The women having poor economic status suffer a lot. Even the tribal women are comparatively more excluded or deprived in terms of social status than the non-tribal women. Women with a better economic position have a louder voice against all types of social discrimination or exclusion than the women belonging to poor economic condition.

Even within the class, there is gender discrimination. Regarding the social discrimination against women, a practice prevailing in the Mising society can be cited in this context. During religious rituals like 'Dobur' in the Mising society, women are not permitted to participate in the ceremony when the rituals are performed anticipating a better harvest. Besides, for the duty of a priest in the Mising society, also called 'miboo', only the male person is entitled for

the duty in the ritual ceremony. During the course of such rituals, the Mising women prepare *among*—a kind of rice beer, which is used in the ritual. Thus, the participation of women in the ritual is restricted to preparing and serving *among* only. It implies that, they are deprived of their rights although our constitution guarantees religious rights to all the citizens of the country without any kind of discrimination.

Child selective abortion is still practised in every nook and corner of the state. As a result, one can see that the child sex ratio is massively declining in the sex ratio above the age group of 6 years. Even in India, as per Census 2011, due to the mal-practices of sex selective abortion, the sex ratio has massively declined over the years (in 1961 it was 976, in 2001 it was 927, in 2011 it was 914). This is also true in the context of the other states in India. In 2001, the child sex ratio in Assam was 965 which had declined to 957 in 2011. It proves that parents are still not willing to prefer a girl child as she is considered to be a liability in future. The practice of preferential treatment of boys and negligence to girls in intra-household allocations in terms of health care, nutrition and related needs are indeed some of the factors for the declining child sex ratio in our state. The role of patriarchy, religion, poverty, caste system, or some other customary practices make women appear under-privileged, and sometimes even oppressed in society. Besides all these, women trafficking is on the rise like never before. This shows the stark reality of our patriarchal society with its gender inequality due to ethical blindness and lack of humanity often resulting in the women being accorded a lower social status. In some cases, such experiences make women socially excluded as a whole.

### **Indicators of Gender Inequality Index and its Reality:**

When we have rationalised the socio-economic status of women in terms of their development, we get a negative picture of the progress towards achieving the challenges of inclusive growth, the MDGs, and human capital growth. In Assam, there is a vast gender disparity in all the spheres of socio-economic growth and development although many policies and programmes are implemented for empowering women and providing social security to them from time to time.

## **The Level of Education for Women in Assam:**

Out of the total literacy rate in Assam i.e. 73.18 percent, the male literacy is 78.81 whereas the female literacy is 67.27 percent, with the gap of 11.54 percent. In terms of literacy, the rank of Assam is situated at the 26<sup>th</sup> position out of 35 states of the country. (Census, 2011) Although the female enrolment is increasing in the primary and elementary level, the enrolment rate of women in secondary and higher education segment is less than that of men. The rank of Assam in terms of Educational Development Index of 2009-10 was 31 and 32 at primary and elementary level among the 35 states of the country. (MHRD Report 2013-14). According to 12<sup>th</sup> FYP, 43% women enrolled in universities and colleges in 2009-10. But the enrolment of women were to be seen mostly in general courses rather than in professional and vocational ones. Even within the North Eastern region of India, there is a wide range of variations in terms of GER at the higher stage. In the North East, Assam has comparatively poor GER (16.8% as per AISHER 2014-15) compared to other North Eastern States like Manipur (38.5%), Sikkim (29.4%) etc. Besides, it has been observed that there is less number of female GER compared to male in India and other states of the North East except Meghalaya and Sikkim. This reveals that the overall inclusion of girls and women in higher education is too poor to be compared to boys and men.

## **Work Participation Rate:**

In the rate of work force participation, there is also a significant gap, with the male occupying 71.35 percent and the female 28.64 percent (from 15-49 age group), where the gap is 42.71 percent. Out of the total male workers, 82 percent were main workers and 18 percent were marginal workers, whereas out of the total female workers, 48 percent were main workers and 52 percent were marginal workers. (Economic Survey, 2013-14). Most of the employed women work in agriculture; only 7 percent work in professional, technical and managerial occupations. (NFHS-III)

### **Women's Access to Credit System:**

If we take access to credit system into account as an indicator of economic empowerment of women, the percentage of women having access to credit system and having saving account in Assam is 11.7 percent which is less than the national average (in India it is 16,2 percent). But, within the country, the states like Kerala is having 27 percent, Delhi is having 30 percent, and Goa is having 42 percent. It seems that there are state disparities in saving outcome. (Economic Survey, 2013-14)

### **Women in Professional and Administrative Sector:**

In the year 2007, the total percentage of women employees in the public sector was 16.65 percent, which had been 14.98 percent in 1994. Again, in the administrative sector, the total number of female I.A.S. and I.P.S. officers was 10 and 2 only in 2000, whereas the total number of male IAS and IPS was 216 and 134 respectively. In 2014, total 15 candidates from Assam cleared the UPSC examination, out of whom 4 are women candidates. But, in 2015, the numbers of qualifying candidates in UPSC examination decreased to 8 only, where equal number of candidates had qualified. Similarly, in Assam, the total number of women candidates qualifying for ACS is 27 out of 90, and the total number of women candidates qualifying for APS is 19 out of 60 among the selected candidates in 2013 under APSC. But, in the next year i.e.2014, although the total qualified number of male candidates is more than the female, women candidates had shown excellent results, bagging the first four position of ACS (Jr) under APSC examination ([www.apsc.nic.in](http://www.apsc.nic.in)). These numbers clearly showcase the fact that very few woman candidates are getting selected for administrative jobs compared to men. The lower employment rate of women in the public sector may be due to all sorts of discrimination against women, or lack of skills or know-how techniques, or mostly their lower level of education.

### **Health Status of Women:**

In the context of health, various preventive, protective and promotive measures have been taken after the recommendation of Bhore Committee in 1942-43 on



the Public Health System and the subsequent launching of various Government-Centric as well as State-Centric Schemes. Still, higher Infant Mortality Rate, Maternal Mortality Rate, Birth and Death Rate have been found more or less in the entire state. The Infant Mortality Rate is found to be 61 percent and 50 percent in Assam and India respectively in the year of 2009, where the percentage of male is 58 and female 64 percent against per thousand live births in Assam. In India, the male occupies 49 percent and female 52 percent in terms of Infant Mortality Rate. (Human Development Report, 2011). In 2012, the IMR was highest in Madhya Pradesh (56 percent), followed by Assam (55%) (Economic Survey, 2013-14). In case of Maternal Mortality Rate, Assam has the highest number followed by Uttar Pradesh. In Assam, the MMR fell from 480 per 100,000 live births in 2004-06 to 390 in 2007-09. It is not possible for the women delivering at home to get the comprehensive health care for both the mother and the child, which is also the primary reason for such high maternal mortality in the state. In Assam, 22.4 percent is recorded as institutional delivery, whereas 77.5 percent is recorded as home delivery in 2005-06. (India Human Development Report, 2011). This is a serious issue of concern particularly for a state like Assam.

### **Women's Involvement in the Political Field:**

In a democratic country, capacity building for women also reflects how women are able to enjoy their rights in terms of political participation. It is because women's political participation is another way towards their empowerment. Empowered women have political freedom which, in turn, translates into their decision making capacity both at the community and national level. Although the involvement of women in politics is growing, still the representative percentage to Legislative Assembly is less than 15 in the world as a whole. In India, the figure is less than 10 and in Assam, the figure that constituted 0.8 percent in 1978, now increases to 10.31 percent in the year of 2011. But, in the last assembly election i.e. 2016, the figure got reduced to 6.34% (Election Commission of India). Thus, from this picture, it is clear that in order to promote women's involvement in the decision making process, the political participation rate or awareness of women should be strengthened in Assam as well as in other parts of country.

## **Important Findings:**

Thus, from the analysis made on the basis of the above mentioned indicators regarding the capacity building of women or their level of empowerment keeping in view the demands of the present challenges of Inclusive Growth; the formation of Human Capital and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, we have found that women in Assam are yet to achieve the targeted progress towards empowerment. The HDR 2011 places Assam at the 16<sup>th</sup> place in terms of HDI value out of 23 Indian states, at the 26<sup>th</sup> place among the 35 states compared in terms of the GDI, and at the 28<sup>th</sup> place among the 35 states compared in terms of GII which is below the states like Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland. Thus, GII yields insights in gender gaps in major areas of human development. The component indicators highlight areas in need of critical policy intervention, and it stimulates proactive thinking and public policy to overcome systematic disadvantages of women.

## **General Factors for Gender Inequalities:**

Inequality, poverty, social and economic discrimination, prevailing social prejudices, superstitions, oppression by caste, creed and religion, untouchability, lack of exposure, hesitation to communicate with the officers of a bank for getting loans and other help—a condition which is particularly faced by the women of Self Help Groups—are basically the responsible factors for poor performance of the women in a community. Women, particularly in the North East, are socially excluded within the community on several grounds. It may be due to reasons like economic exploitation, social discrimination, patriarchy, illiteracy, ignorance towards the innovative ideas and thoughts, firm belief in the customary traditional practices like witch-craft, female infanticide and feticide etc. Even, in the political field, women as a whole are discriminated compared to men.

Women are lagging far behind in terms of political participation compared to men in the whole world. In India, the percentage of women participation in active politics is less than 10%. Although in the Panchayat election, the rate of participation is equal with men, in some states, the percentage is even higher than men. It is because, in India, 33% seats are reserved for women in the

Panchayat level election, while in parliamentary election, the reservation is still a dream. Apart from these, in Assam, there are other serious problems like women trafficking mostly in Kokrajhar district, ethnic conflict mainly in NC Hills, massive impact of routine occurrence of floods mostly in Dhemaji and Lakhimpur districts—which particularly impact those women who lose their own identity, respect and dignity of life, and suffer from economic devastation that has serious bearing on them both educationally and socially.

### **Some other Responsible Factors:**

It is a fact that after the economic liberalisation in 1991, measures like social security, health security, economic security, food security and human security were evolved for preventing and promoting the welfare of the people of the country. But, the implementation of the various schemes under these securities is both debatable and questionable. The transparency for utilising the welfare schemes and financial allocation is a major cause of concern. Let us now have a look at the following points.

- According to the World Labour Report, 2000, the public expenditure on social security in India is 1.8% of the GDP, whereas the same figured at 4.7% in Sri Lanka and 3.1% in China (12<sup>th</sup> FYP)
- The 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plans and the NRHM framework decided to increase public health expenditure to 2 to 3 % of the GDP. Public health expenditure rose briskly in the first years of the NRHM, but at the peak of its performance it started stagnating at about 1.04 % of the GDP (the actual expenditure of the Government). Again, the National Health Policy 2015 requires an increased public health expenditure of 4 to 5% of the GDP for the well-being of the people. The developing country like Thailand invests more than 9 % of the GDP in the public health sector. But, it also realized by the most expert groups of latest Health Policy of India that if there is actual 2.5% expenditure on public health, then it is more realistic for ensuring good health and wellbeing to the people of the nation.
- In this regard, we can cite an example of the improvement of health in Sri

Lanka where one third of the Sri Lankan population live on less than two dollars a day, but the country's MMR is among the lowest in the medium Human Development countries. Now 96 percent deliveries are attended by skilled birth attendants, and 90 percent births take place under proper health care. This has been possible because public health services are provided free of cost. Now in Sri Lanka, almost every household lives less than 1.5 km away from the nearest health centre.

- In terms of higher education, the cost of expenditure is 1.12% of the GDP, which is very poor compared to many developing countries in the world.
  
- Thus, Finance is the most important factor for the question of development. As a special category state, Assam as well as the North East receives 90% grants and 10% loan centrally for implementing development plans. The states in the North East are allowed to use 20% of central assistance for Non-plan expenditure and also 10% of the Budget(s) of the Central Ministries/Department are earmarked for the development of the North-Eastern states under the fund of non-lapsable pool, specifically for the development of infrastructure, economic and social situation. Besides, there is the provision of 'women component plan' where not less than 30% funds/benefits are earmarked in sectors for ensuring women's empowerment. Women are also benefitted from the effect of gender budget where the main aim is to analyse the budget expenditure from a gender perspective (i.e. the government expenditure and revenue should impact men and women equally). But, the fact is that in a state like Assam, there is a failure on the part of the Government to utilise the funds properly, because, there is a leakage of fund (for example, the sensitive issue regarding fund leakages in N.C. Hill), lack of administrative training in budget analysis, lack of adequate role of the opposition parties and the civil society etc. (such as universities, academicians, research institutions, intellectuals, groups like All Assam Student's Union, etc.) in addressing the issues related to our state, regional and national development etc. In fact, apart from the financial allocations, the transparency and duration of the time of each scheme should be focused while these are being implemented for the people of the nation.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations:**

Thus, it is high time for our country as a whole to make a rationalisation towards the fact of gender discrimination. Hence, measures should be taken for reducing the factors of social exclusion in a community and providing the space to women for active involvement in the community development process. Education is the only way to boost up the positive social transformation for the welfare of the country. Education can build up women as economically empowered, educationally competent, and make them self-reliant, self-dependent, and enable them to take their own decisions and choices. Life skills Education is a practical way for developing the competence of the women which will finally empower them in day-to-day life.

In order to achieve this progress, women should be skilled, they must be competent in their work, they must be aware about their status or position in the society, they should have the capacity to realize their basic human rights, and also, they should be capable of critical thinking to identify the oppressive forces in society so that they can act for their own empowerment. The following are some measures that should be taken into account for the capacity building of women.

- The role of the Government in Assam should be directive, besides providing the practical vision and a transparent political will towards the implementation of the schemes which are adopted as well as implemented for enhancing the capacity of the people, particularly the women. Now-a-day, due to transparent political will and its practical application, Chhattisgarh can be considered a model state in terms of successful implementation of public distribution system and the scheme like NREGS.
- It is a fact that Assam or India as a whole is demographically very potent or vibrant, which is our national strength. Therefore, in order to address the needs of the people in a positive direction and to make them vibrant human capital, education should be need-based as per the demands of the present society. Education is the only means to make human beings skilled and competent. Although in Assam, special provisions are made for

education, still the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education is 13.4, which is the lowest GER within the North Eastern states of India. Therefore, apart from the conventional system of education, Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and Open and Distance E-Learning (ODEL) system should be adopted sincerely for starting a new frontier in terms of education. By launching various general, professional and vocational courses, Open and Distance Learning can provide a chance to those who are deprived of education due to their various constraints. The ODL system can also develop or mobilise the capacity of the people who want to continue their education for the enhancement of their career. Thus, flexibility is the most important requirement of this system.

- In bringing in functional literacy, with the help of Community Communication Centres and other offline and online sources, Open Educational Resources may be seen as a viable option to develop this region educationally, economically and socially. In fact, it is through OER that one can be a part of the Open Knowledge Movement for ensuring the equity and justice among the people in the state and finally, make the people functionally literate. These people can change the human development indicators in terms of education, health and employment in near future. In this context, KK Handiqui State Open University, the only open university of the entire North East, can play a prominent role for ensuring the capacity of the adult vibrant population in the state.
- Some local personnel should be involved for transmitting the information of such Open Educational Resources to those sensitive and unreached areas, without access to newspaper or even electricity. The courses should be offered in the local languages in order to develop the functional literacy among the people.
- Promoting Self Help Groups, as strong avenues for economic empowerment of women, may be yet another option. For the long-term benefit as well as the development of a country, the economic security to each member of the country is very essential. Therefore, the Government also tries to make women entrepreneurs by spreading education and launching various

women-centric awareness programmes and schemes. Due to the changes in time and explosion of industrialisation and globalisation, every human being must have the capacity to produce something for the betterment of the society. Providing the avenues of entrepreneurship to the women in rural areas is the key factor for protecting the economic security of women. Economic empowerment makes women self-reliant, self-dependence and self-controlled. Today, the Self Help Groups play a vital role in the rural areas for developing micro-finance in the country. The SHGs can play a significant role in the development of entrepreneurship skills among the women in the rural areas. Thus, through the conventional, as well as the open and distance learning institutions and universities, various entrepreneurial courses or need-based training courses for the women of Self Help Groups (SHGs) can be designed and launched. Before launching the courses, there is the need to conduct a survey, to identify the needs of the women in a particular area, and then to train them in order to utilize their local resources in productive ways. Thus, it will be helpful not only for the women themselves but also for the society as a whole.

- Reservation of women in the Assembly and the Parliament should be practical in nature. There should be the scope for sharing power and the resources in order to strengthen the status of a marginalised section like women in a periodic form. Importance to reservation should be given until women are able to gain a competitive rank against men or get equal level as men have got in the political field. Involvement in politics will give them a chance to take decisions in policy formulation, and through this platform, they will be able to raise their voice for the equal rights and opportunities.
- There is a target of the Government to achieve 9% inclusive growth at the end of 12 FYP. Therefore, the concerned educational institutions should adopt innovative and effective ways of pursuing activities in all sections of the society. For these, proper skill development courses should be introduced in the curriculum by the educational institutions for developing critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity (4Cs) particularly among the adult population of the country. Therefore, the mapping of the skill-based courses should be designed considering the Industrial Policy,

Economic Policy, and Social Policy of a State. In this connection, it should be kept in mind that in terms of Skill development courses, in India, only 5 % population of 19-24 age group have acquired some sort of skills through vocational education, while the corresponding figure in Korea is as high as 96%. (12 FYP on Social Sector, 2012-17). Thus, skill-based course is an urgent requirement for developing the livelihood skills of the people particularly the adult population, for having a sustainable economy so that the welfare can be promoted in the real sense for all the citizens of the country.

### **End Note:**

- a. Inclusive growth encompasses equality of opportunity in accessing education, in accessing health services, and ensuring protection in market and employment transitions. Thus, the Government has the expectation or the target to ensure the idea of equality of opportunity in terms of access in economic field, in educational field, in social and cultural norms, in health sector and unbiased regulatory environment for business and individuals.
- b. Besides achieving the target of inclusive growth in all sectors of socio-economic development of our country, there should also be concerted efforts to analyse the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, which was targeted to achieve by 2015. The Eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) lead to the Millennium Declaration at the General Assembly of the United Nations in the year 2000. These include promoting gender equality and empowerment of women and improving maternal health. Though, only these two are explicitly gender specific, gender equality is at the core of achievement of MDGs from improving health and fighting disease to reducing poverty and mitigating hunger, to expanding education and lowering child mortality, to increasing access to safe water, and to ensuring environmental sustainability. In terms of Gender Inequality, it has been realised that Gender Inequality is a major obstacle to meet the progress towards the MDGs. Therefore, there is a demand to eradicate the gender gap in terms of capacities, access to resources and opportunities, and vulnerability to violence and conflict. The Government had implemented various approaches and so many schemes for achieving the targets of MDGs by 2015.
- c. Gender Equality means equipping both women and men with equal access to capabilities, so that they have the freedom to choose from opportunities that improve their lives. Gender Equality means that women have the equal access to resources and rights like men. (Power, Voice and Rights 2010, Asia Pacific Human Development Report, UNDP)



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