

A STUDY ON HIGHER EDUCATION OF MINORITY GIRL STUDENTS AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN THE RURAL AREA OF BARPETA DISTRICT, ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

The subject of empowerment of the girl students has becoming a burning issue all over the world including Assam since last few decades. The girls and women now cannot be waited for any more for equality. The girls coming from the minority community should be empowered for developing their status in the society. As higher education helps in reforming our society, so the girls pursuing higher education should be taken into consideration along with the issue of women empowerment. Hence, the present paper proposed to study the level of women empowerment of Muslim minority girl students in higher education in rural areas of Barpeta district. The main aim of the present study was to find out the level of empowerment of Muslim minority girl students in regard to decision making in higher education. It's another aim was to find out the level of empowerment of Muslim minority girl students in regard to participation in higher education. The study also aimed to find out the level of empowerment of Muslim minority girl students in regard to social, political and legal awareness. The method of investigation for the present study was descriptive survey method. The sample of the present study was consisted of 60 Muslim minority girl students from Arts stream, 60 from Science stream (total 120 Muslim minority girl students from Science and Arts stream were selected randomly) from 4 provincialised degree colleges from the rural areas of Barpeta district. The investigator used self constructed questionnaire for finding out the level of empowerment of the sampled girl students. The study revealed no significant difference between Muslim minority girl students from Science and Arts stream in the level of women empowerment in regard to decision making in higher education. But the investigator found significant difference between Muslim minority girl students of Science and Arts stream in the level of women empowerment in regard to participation in higher education. The study revealed no significant difference between Muslim minority girl students of Science and Arts stream in the level of women empowerment in regard to social, political and legal awareness in higher education.

Keywords: Higher education, minority girl students, women empowerment and rural area.

1. Introduction

Women empowerment means increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individual as well the women communities. Empowerment of women in India is heavily dependent on many different variables which include geographical location (rural and urban), educational status, social status (class and caste) and age etc. Different policies on women's empowerment exists at the national, state and local levels in many sectors. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social, political status of women (Shettar, R., 2015). During the last five decades, the concept of women empowerment has undergone a sea change from welfare oriented approach to equity approach. It is now understood as the process by which the powerless gain greater control over resources and ideologies. Women empowerment is defined as a change in the context of a women's life, which enables her increased capacity for leading a fulfilling human life.

Higher education on the other hand means that type of education, which is given in post-higher secondary institutions, colleges and universities etc. Education given in the higher institutions can act as a bridge between the community and government. People having higher education can give us better financial security and better life style. Hence, in the field of higher education, a study on the level of women empowerment of Muslim minority girl students in the rural area of Barpeta district, Assam is an important aspect to be studied. With the help of studying the level of empowerment of Muslim minority girl students at higher level, we can find out the condition in this respect.

The present study has been undertaken to assess the level of empowerment of Muslim minority girl students in respect of decision making, participation in higher education and in regard to social, political and legal awareness, through which we are able to get acquaintance with the status of them in this respect.

1.2 Need and significance of the study

In the 21st century, the empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns, but practically women empowerment is still an illusion of reality. In our day to day life, we always observe how women become victimized by various social evils (Shettar, R., 2015). Even, in our society, girls face the incidence of discrimination because of being born as girl. The question of women empowerment rise here. If girls and women are empowered, then the situation of discrimination may not arise. So, empowering the girls, specially the girls coming from the Muslim minority community becomes the major challenge of the present day society, as they form an important part of our society. Besides, the Muslim minority girls must be empowered, because the empowered girls can become the agents of their own community development, able to exercise choices to set their own agenda and also be strong enough to challenge and change their own subordinate position in the society.

Higher education is an important stage for leading a healthy, happy and better livelihood for everybody in society. So, when girl students coming from the Muslim minority community is possible to be empowered in higher education, then they will be able to fulfill the aim of completing higher education and get success in their life.

Moreover, empowerment of the girl child is not only important for the family, but also to the whole community and consequently the nation. Specially, there is the urgent need of empowering the girl students coming from the Muslim minority community, as their condition of education is found very deplorable due to lack of empowerment. The constitution of India has made many provisions for safeguard for minority's right. But in spite of this, girls from Muslim minority are found weak in decision making in many respect along with the decision of getting education. In fact, the common problems of low educational attainment of Muslim girls are negative attitude of the parents towards education of girls and lack of strong decision of the girl's own in respect of participation in education and so on. Decision making power of girls in any aspect of their life is one of the important indicators of women

empowerment. *Early marriage is also responsible for low level of education of the Muslim minority girls which is happening only due to lack of strong decision of their own. So, for development of the Muslim society, the aspect of empowering the girls is considered very important. As higher education has an important role in our life, we should give importance on empowerment of the girls at this stage. In fact, the position of the girls in higher education is possible to be developed through empowering them in the field. The status of Muslim minority girls in the field of higher education is more deplorable than the male child which is possible to be developed through empowering them. So, women empowerment is an important issue to be handled in higher education. In fact, Barpeta district is one of the minority concentrated district in Assam. Hence, a study on the aspect of empowerment of Muslim minority girls in higher education in rural area of Barpeta district is considered very important.*

Therefore, the present study focuses on higher education of Muslim Minority girl students and women empowerment in the rural area of Barpeta district, Assam which will help to know about the situation in this respect. The study mainly focuses on the level of empowerment of Muslim minority girl students in regard to decision making and participation in higher education. The study also aimed to find out the level of empowerment of the sampled girls in regard to social, political and legal awareness. So, the present study will be useful for finding out the level of empowerment of Muslim minority girl students in rural area in the field of higher education.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The present study has been entitled as –
A Study on Higher Education of Minority Girl Students and Women Empowerment in the Rural Area of Barpeta District, Assam

1.3 Objectives of the study

- (i) To find out the level of empowerment of Muslim minority girl students in regard to decision making in higher education.
- (ii) To find out the level of empowerment of Muslim minority girl students in regard to participation in higher education.

(iii) To find out the level of empowerment of Muslim minority girl students in regard to social, political and legal awareness.

1.4 Hypotheses of the study

Ho1. There exists no significant difference between Muslim minority girl students of Science and Arts stream in the level of women empowerment in regard to decision making in higher education.

Ho2. There exists no significant difference between Muslim minority girl students of Science and Arts stream in the level of women empowerment in regard to participation in higher education.

Ho3. There exists no significant difference between Muslim minority girl students of Science and Arts stream in the level of women empowerment in regard to social, political and legal awareness in higher education.

1.5 Delimitation of the study

This study is delimited to the following –

(i) It is delimited to only 4 provincialised degree colleges from rural areas of Barpeta District.

(ii) The study is delimited to the girl students from the Muslim minority community.

(iii) It includes both Science and Arts stream.

2. Review of related literature

Wassem, et al. (2012) carried out a study on “Muslim Women Education and Empowerment in Rural Aligarh (A Case Study). The major finding of the study was that the village survey shows a poor development and so is the literacy level. It was found that out of the total household surveyed about two third of them are illiterate and they can’t even read and write their name. So far as the working condition of women in Muslim is concerned, it was found that 60% were house wife and remaining were working in different economic activities. The data collected through this study clearly illustrate the fact that family structure has an association with the participation of women in the decision making process as well as status of the problem. It was found that most of the respondents agreed for existing equal rights in society, but they were not enjoying freedom of exercise regarding their opinion about vote, freedom of movement away from home without husband’s permission, daily household expenditure and

child care etc. The data collected by the study also indicates a formidable gap between the employment eligibility and the employment availability among the educated Muslim, particularly in the public sector government employment. A Muslim woman is by and large confined to indoor activities and their opinion and suggestions are not taken into consideration even in some serious and important matter of their family.

Dutta, S. (2019) had conducted a study on “A Comparative Study of Women empowerment awareness level of Adolescents Girls in rural and urban H.S. Schools of Assam”. The prime objective of the study is to compare the awareness level of the urban and rural located adolescent girl students. The study reveals that the rural located adolescent girls are less empowered than the urban located adolescent girls. The study also reveals that there is a significant difference between rural and urban adolescent’s girls awareness level.

Khan, J. (2020) has published an article entitled “Women Empowerment and Employment Gender Studies Background of the Study”. The article mainly focuses on women empowerment and employment through decision making authority at the household level. The main objective of this study was to examine the women empowerment and employment through decision making power at the household level. The has found that there is a positive relationship between women empowerment, employment and decision making power at the household level.

3. Methodology

The research methodology is very much important for doing research in any field. It includes the research design preparing blue print necessary for doing the research work. Methodology is a way to solve the research problem successfully and systematically.

3.1 Method of the study

In the present study, the investigator employed descriptive survey method.

3.2 Study area

Barpeta district of Assam has been considered as the area of the present study. The study covers only rural sample colleges belonging to Barpeta district of Assam.

3.3 Population and sample of the study

For the present study, all the Muslim girls enrolled in all the provincialised degree colleges of rural area of Barpeta district constitute the population and a sample of 120 Muslim minority girl students (60 from Arts stream, 60 from Science stream) from Science and Arts stream were selected randomly from 4 provincialised degree colleges from the rural areas of Barpeta district.

3.4 Sources of data

The primary data were collected by field survey with the help of self constructed questionnaire. Along with primary data, the investigator also collected secondary data through government reports, documents, official records, periodicals, journals and various publications etc.

3.5 Tools used

The investigator used self-constructed questionnaire as a tool for collection of required data.

Reliability and validity of the self-structured questionnaire

Reliability

Reliability of the self-structured questionnaire was estimated by the split-half method on a sample of 60 Muslim girl students from higher

education. The split-half reliability has been found to be .79 which indicates a high degree of reliability.

Scoring procedure

The investigator has prepared the self-structured questionnaire with 3 ratings such as strongly agree, agree and disagree and accordingly the scoring pattern has been fixed as 2 for strongly agree, 1 for agree and 0 for disagree.

Validity

The prepared self-structured questionnaire possesses high content validity, as the items included in the questionnaire at the first stage for tryout were selected on the basis of unanimous agreement of the experts in the field regarding its content adequacy. Based on their opinions, modifications were made and the questionnaire was finalized.

3.6 Statistical techniques used

For the present study, the investigator used mean, standard deviation and t-test as the statistical technique for analyzing the data.

3.7 Data collection

For the collection of data, the investigator personally visited the sampled colleges of rural area of Barpeta district.

4. Data analysis and results

Table-1: Showing significant difference between Muslim minority girl students of Science and Arts stream in the level of women empowerment in regard to decision making in higher education.

Group	N	Mean	S.D	t-value	Level o significance (0.01 and 0.05 level)
Science	60	52.61	21.43	0.39	Not significant
Arts	60	53.28	24.79		Not significant

The above table-1 shows that the mean score obtained by the Muslim minority girl students in Science stream is 52.61 with S.D 21.43, while the mean score obtained by the Muslim minority girls in Arts stream is 53.28 with S.D 24.79. Here, the calculated t-value is 0.39, which is less than the table value and not significant at both the level of 5% and 1% level

of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted. So, it can be concluded that there exists no significant difference between Muslim minority girl students of Science and Arts stream in the level of women empowerment in regard to decision making in higher education.

Table-2: Showing significant difference between Muslim minority girl students of Science and Arts stream in the level of women empowerment in regard to participation in higher education.

Group	N	Mean	S.D	t-value	Level of significance (0.01 and 0.05 level)
Science	60	33.45	4.51	8.07	Not significant
Arts	60	40.12	5.01		Not significant

From the table-2, it has been found that the mean score obtained by the Muslim minority girl students in Science stream is 33.45 with S.D 4.51, while the mean score obtained by the Muslim minority girl students from Arts stream is 40.12 with S.D 5.01. The calculated t-value is 8.07, which is greater than the table value and significant at both the level of 5% and 1%

level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. So, it can be concluded that there exists significant difference between Muslim minority girl students of Science and Arts stream in the level of women empowerment in regard to participation in higher education.

Table-3: Showing significant difference between Muslim minority girl students of Science and Arts stream in the level of women empowerment in regard to social, political and legal awareness in higher education.

Group	N	Mean	S.D	t-value	Level of significance(at 0.01 and 0.05 level)
Science	60	31.72	29.23	1.91	Not significant
Arts	60	20.63	27.78		Not significant

From the table-3, it is found that the mean score obtained by the Muslim minority girl students from Science stream is 31.72 with S.D 29.23, while the mean score obtained by the Muslim minority girl students in Arts stream is 20.63 with S.D 27.78. The calculated t-value is 1.91, which is less than the table value and not significant at both the level of 5% and 1% level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. So, it can be concluded that there exists no significant difference between Muslim minority girl students of Science and Arts stream in the level of women empowerment in regard to social, political and legal awareness in higher education.

5. Discussion

At the higher level of education, the Muslim girls remained backward due to some important problems. Among different problems, lack of empowerment of the girls is very significant. So, a study on level of empowerment of Muslim minority girl students at the higher level in the rural area of Barpeta district, Assam is considered very significant to

find proper solution for it. Women empowerment is helpful for solving problems which hinder in continuation of their education. Therefore, it is very vital to find out the situation of empowerment of the sampled girls in higher education. The present study set out to explore the level of empowerment of rural Muslim minority girl students in both Science and Arts stream in regard to decision making and participation in the field of higher education. This study also tries to explore the level of women empowerment in respect of social, political and legal awareness in higher education. The obtained results showed that there exists no significant difference between Muslim minority girl students from Science and Arts stream in the level of women empowerment in regard to decision making. But it is significant to note that there exists significant difference between Muslim minority girl students of Science and Arts stream in the level of women empowerment in regard to participation in higher education. The Muslim minority girl students coming from the Science stream are comparatively found more

empowered than the Arts stream. In a study (Dutta, S., 2019) found that the rural located adolescent girls in Assam are less empowered than the urban located adolescent girls. But, the present study indicates no significant difference between Muslim minority girl students of Science and Arts stream in the level of women empowerment in regard to social, political and legal awareness in higher education. In the study conducted by Dutta, S. (2019) in Assam has found that there is a significant difference between rural and urban adolescent's girl's awareness level in Assam.

It is very important that all individuals should be empowered whether boy or girl for getting success in our life. Specially, empowerment of women is a necessity for the development of a society. Empowerment enhances both the quality and the quantity of human resources for development. Both empowerment and gender equality is essential for our society to ensure the sustainable development of the country. Awareness program need to be organized creating awareness among the girls especially belong to the weaker section like the minority community.

6. Recommendations

The present study is conducted by taking the sample girls from Arts and Science stream. So, further study may be conducted by taking the sample girls from the Science and Commerce stream and Arts and Commerce stream. There is enough scope to study the attitude of the parents of Muslim minority girls towards the aspect of empowering their girl child in respect of higher education. A comparative study may also be conducted on attitude of parents of rural and urban Muslim minority girls regarding empowering their girl child. There is sufficient scope for conducting study on different programs and policies taken by the govt. to make empowered the girls for improving their status and as well as standard of life.

7. Conclusion

In regard to the aspect of women empowerment we find several constraints which check it. For example, social norms and

family structures in developing countries like India, manifests and perpetuate the subordinate status of women. One of such norms we can mention here is the continuing preference for a son over the birth of a girl child, which is present in almost all the societies and communities whether general or minority. The society is found more biased in favor of male child in respect of education, nutrition and all other opportunities. So, people are not aware of the concept of women empowerment. It is also found that poverty is the reality of life for the vast majority of women in India, which may be another important factor that poses challenge in realizing women's empowerment. In general, it is seen that in a poor family, girls are the main victims; they are malnourished and are also denied the opportunity of better education and other facilities. But if they are financially independent, then they are able to exhibit greater autonomy both in the household and in public sphere. It means financial independence can empower the girls and women to a great extent. Lack of awareness about legal and constitutional provisions is another factor that hinders the process of empowerment. Most of the women in our society are not aware of their legal rights. In the study conducted in India by Shazli & Asma (2015) opined that in respect of social, economic, political and educational aspects, Muslims are behind as compared to other communities. Towards education of the Muslim minority girls, it is found that Muslim communities possess negative attitude. So, the first and foremost priority should be given to the education of girl child, which is the grassroots problem. It is vital for the Muslim girls to get empowered and take strong determination to get success in education. If the girls themselves empowered they may take right decision in the right time at right place. Empowered girls can convince their families for their education and in every important aspect of their life. Hence, there is the urgent need to empower the Muslim minority girls which will help to raise their status in the society through acquiring proper education.

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