

Women and Their Lifestyle in North-East India

Sonia Mehta¹ and Aditi Singh²

¹Sr. Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Daulat Ram College

²Undergraduate Student, Daulat Ram College

E-mail: ¹mehtasonia@hotmail.com, ²singh.aditi.01.2010@gmail.com

Abstract—This research paper aims to focus on the lives of women in the North-Eastern region of India by deeply analyzing and studying their roles in the different aspects of their daily working. This is an effort in order to bring attention and highlight the positive and revolutionary work that the women of this region are doing which is going unnoticed and unawarded. Despite of immense potential, women have to struggle a lot and this can only be changed if the causes of their struggle are identified and eliminated. Statistical approach has been adopted in this paper along with practical groundwork that consists of an one on one interview with a modern woman from the North-Eastern region who has made the nation proud by representing the country at an international level. Research based content along with contemporary images makes it easier for the general masses to understand and relate to the situation being studied.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a common similarity between women and the states of North-Eastern India, which is that both are struggling to establish their own identity in the modern world. Women, despite of the immense potential they possess, have been sidelined and suppressed since ages and this condition is worsened in a geographical area which itself remains untouched by modern ideas and means. There is a general perception because it commonly seen that women are the poorest of poor in terms of opportunities. Taking in consideration the case of northeastern region of India, due to its poor geographical connectivity and lack of modern means, it is quite natural to presume that women of this region will also be going through and struggling with the same problems as women of most of the other regions of the world and the nation. However, the North-Eastern states of India have some outstandingly unique results to showcase. Women of the eight sisters have constantly been making their mark in various fields and making the nation proud. Some basic statistics such as gender ratio,

infant mortality ratio, literacy ratio and employment opportunities for girls in the northeast is much better than most of the other parts of the world. All these wonderful statistics and evidences make it important for us to collectively study the role and lives of women in this region and highlight the measures that can be taken in order to make their lives better and easier.

A deep study analysis is required to understand as to how improving the role of women in this region will lead to the further contribution in the development and improvement of the eight states and as well as the whole nation. Comparative analysis gives an insight into the differences that exists between the lives of women around the globe or in different sectors of our nation only or in a particular group of eight states of the North-East. Women have played an equally important role in the development and growth of mankind, hence it is essential to study their roles and status in the North-Eastern region if a scheme needs to be highlighted wherein the progress of these eight states is in focus in particular because no region can progress in totality without keeping in mind the welfare and promotion of women. An overall view of the condition of women along with one on one interaction for personal opinions on the topics and issues that concern the modern women of the northeastern region of India the most will act as a significant effort in documenting the lives of women at a time when minimal literature about them is present as compared to their other counterparts.

2. IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THE LIFESTYLE OF WOMEN OF THE NORTHEASTERN INDIA

2.1. Literacy

Literacy, in layman's language can be defined as the ability to read and write. This is a basic requirement of routine life for each and everyone to progress in their

lives. However, India, as a nation has never been performing strongly at this parameter and its literacy rate as well as standards have always been falling down. Currently, India's literacy rate is well below the average literacy rate of the world as the adult literacy rate rests at 72.1% in 2015 as compared to the world adult average literacy rate which was at 86.3% in 2015. Considering these statistics, the rates that have been arrived at from the North-Eastern region of India act as a pleasant surprise. Literacy rate has been increasing in great proportions in this region and women have been

contributing majorly in this aspect. The literacy gap is closing down and getting reduced every year in the North-Eastern regions and the conditions are improved so much so that lately, the former Chief Minister, Manik Sarkar of Agartala has claimed Tripura to be the state with the highest literacy rate at 94.65%. The official statistics that have been released by the government of India show that women contributed immensely in improving the literacy rate by reducing the gap between the number of literate men and women.

	2001 Data				2011 Data			
States	Persons	Male	Female	Gap	Persons	Male	Female	Gap
Arunachal Pradesh	54.34	63.83	43.53	20.30	66.95	73.69	59.57	14.12
Assam	63.25	71.28	54.61	16.67	73.18	78.81	67.27	11.54
Manipur	69.93	79.54	60.10	19.44	79.85	86.49	73.17	13.32
Mizoram	88.80	90.72	86.75	3.97	91.58	93.72	89.40	4.32
meghalaya	62.56	65.43	59.61	5.82	75.48	77.17	73.78	3.39
nagaland	66.59	71.16	61.46	9.70	80.11	83.29	76.69	6.60
Sikkim	68.81	76.04	60.40	15.64	82.20	87.29	76.43	10.86
Tripura	73.19	81.02	64.91	16.11	87.75	92.18	83.15	9.03
All India	64.83	75.26	53.67	21.59	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68

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As can be clearly seen in these statistics released by the Ministry of Development of North-Eastern Region, Government of India, it is clearly visible that the women in the North-Eastern region are getting education with an impressive rate and that they are qualified enough to get jobs and create jobs for the purpose of economic growth of the nation. This calls for more investment from the government in planning and devising education schemes and plans as well as building more schools for girls so that education becomes easily accessible to all.

2.2. Employment Opportunities

Despite being highly educated, minimal employment options are available and that too mostly for the male population of the northeast region of India. Females are generally employed in small scale industries only and do

not have any major opportunities for them in their region because of which they have to migrate out of their areas. There are no opportunities in multinational companies in their areas due to which they have to resort to their local options and stay limited in their circles.



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2.3. Equal Treatment towards women

Northeastern region of India acts as an inspiration to various other places of the nation as well as the world when it comes to crimes against women because the cases of reported abuse, harassment or rape have been the lowest in this region as compared to other parts of the world. Girls feel safe and the cases of discrimination are also very low. As people here are educated, they believe in equal treatment of males and females and hence females get a supportive and safe environment to grow in. However, there are many measures that can still be taken to bring into light the number of harassment or household abuse cases that are happening in this region as these cases generally go unnoticed or unfiled for.

2.4. Sex ratio in the region

In 2011, male to female ratio for North-Eastern region of India was 886 females per 1000 males. However, the male to female ratio of North-East increased from 769 females per 1000 males in 1971 to 886 females per 1000 males in 2011 which means that it has been growing at an average annual rate of 3.61 %. This rise in the sex ratio is also a powerful indicator that the negative perception that has been increasingly attached to the birth of girls is slowly decreasing in this region due to which it can be concluded that rate of female foeticide is also on decline.

2.5. Issues related to women safety

Though North-East India has been considered to be comparatively safer for women as many parts of the world, there are still many cases for which strict rules and norms need to be applied so that women feel safer. Following is a compressed report on the crimes rates that are taking place in the region and how they have been increasing due to the less opportunities or safety measures that are provided to women.

Reported instances of crimes against women in NE States			
STATE	Reported instances of crimes against women in 2012	Reported instances of crimes against women in 2013	Increase/ Decrease
Arunachal	201	288	87
Assam	13,544	17,449	3905
Manipur	304	285	-19
Meghalaya	255	343	88
Mizoram	199	177	-22
Nagaland	51	67	16
Sikkim	68	93	25
Tripura	1,559	1,628	69

[9]

Thus, it can be seen that these statistics are lower as compared to other places and there has been a decline in the reported cases in Manipur and Mizoram, however still, a lot needs to be done in the other states that can make lives of women easier in this region. The Ministry of Women and Child Welfare at the centre needs to be plan out schemes and plans that makes it easier for women to voice their own opinions or at least highlight the problems that they are facing on a daily basis so that women are not suppressed inside their own homes in this area.

3. PROBLEMS OF THE NORTH-EASTERN WOMEN

Women, in general, are struggling through various issues at this point of time. Specially focusing on the problems that trouble the women from the North-Eastern region, the following main problems can be listed which need to be dealt with in a variety of fields to make the lives of women better-

3.1. Inaccessible Education

Education plays a vital role in the growth and overall development of any human being. It enables a human being to understand and communicate with the world and grow with it by making use of the ample amount of opportunities present. People from the North-Eastern region have shown increasing interest in getting education and the statistics prove the same. Girls and women from the northeast are increasingly reducing the literacy gap that exists between the male and female population in their region. This situation can be made even more better and the chances of women getting educated can be improved further by building more and more schools and by investing in schemes that provide easily available education to the little girls. More

scholarships can be launched for the students of the North-Eastern region wherein they are rewarded for doing good at school. They should be attracted towards the mainland wherein they will get a lot of opportunities to study and to interact with other people from different communities so that others also get to know of the cultures and lives of women from North-East.

3.2. More Employment Opportunities

Employment is necessary in order to convert education to economic gains. Employment options for the North-Eastern women remain limited to the small scale industries such as tea gardens that are present in their region. They do not get the opportunities of getting into entrepreneurship or making it big in the corporate sector because they are being devoid of all these opportunities. Hence, more options regarding government jobs or corporate jobs should be made available to them according to their qualifications. This will bring women of the North-East at a professional pedestal and that will help immensely in the empowerment of women by creating a sense of economic independence.

3.3. Reduction in crime against women

Crimes against women is one of those aspects which make lives difficult for women from not only the northeast region but from any part of the world. Reduction in crime rates is only possible when women are made aware of the legal rights that they have. Hence, strong policies and awareness regarding the same must be created so that women build a sense of safety in this region and can come out to achieve more.

3.4. Identification and empowerment

Identification of women as an essential part of the society is the most important step that needs to be taken care of initially. Women of the North-Eastern region are not identified for the cultural talents or local occupations that they do. Promotion of their everyday jobs or the cultural talents that they possess and identifying with it on a global scale would promote them a lot. Local handloom and handicrafts can be put on sale with the help of central ministries and that will empower the women of this region at many levels.



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3.5. Inclusion in mainland

There is a growing issue of discrimination and harassment that women face when they migrate to the mainland from the North-Eastern region. They are not identified as Indians and that acts a major blow to their whole image. Inclusion to mainland can be done on many levels. Giving jobs, education and many other opportunities will also help in bringing more women to the mainland along with creating awareness about the fact that women from North-East are from our nation only and they are a part of us. Discriminating against them on the basis of looks or their accent is a criminal offence and those indulge in such activities are punished. Addressing to girls from the northeastern region as “chinki” or making fun of their accents comes under the various forms of discrimination that they face in the mainland and the same must be stopped.

3.6. Awareness regarding Opportunities

Media can play a very important role under this head. Not many women from the North-Eastern region are able to find jobs in various parts of the nation and that is because they are not aware of the jobs that are available as of now. Media has reached everywhere and it can play a significant role in communicating the important information to and from this region to the masses. The issues concerning women will then be known to all and hence it is necessary that both print media and electronic media are highly active in this aspect.

3.7. Increasing connectivity

Building safer roads and providing more measures through which the women from the countryside to the urban areas are connected with each other is necessary. The NGOs that are in function and work actively towards

women empowerment must connect with the women of the North-Eastern region as well for bringing their problems and issues to the hindsight. For example, a special coach has been provided throughout the metro networks where ever it is functional in India, similar steps can be taken in this region as well to make travel and connectivity safer for women so that they can go to long distances for work or other activities and increase their horizons of exposure.

3.8. Promotion of Sports and Extracurricular Activities as Employment Opportunities

Not only technical jobs but women from the northeast must also provided opportunities wherein they can harvest their talents in different fields such as music, singing, art, dance, debating, cooking etc and can adopt such vocations as their professions. This will lead to creation of more employment and can also lead to better options wherein the local folk culture of the women of northeast India is preserved and can be made optimal use of.

4. WOMEN LEADERS FROM THE NORTH-EAST INDIA

Though not many people know but the northeastern region of India has produced women leaders in each and every field of art, science and commerce. These women have worked hard and overcame all the geographical, mental or physical obstacles that came their way and made extraordinary contributions in empowering women and making the whole nation proud of them. These women are an example as to why it is necessary for us to finally bring the spotlight to the women of the North-Eastern region and support them immensely so that they can actually make the best usage of their talent. The following ladies are some of the most important figures that came from the one of the eight sister states-

4.1. Madhumati Debbarma

Madhumati began her career in the political field as a student leader in her college days at Agartala after which she moved in to social activism. Agartala is a state which known for poor representation of women in politics and any kind of women participation is extremely poor, Madhumati has held her stand and made her mark. After a lot of struggles and huge competition from the males, she got elected to the Tripura Tribal Area Autonomous Districts Councils (TTAADC) and she herself admitted that it was extremely difficult for her to get a foothold in tribal politics in the state.

4.2. Sandhya Rani Chakma

Sandhya Rani Chakma is the only female member in the executive council which consists of nine members of the TTAADC IN THE Khumulwng district. Sandhya Rani became a member of the Student federations of India during her college days and this is the time when she also entered politics. She also joined the Tripura Tribal Student Union in her college days itself where she actively worked for women's participation in her community and the general community work as well. After graduating, she actively involved herself in CPI(M).

4.3. Syeda Anwara Taimur (Figure-1)

Born on 24 November 1936 Syeda Anwara Taimur was the first chief minister of Assam where she was on the seat from 6th December 1980 to 1981 30th June. She was the leader of the Indian National Congress in Assam and all India Congress Committee and so far was the only female Chief Minister of the state.

4.4. Sati Joymoti (Figure-2)

Joymoti is popularly known as the *Ahom* princess who later became Queen to King **Gadadhar Singha**. She sacrificed herself for her kingdom and her husband. Her main agenda was to establish a kingdom free from corruption, oppression and the evils of inefficient administration, she sacrificed her life in the hands of **Lora Roja (Sulikphaa)**. She was a brave queen who faced continuous inhumane physical torture in *Jareng Pathar* (Jareng field) of Sivasagar district of Assam after being tied to *Kotkora Gos* (a thorny plant) and yet chose to protect her kingdom till the very last breath.

4.5. Kanaklata Baruah (Figure-3)

Kanaklata Baruah was one of the Assamese leaders who emerged out as an important political figure in the Indian Independence Movement. She was a part of *Quit India Movement* and is known for fighting fearlessly against the British. As a part of the **Mrityu Bahini** (Death Squad) she led the protest procession in Gohpur police station with other leaders and promoted as well as supported other women leader to join her in hoisting the Indian flag on the top of police station as a symbol of our freedom struggle against the British rule. She led the women's procession and walked ahead bravely towards the police station with the Indian flag in her hand. While she was proceeding towards the police station, she was shot by the police on the way and died. It is sad that her name got lost in the pages of history like many other leaders.

4.6. Chandraprabha Saikiani

She has been a writer, a teacher, a social reformer and also a women's rights activist, all these contributions of Chandraprabha Saikiani are immense in the field of women empowerment. She is known as the founder of Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti in 1926 which is a foundation that works for the betterment of lives of women. She has always fought for women's and girls' education since a very young age in her life. During the Assam session of the Asom/Axom (Assam) Chhatra (Students) Sanmilian in 1918, she spoke significant issues that were not discussed at that point in time such as the ill effects of opium consumption and also demanded for its ban. She has always been vocal against caste discrimination and attacked it through the teachings of Srimanta Sankardev. She claimed the entry of women in religious places and rituals as for her, these were some of the important steps that must be taken for the upliftment of women. She also became a part of the National Non-Cooperation Movement from the northeastern region and took part in the Indian freedom struggle as one of the freedom fighters.

4.7. Mina Agarwala

She was an extremely important figure in the *Tezpur Mahila Samity* for more than 50 years. Inspired by a woman leader from the same region, Chandraprabha Saikiani, she worked for women rights throughout her lifetime. She became the President of the *District Social Welfare Board* in the 1950s. Her work with rural women is appreciated till date and studied by scholars. She was a strong youth mobiliser and attracted women from all ages to work for different agendas such as she mobilised women to welcome Tibetan refugees and helped them from the hands of Chinese atrocities in 1959 which is said to be one of her biggest achievements.

4.8. Silverine Swer

She was a social worker and came from the state of Meghalaya. Her contribution to social work for young girls is immense and spread across different fields. She became trainer and adviser of the *Girls Guide Movement*, the movement for which she worked for the rest of her life. She was appointed as the *Assistant Controller of Rationing* during World War II. Her contributions to the academic field is vast. She was initially a faculty member and later the Principal of Teachers' Training Institute in Changlang Tirap and hence she became an inspiration for the women scholars as well.

4.9. Anshu Jamsenpa (Figure-4)

She is from Bomdila, a small place in Arunachal Pradesh and she is a mountaineer. She is well known as she became the first woman to scale Mount Everest twice within five days only. In 2011, she achieved the feat of summiting Mt. Everest twice within 10 days, which was followed by her climbing the mountain from the Nepal side. She also became the first woman who has ever reached the top of Mt. Everest for the fifth time.

4.10. Dipa Karmakar (Figure-5)

She became a household name after the Rio Olympics. Hailing from Agartala, Tripura (born in 9 Aug, 1993), she is became the first ever Indian woman gymnast to compete in Olympics. She missed the bronze medal in the Olympics by a very small margin yet won billions of hearts. She bagged the fourth position in women's vault in the Rio Olympics.

4.11. Mary Kom-(Figure-6)

Born in Kangathei village of Manipur in 24 Nov, 1982, Chungneijang Mery Kom Hmangte (better known as Mary Kom) needs no introduction for the achievements that she has made. She is a five-time *World Amateur Boxing* Champion. She studied only till 8th standard after which gave all time to sports.

5. CONCLUSION

Women have been the victims of orthodoxy and various kinds of suppression all around the world but the women from the region of northeastern states of India have been at a more disadvantaged position because despite of growing in numbers, they have not been to access the various opportunities that they deserve. They have been limited to their own states due to the geographical boundations and even in those states, they have not been able to flourish completely because of the various discriminations that they have to go through. All these issues will be slowly eliminated only when the focus and attention shifts to the women from the northeastern region. This is will help us stride forward as a nation and make the lives of women better and easier.



(Figure 1)
Courtesy [4]



(Figure 2)
Courtesy [15]



(Figure 3)
Courtesy [4]



(Figure 4)
Courtesy [5]



(Figure 5)
Courtesy [11]



(Figure 6)
Courtesy [5]

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