



Pratidhwani the Echo

A Peer-Reviewed International Journal of Humanities & Social Science

ISSN: 2278-5264 (Online) 2321-9319 (Print)

Impact Factor: 6.28 (Index Copernicus International)

Volume-VII, Issue-II, October 2018, Page No. 183-192

Published by Dept. of Bengali, Karimganj College, Karimganj, Assam, India

Website: <http://www.thecho.in>

Women Empowerment and Socio-Economic Development: A Study on Urban Parts of Kokrajhar District of Assam

Dr. Pradip Brahmachary

*Associate Professor, Dept. of Humanities & Social Sciences, Central Institute of
Technology Kokrajhar, Kokrajhar, Assam*

Mrs. Anindita Brahmachary

Abstract

There is a perception that the status of women is relatively better in the North Eastern Region of India in comparison with the status of women in all India average. To analyse the status of women empowerment, present study is confined to the urban parts of Kokrajhar district of Assam which consists of two statutory towns and two census towns. To investigate the status of women, few indicators like sex ratio, literacy rate and work participation rate are considered. The findings of the study indicate that women are oppressed in social and economic spheres of life. Overall trend of the sex ratio of the various towns of Kokrajhar district has always remained unfavourable to female as there are less number of women per 1000 men. There exists significant gap between male and female literacy rate in all the four towns which vindicates the fact that female literacy is far behind male literacy rate. Regarding work participation rate, female work participation rate is far lower than male work participation rate which is an indication of less women's participation in economic activities. To know the overall status of women, Gender Development Index (GDI) is calculated separately for each town. As per GDI ranking two out of four towns are at medium level and rest two towns are at low level. Thus the overall socio-economic status of the women in area under study is not at all impressive.

Key words: Women Empowerment, Sex Ratio, Literacy Rate, Work Participation Rate, Gender Development Index.

Introduction: Women empowerment, the buzzword for promoting gender equality, is one of the biggest challenging issues that has been facing typically by all developing and underdeveloped nations of the world. The status of women in a society is a significant reflection of the level of social uprightness in that society. In one side Indian women are honoured at par with Goddess and on the other side there has been an increase in incidents of gender based violence. Both these views can form part of the spectrum on the status of Indian women. To bring economic progress in our nation, there must be a change in the status of women in the society and for that women need to be empowered in all walks of

Women Empowerment and Socio-Economic Development: ... Pradip Brahmachary & Anindita Brahmachary
life. Women empowerment is critical to the process of sustainable development of each and every nation.

Women empowerment as a concept was introduced at the International women Conference in 1985 at Nairobi, which defined it as redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women (Panucha and Khatik, 2005).

In fact, it is a process by which women acquire the power which capacitates them to control their day-to-day lives in the social, political and economic spheres. An empowered woman should be politically active, economically productive and self-sufficient and can enjoy equal opportunities along with their male counterparts by taking part in decision making discussions within family and outside family.

The North Eastern Region of India has been considered as a backward region in terms of growth in per capita income. However, there is a perception that the status of women is higher in the North Eastern Region of the country in comparison with the status of women in all India average. Women in this region use to enjoy greater mobility and visibility compared to the other parts of the country. Bodoland Territorial Areas Districts (BTAD) is an autonomous region lying within the state of Assam in the North-East India. The BTAD consists of four contiguous districts — Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri.

The women of the Bodoland are well known for their diligent nature. They are proficient in weaving, farming, fishing and trade. But still like their counterpart of other region, women of Bodoland has also encountered a number of specific problems over ages such as patriarchal culture, inadequate access to productive resources, non-accounting of women's household works, insufficient advancement facilities, powerlessness etc. (Phukon, 2008). The present study is confined to the urban part of Kokrajhar district which consists of two statutory towns' viz. Gossaigaon town and Kokrajhar town having Town Committee and Municipal Board respectively and two census towns viz. Padmabil and Salakati.

Objectives:

The main objectives of the present paper are:

1. To address status of women in urban parts of Kokrajhar District in light of socio-economic parameters which have direct or indirect bearing on women empowerment.
2. To construct town wise Gender Development Index (GDI) on the basis of Equally Distributed Economic Index (EDEI) and Equally Distributed Social Index (EDSI) to assess the overall socio-economic status of women.

Methodology: The study is purely based on the secondary data. To achieve set objectives, the data are compiled from Census of India 2011 and 2001. For the purpose of first objective, demographic and educational attainment indicators like sex ratio and literacy rate are considered under women's social attainment indicator and work participation rate is considered for addressing the economic attainment indicator. Due to lack of statistically comparable data, income earnings and political participation of women are not considered for the present study. The second objective is all about the construction of GDI which was

Women Empowerment and Socio-Economic Development: ... Pradip Brahmachary & Anindita Brahmachary introduced in 1995 in the Human Development Report published by the United Nations Development Program.

In this present study, GDI has been measured by considering two dimensions viz., social dimension and economic dimension. Social dimension is reflected by literacy rate and economic dimension is reflected by work participation rate as town wise secondary data on life expectancy and income aspects are not available. GDI has been calculated by the following three steps. Firstly, female and male indices in each dimension are calculated according to this general formula:

$$\text{Dimension Index} = \frac{\text{Actual Value} - \text{Minimum Value}}{\text{Maximum value} - \text{Minimum value}}$$

Maximum and minimum value would be as per the goalposts value given in Human Development Report 2005.

Secondly, the female and male indices in each dimension are combined in a way that penalizes differences in achievement men and women. The resulting index is calculated according to the general formula:

$$\text{Equally Distributed Index} = \{[\text{female population share}(\text{female index}^{1-\epsilon})] + [\text{male population share}(\text{male index}^{1-\epsilon})]\}^{1/1-\epsilon}$$

Here, ϵ measures the aversion to inequality. The value of ϵ is the size of the penalty for gender inequality. The larger the value, the more heavily a society is penalized for having inequalities. If $\epsilon=0$, gender inequality is not penalized. As ϵ increases towards infinity, more and more weight is given to the lesser achieving group. The value 2 is used in calculating the GDI. This value places a moderate penalty on gender inequality in achievement.

Thus, the general equation becomes:

$$\text{Equally Distributed Index} = \left\{ \frac{\text{female population share}}{\text{female index}} + \frac{\text{male population share}}{\text{male index}} \right\}^{-1}$$

Equally Distributed Index gives the harmonic mean of female and male indices. Thus GDI is the average of two component indices viz. Equally Distributed Literacy Index (EDLI) and Equally Distributed Work Participation Index (EDWPI), where

$$\text{Equally Distributed Literacy Index} = \left\{ \frac{\text{female population share}}{\text{female literacy index}} + \frac{\text{male population share}}{\text{male literacy index}} \right\}^{-1}$$

$$\text{Equally Distributed Work Participation Index} = \left\{ \frac{\text{female population share}}{\text{female work participation index}} + \frac{\text{male population share}}{\text{male work participation index}} \right\}^{-1}$$

About Kokrajhar District and its Town Areas: Kokrajhar, one of the 33 districts of Assam, is predominantly inhabited by bodo tribal people. As per Census of India 2011, the total population of the district is 887142, which is 2.84 percent of State population, of which 51 percent is male and 49 percent is female. Out of the total population of the district, 93.8 percent falls under rural and 6.2

percentisunder urban areas of the district. The less percentage of urban population indicates that most of the population dwell in rural areas of the district. The district has an area of 3296 Sq.Km. out of whichrural area is 3279.68 Sq.Km and urban area is 16.32 Sq.Km. Kokrajhar (MB) is the most populous town with 34136 persons while Salakati(CT) is the least populatedtown with 4863 persons as per 2011 census. The total urban female population in the district is 26,482 which is slightly more than 50 percent of total urban population.

Table 1: Geographical Area and Total Population in Kokrajhar Town

Town/Dist/State	Area (in Sq. Km.)	Total Population		
		Persons	Males	Females
Gossaigaon (TC)	4	9068	4782	4286
Padmabil (CT)	2.94	6874	3500	3374
Kokrajhar (MB)	8.24	34136	17567	16569
Salakati (CT)	1.14	4863	2610	2253
Dist Urban Kokrajhar	16.32	54941	28459	26482
Kokrajhar	3296	887142	452905	434237
Assam	78438	31205576	15939443	15266133

The proportion of male-female population in urban as well rural areas of the district is almost fifty-fifty percent. Area wise Kokrajhar town is the largest town occupying 50 percent of the total urban areas of the district whereas Salakati is the smallest town occupying only 7 percent of the total urban parts of the district. In this present study empowerment of women and their socio-economic status is examined on the basis of two dimensions i.e., social dimension and economic dimension.

Social Dimension: Under social dimension, sex ratio from demographic indicator and literacy ratefrom educational attainment indicator have been sorted out for discussion.

Sex Ratio: Sex ratio is considered as one of the most important demographic indicators as it indicates the presence of gender inequality in a particular area. It is positively correlated with women empowerment. We can't think of women empowerment if women are not allowed to be born. Skewed sex ratio generates a lot of demographic, social and ethical problems.According to James (2004) 'sex ratio is a useful indicator to understand women's health and position in any society'.

Table 2: Sex Ratio in Towns in Kokrajhar District

District/State(status of the town)	Sex Ratio (2011)	Child Sex Ratio (2011) for 0-6 age group	Sex Ratio (2001)	Change in Sex ratio
Gossaigaon (TC)	896	963	882	14
Padmabil (CT)	964	1018	0	-
Kokrajhar (MB)	943	915	906	37
Salakati (CT)	863	986	813	50

Dist (Urban)	931	947	887	44
Kokrajhar				
Kokrajhar District	959	954	946	13

Source: Census of India 2011 and 2001, Office of the Registrar General, India

The table 2 depicts the sex ratio of four towns in the Kokrajhar district over the period from 2001 to 2011. In 2011, out of the 4 towns in the district, Padmabil (CT) recorded the highest sex ratio of 964, and the lowest of 863 sex ratio is seen in the Salakati (CT). Padmabil (CT) has also witnessed the highest child sex ratio with 1018 females per 1000 males in 2011. Thus Padmabil census town registered less gender disparity in 2011. The lowest child sex ratio of 915 females per 1000 males is seen in Kokrajhar (MB).

It is observed from the table that the aggregate sex ratio of all towns in the district was 931 as per census 2011 where as in 2001 it was 887. Thus the aggregate sex ratio of all the towns has increased by 44 females per 1000 males during the period 2001 to 2011. The highest change in sex ratio was observed in Salakati town and the lowest change is observed in Gossaigaon town during a decade of 2001 to 2011. Though a positive change in sex ratio of all the towns indicates an increase in number of female population per 1000 male population during the years from 2001 to 2011 but overall trend of the sex ratio of the various towns of Kokrajhar district has always remained unfavourable to female.

Literacy rate: Among different parameters of educational attainments, literacy is the most fundamental, as it paves the way for further learning and training (India, HDR, 2011). Literacy is an important parameter of socio-economic transformation (Dash, 1986). It is the first step in knowledge building and hence literacy indicator is important in the assessment of human development as well as women empowerment.

According to Census 2011, a person aged 7 years and above who can both read and write with understanding in any language is considered as literate. A person who can only read but cannot write is not literate. It is not necessary that to be considered as literate, a person should have received any formal education or passed any minimum educational standard. Literacy rate of the population is defined as the percentage of literates in the age-group seven years and above. The difference between male literacy and female literacy is known as literacy gap. Women's access to education which is one of the important sources of empowerment can be measured by gender gap in literacy rates.

The Table-3 describes the numbers of literates, illiterates and literacy rate (excluding children under 6 years of age) by sex in towns of Kokrajhar district. In the district, the number of literates in urban is 43415, which is 79 percent of total urban population of which 82.79 percent are males and 74.97 percent are females. If we look at the number of illiterate persons, number of male illiterates surpasses the female illiterates in case of all the four towns and district as an aggregate. Among the towns in the district, Kokrajhar (MB) town recorded the highest and Salakati (CT) recorded the lowest number of literates as well as illiterates. In terms of literacy rate, Gossaigaon (TC) is highest with 90.21 percent and

Salakati (CT) the lowest with 76.93 percent. Salakati (TC) recorded the highest regarding the gap in male female literacy rate with 14.9 percent, and the lowest is seen in Kokrajhar (MB) with 7.48 percent. It is notable that the female literacy rate is much lower than male literacy rate in all the four town areas of Kokrajhar district. Though the male and female literacy rate of all the towns under study are much higher than State's overall average, but the female literacy rate of all the towns is lagging far behind the male literacy rate. This is also clear from the literacy gap existing in all four towns which indicates a serious cause of concern as men outperform women in basic educational attainment.

Table 3: Number of Literates, Illiterates (along with percentage mentioned in braces) and Literacy Rate in Towns of Kokrajhar District

Town/District	No. of Literates			No. of Illiterates			Literacy Rate			Literacy Gap
	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	
Gossaigaon (TC)	7307 (80.58)	4029 (84.25)	3278 (76.48)	1761 (19.42)	753 (15.75)	1008 (23.52)	90.21	93.94	86.01	7.93
Padmabil (CT)	4893 (71.18)	2664 (76.11)	2229 (66.06)	1981 (28.82)	836 (23.89)	1145 (33.94)	81.60	86.95	76.08	10.87
Kokrajhar (MB)	27923 (81.80)	14929 (84.98)	12994 (78.42)	6213 (18.20)	2638 (15.02)	3575 (21.58)	89.96	93.59	86.11	7.48
Salakati (CT)	3292 (67.69)	1940 (74.33)	1352 (60.01)	1571 (32.31)	670 (25.67)	901 (39.99)	76.93	83.77	68.87	14.9
Dist Urban Kokrajhar	43415 (79.02)	23562 (82.79)	19853 (74.97)	11526 (20.98)	4897 (17.21)	6629 (25.03)	87.86	91.97	83.44	8.53
Kokrajhar Dist (Urban+Rural)	489305 (55.16)	275220 (60.77)	214085 (49.30)	397837 (44.84)	177685 (39.23)	220152 (50.70)	65.22	71.89	58.27	13.62

Source: Census of India 2011: Assam, District Census Hand Book, Kokrajhar Part A: Village & Town Directory (accessed through <http://censusindia.gov.in>)

Economic participation: Women's work force participation is a critical element of economic empowerment. Economic empowerment of women can be understood through assessing the economic participation of women in different economic activities. Economic empowerment of women means empowering women for availing new employment opportunities for generating income through various means. Joshi (1998) pointed out that women's work participation rate and her being economically independent is very vital for determining the economic status of women. The work participation rate indicates the access of the people to the means of livelihood (Barman and Morang, 2016).

Work Participation Rate: Work participation rate means percentage of total workers (Main + Marginal) to total population. Census 2011 recognised a person who has worked for major part of reference period (i.e. six months or more during the last one year preceding

the date of enumeration) in any economically productive activity is termed as ‘Main worker’; whereas a person who worked for 3 months or less but less than six months of the reference period (i.e. in the last one year preceding the date of enumeration) in any economic activity is termed as ‘Marginal worker’. When more women work, economies grow. An increase in female labour force participation—or a reduction in the gap between women’s and men’s labour force participation—results in faster economic growth.

The Table 4 shows the number and percentage of main workers, marginal workers and non-workers by Sex in towns of the district in 2011. From the table it is seen that the total workers of the Towns is 38.49 percent, with 58.31 percent males and 17.2 percent females. The main workers recorded 33.17 percent with 52.63 percent male and 12.26 percent female whereas marginal workers recorded 5.32 percent with 5.67 percent male and 4.94 percent female. Among the towns Salakati (CT) recorded the highest percentage of total worker with 47.93 percent, and the lowest is seen in Padmabil (CT) with 32.38 percent. In main-workers category the highest percentage is seen in Salakati (CT) with 42.69 percent and the lowest is seen in Padmabil (CT) with 25.55 percent. In marginal-workers category the highest percentage is seen in Padmabil (CT) with 6.84 percent and the lowest is seen in Gossaigaon (TC) with 2.53 percent. Looking at the male-female participation, huge variation is observed in the category of main workers in case of aggregate urban areas of the district as well as in all four towns. In case of all the towns there are not much differences observed between male-female in case of marginal workers but a significant variation is observed in case of main workers which ultimately leads to colossal variation in male-female in case of total worker category. In case of work participation rate female work participation rate is far lower than male work participation rate because of wide variation in male-female in case of total worker category. This implies that low work participation rate of female is an indication of less women’s participation in economic activities.

Table 4: Distribution of Workers and Work Participation Rate by sex in Towns of Kokrajhar District - 2011(Percentage of workers mentioned in braces)

Town/Dist	Main Workers			Marginal Workers			Total Workers			Work Participation Rate		
	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female
Gossaigaon (TC)	2990 (32.97)	2599 (54.35)	391 (9.12)	229 (2.53)	120 (2.51)	109 (2.54)	3219 (35.50)	2719 (56.86)	500 (11.67)	35.50	56.86	11.67
Padmabil (CT)	1756 (25.55)	1515 (43.29)	241 (7.14)	470 (6.84)	291 (8.31)	179 (5.31)	2226 (32.38)	1806 (51.60)	420 (12.45)	32.38	51.60	12.45
Kokrajhar (MB)	11403 (33.40)	9374 (53.36)	2029 (12.25)	1969 (5.77)	1059 (6.03)	910 (5.49)	13372 (39.17)	10433 (59.39)	2939 (17.74)	39.17	59.39	17.74
Salakati (CT)	2076 (42.69)	1491 (57.13)	585 (25.97)	255 (5.24)	145 (5.56)	110 (4.88)	2331 (47.93)	1636 (62.68)	695 (30.85)	47.93	62.68	30.85
Dist Urban Kokrajhar	18225 (33.17)	14979 (52.63)	3246 (12.26)	2923 (5.32)	1615 (5.67)	1308 (4.94)	21148 (38.49)	16594 (58.31)	4554 (17.20)	38.49	58.31	17.20
Kokrajhar Dist	253110 (28.53)	198804 (43.90)	54306 (12.51)	88021 (9.92)	37518 (8.28)	50503 (11.6)	341131 (38.45)	236322 (52.18)	104809 (24.14)	38.5	52.2	24.1

Source: Census of India 2011: Assam, District Census Hand Book, Kokrajhar Part A& Part B: Village & Town Directory (accessed through <http://censusindia.gov.in>)

Gender Development Index (GDI): The GDI is a gender-inequality adjusted measure of overall human development (Klasen and Schuler, 2009).GDI is calculated to know the relative status of men and women and to rank the various towns under consideration on the basis of selected indicators. It helps to understand the socio-economic status of women in the various towns in Kokrajhar. The calculated value of GDI against various towns is shown in the following table 5

Table5: Town wise Gender Development Index in the Kokrajhar District

Town	EDLI	EDWPI	GDI	Rank
Gossaigaon (TC)	0.900172	0.201347	0.55076	1
Padmabil (CT)	0.812519	0.20222	0.50737	2
Kokrajhar (MB)	0.291325	0.105726	0.198525	3
Salakati (CT)	0.234812	0.138817	0.186814	4

Calculated by author himself on the basis secondary data collected from census 2011

(The goalpost values for calculating dimension index for literacy rate and work participation rate are maximum 100 and minimum 0{zero} respectively, as per Human Development Report 2005)

It is observed from the table that there is a wide difference between Equally Distributed Literacy Index (EDLI) and Equally Distributed Work Participation Index (EDWPI) especially for the first two towns in the above table which means that most of the literate women in these two towns are having very low work participation rate. If we rank towns as per GDI value it is clear that Gossaigaon occupies the top position and salakati occupies the bottom. The top position of Gossaigaon is mainly attributed to the highest value of Equally Distributed Literacy Index (EDLI). In case of Kokrajhar (MB) and Salakati (CT), though the difference between EDLI and EDWPI is less but the low indices value results in low value of GDI. In other words, women in these two towns are underprivileged as far as literacy rate and work participation rate are concerned.

Conclusion: Women empowerment is multi-dimensional process. The complexity of the problem itself requires indepth study on socio-economic considerations both at micro as well as at macro level. The finding of the present study reveals that out of four towns, sex ratio in three towns is well below District's aggregate sex. This brings out the fact that there are less number of women per 1000 men in the area under study which is not at all a healthy trend for the society as skewed sex ratio generates more crimes and violences against women.

Regarding literacy rate, though the female literacy rate of each town is higher than the District's aggregate female literacy rate, still there exists significant gap between male and female literacy rate in all the four towns. A significant proportion of women from each town

Women Empowerment and Socio-Economic Development: ... Pradip Brahmachary & Anindita Brahmachary

is unable to read and write and they are devoid of getting basic education facility. Thus the overall performance of female literacy is not at all impressive in comparison with male literacy rate. In case of work participation rate female work participation rate is far lower than male work participation rate which is an indication of less women's participation in economic activities. The low work participation rate of women may not necessarily be an indication of women's powerlessness. This may take place even as a consequence of socio-economic progress. There are few studies which points out that women are force to work because of economic hardship of the family. So, with improvement in the economic condition, their compulsion to work may slowly be receding (Das, 2008).

Finally the overall socio-economic status of women is measured with the help of GDI. It is observed that GDI is at medium level in case of two towns viz. Gossaigaon and Padmabil and at low level in case of rest two towns viz. Kokrajhar (MB) and Salakati(CT). No town has scored GDI value of highest level category. Equally Distributed Literacy Index (EDLI) is much higher than the Equally Distributed Work Participation Index (EDWPI) in Gossaigaon (TC) and Padmabil (CT) which implies that most of the literate women in these two towns are not attached in work participation.

Though it is difficult to pass judgement on the status of women by using a few selected criteria, but on the basis of selected indicators it can be concluded that the overall socio-economic status of the women in urban parts of Kokrajhar district is not at all impressive. The probable reasons of poor socio-economic status and pitiable condition of women may be due to male dominance, lack of awareness and the poor implementation of government policies. This necessitates an urgent call for proper monitoring of various ongoing schemes on women empowerment and for that purpose voluntary associations have to play key role along with government organizations. More initiatives need to be taken by the Government and more NGOs should come forward for implementing those schemes successfully because the pace of economic development of this region cannot be augmented without strengthening women.

Acknowledgement: The author is thankful to ICSSR, New Delhi for sanctioning project grant under Major Research Project 2017-18. This paper is an outcome of the initial stage of the project work.

References:

1. Barman, B.K. and Hori Chander Morang (2016): Empowerment of Tribal Woman In Assam: A Study in Srivastava, M. K. (Ed) in *Women Empowerment in North East India-The Context and Concerns*, Lakshi Publishers, New Delhi
2. Census of India 2011: Assam, District Census Hand Book, Kokrajhar Part A & Part B: Village & Town Directory (accessed through <http://censusindia.gov.in/>)
3. Das, B (2008) "A Glimse on the Status of Plains Tribal women of Assam in the Perspective of Women Empowerment" in *Empowerment of Tribal Women in Assam*, Directorate of Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Schedule Castes, Jawahar Nagar, Guwahati

4. Dash, N. R. (1986): "Determinants and Correlates of Spatial Pattern of Tribal Literacy in North-East India", *Hill Geographer*, Vol. V (1&2), pp. 1-12.
5. Human Development Report 2005, Published for the United Nations Development, New York, New York, USA
6. India, HDR, 2011: India Human Development Report Towards Social Inclusion, Institute of Applied Manpower Research, Planning Commission, Government of India
7. James, K.S. (2004) 'A Note on the Sex Ratio from 2001 Census results in Andhra Pradesh', in Ramchandrudu, G & Rao, M. P. (Ed) *Census 2001 & Human Devlin India*, Serials Publications, New Delhi, pp: 1-12
8. Joshi, S.T. (1998): Women and Development, the Changing Scenario, Mittal Publication, New Delhi
9. Klasen, S and D. Schuler, (2009), "Reforming the Gender-Related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM): Some Specific Proposals", Ibero-American Institute for Economic Research (IAI), Georg-August-Universitat Gottingen, Discussion Papers no. 186.
10. Panucha, Suman and AnkitaKhatik (2005), "Empowerment of Rural Woman", *Social Action*, Vol. 55, p. 349, 2005.)
11. Phukon, D (2008) Gender Development Approach and Social Protection: Understanding the Case of Assam, *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 69, No. 4 (OCT. - DEC., 2008), pp. 771-785).