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RESEARCH ARTICLE

TRENDS AND PATTERNS OF GENDER DISPARITIES IN EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT IN ASSAM

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Abstract

Inclusive growth and social justice are essential determinants that depend on gender equality in education and employment, especially in socio-economically vulnerable regions like Assam (Sen, 1999; UNDP, 2018). This paper investigates the trends and patterns of gender inequality in education and employment in Assam which is based on the secondary data that include the Census of India, PLFS, NFHS and government reports. The discussion targets three main areas, namely, educational attainment, employment participation, and structural determinants of gender inequality. The results indicate that despite significant gains in female literacy and enrolment in primary schools, there are still unequal outcomes at secondary and tertiary education because of socio-cultural restrictions, infrastructural limitations, and economic considerations (Sharma, 2020; Ministry of Education, 2022). The participation of female labour force in the labour market is still much lower compared to that of males, and women are mostly involved in informal and low-paying jobs (Boruah and Das, 2022; Roy and Barua, 2022). The paper also finds a significant gap between educational progress and labour market performance, which is fuelled by patriarchal values, scarce career prospects, and institutional constraints (Kabeer, 1999). The article presents the argument that gender differences in education and employment are combined and based on structural inequalities. It highlights the importance of combined policy response in terms of educational retention, skills building, labour market inclusion, and gender-sensitive governance. The paper finds that gender equality in Assam should be pursued through long-term institutional mobilization and comprehensive development.

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Introduction:-

The concept of gender equality has traditionally been considered as a pillar of social development, economic growth, and democracy (Sen, 1999; World Bank, 2014). Globally, the nature of inequality between men and women in terms of educational opportunities, workplaces, and access to economic resources still affect inequality patterns, especially in developing countries, where institutional constraints (poverty, socio-cultural values, poor infrastructure, and lack of institutional support) contribute to gender inequalities (Kabeer, 1999; UNDP, 2018). Even though India has made significant advances in both educational growth and women empowerment programs, the country remains characterized by gender disparities in various socio-economic indicators (Desai and Jain, 2019). Domestically, the differences between regions are sharp, and such states as Assam pose their own unique challenges and opportunities to study the dynamics of gender inequality (Nayak and Mahanta, 2015).

The socio-economic profile of Assam is defined by rural majority population, ethnic diversity, environmental susceptibility, like frequent floods, and uneven development across districts, which all influence access to education and participation in the labour markets (Government of Assam, 2025). Assam historically had a large number of women contributing to the household and subsistence economies through agriculture, handloom production and informal sector activities. Nevertheless, most of this contribution is not reflected or not well reflected in official employment data, which leads to the incomplete evaluation of the economic activity of women (Borah, 2018). Therefore, gender inequalities in education and labour are associated not only with differences in access but also with additional structural inequalities embedded in social, economic, and institutional organization.

Education is generally considered to be a major factor in determining the employment, acquisition of skills, and socio-economic mobility. The greater the education, the better the labour market and earning capacity (Kingdon, 2007). However, the connection between education and a job is not always linear especially among women. In most situations, as female educational attainment increases, workforce participation does not correspondingly rise because of the entrenched gender norms, division of labour, and caregiving (Boruah and Das, 2022). In various Indian states, such as Assam, this paradox can be observed, with the female literacy rates increasing significantly, yet the percentage of female labour force participation in the country is quite low (Roy and Barua, 2022).

An emerging literature indicates that the relationship between gender inequality in education and employment is a phenomenon that is linked by culture, labour market, institutions, and policy environments (Kabeer, 1999; Sharma, 2020). These interlinkages are critical to understanding effective and context-specific interventions to be applied in minimizing gender inequality. In this regard, an analytical study on Assam is required to do in-depth analysis to establish trends, patterns and produce policy-relevant information on the structural aspects of gender gaps in education and employment.

Conceptual Framework:-

The theoretical framework of the paper is based on the fact that gender differences in education and employment are multidimensional processes that are influenced by a combination of structural, socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors. Gender disparity: the lack of equality in access to opportunities, resources and outcomes between men and women in all sectors of life especially in the fields of education and labour markets (Kabeer, 1999). Education is commonly considered as a very important type of human capital in the development theory as it improves skills, productivity and opportunities of finding jobs (Becker, 1993). Nevertheless, feminist and structural approaches believe that acquiring education is not enough to achieve fair employment results because labour markets tend to be gender-biased, discriminatory, and institutionalized (Sen, 1999).

Gender differences in education and employment in the case of Assam can be understood as processes instead of separate problems. The access and attainment of education affect the employability of women, the level of skills, and the mobility within the occupation, and the job can determine whether to continue education and acquire new skills. Empirical data reveal that female literacy and survey enrolment in Assam is the area that has improved, but the participation of women in the labour force is relatively low, which suggests that the contribution of education to economic inclusion is weak (Boruah and Das, 2022; Roy and Barua, 2022). This association implies that educational gains are translated into employment outcomes through the intermediary of labour market arrangements, access to decent employment, and social anticipations about gender roles.

The model thus places the gender gaps in education (literacy, enrolment, retention, higher education participation) as the two major explanatory variables affecting employment outcomes (labour force participation, occupational

distribution, wage levels), though both are also shaped by the broader contextual determinants of socio-economic status, rural–urban location, cultural norms, infrastructure, and policy environments (UNDP, 2018; Sharma, With the combination of these dimensions, the conceptual framework offers an integrated analytical view of the interaction of structural inequalities and institutional conditions to create and reproduce gender disparities in the education and employment systems in Assam.

Review of Literature:-

Boruah and Das (2022) carried out a study on ‘Female Labour Force Participation Rates in Assam: Trends, Composition and Determinants.’ This paper examines the trends in female labour force participation in Assam in terms of national survey data and the results are that the participation rate of women in Assam is still way below that of men even after education has improved. The authors demonstrate that the majority of working women are concentrated in agriculture and informal sectors, which is a manifestation of structural constraints in obtaining formal jobs. Education enhances the chances of participation but does not ensure employment because of the labour market limits and socio-cultural barriers. The paper concludes that gender differences in the job market are determined not only by human capital conditions but also by institutional and regional differences which limit the access of women to gainful employment.

Roy and Barua (2022) made a study on ‘Women’s Workforce in Assam: Insights on Composition and Determinants from PLFS Data.’ This study analyses the nature of the women workforce in Assam and its determinants using data of Periodic Labour Force Survey. It concludes that women are overrepresented in self-employment and unpaid family work, which reflects underreporting of women and their economic contribution to the economy. Education and urban living have positive effects on the workforce participation, but marital status and household duties have negative effects. The research notes that gender disparities still exist in all sectors and suggests specific labour policies and labour skills development programs to facilitate the increase in the number of women in the labour market and curb the structural limitations in the labour market.

Nayak and Mahanta (2015) made a study on ‘Gender Disparity and Women Empowerment in Assam.’ This paper is a detailed account of gender inequality in Assam in terms of education, employment, health and social indicators. It indicates that despite the increased female literacy over the years, gender inequality in the workforce and economic autonomy is still sharp. The authors explain these gaps by the patriarchal norms, economic dependence, and a lack of access to resources. The paper underlines that gender inequality cannot be eradicated solely through education unless there are equal gains in the areas of employment and institutionalization. It concludes that development strategies need to be integrated to ensure women empowerment, and structural gender differences in the state are minimized.

Abdul R. Y. (2019) carried out a study on ‘Gender Disparity in Educational Development in Assam.’ The research paper is specifically based on the gender inequality in the educational development in districts of Assam. It concludes that despite the fact that the primary level of gender parity has been achieved, there are still gaps in secondary and higher education levels because of the socio-economic factors, early marriage, and infrastructure deficit. There are higher gender disparities in rural areas than in urban areas. The paper states that poverty and social norms restricting access to schooling to girls are closely related to the inequality in education. It suggests specific re-interventions like; scholarships, transport facilities and awareness programmes to enhance retention and enrolment of girls in higher education.

Sharma (2020) carried out a study on ‘District-Level Educational Disparities in Assam.’ This study through district level analysis determines regional disparities in gender gaps in literacy, enrolment and school completion rates. It concludes that less socio-economically developed districts have greater gender gap in education. Women dropout is especially high in the rural and marginalized communities because of economic strains and household duties. The study shows that infrastructural disparities such as absence of secondary schools and inadequate transport have a dissimilar impact on educational continuation of girls. The author concludes that gender inequality in education can be reduced in Assam by tackling the issue of uneven regional development.

Borah (2018) made a study on ‘Women’s Work Participation in Northeast India with Reference to Assam.’ This paper examines trends in the labour participation by women in Northeast India and the uniqueness of women labour in Assam. It concludes that women play significant roles in agricultural production, household industries and informal economic activity but their work is not reflected in official statistics. The paper contends that traditional

measures of employment do not capture the economic contribution of women since they do not capture unpaid and subsistence activities. It concludes that gender differences in employment figures are evidence of limitations in measurement and structural inequalities and that gender sensitive data collection and labour policies are needed.

Objectives of the Study:

- i. To examine the trends and patterns of gender disparities in education in Assam
- ii. To analyze the extent and nature of gender gaps in employment in Assam
- iii. To identify the structural determinants underlying gender disparities and to derive policy implications for reducing gender inequality in Assam.

Research Methodology:

This paper will use a descriptive and analytical research design that is all based on secondary data. The sources used to collect the data are credible such as the Census of India, Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), National Sample Survey (NSS), National Family Health Survey (NFHS), Government of Assam statistical reports and Ministries of Education and Labour publications. Also, pertinent scholarly journals, books, and policy documents have been examined to reinforce the analysis framework. Thematic approach has been utilized to study the trends and patterns of gender disparities in education and employment whereas the comparative analysis has been utilized to determine the differences among regions, sectors and socio-economic groups. The paper also incorporates the existing literature understanding to explain policy implications and structural determinants. The methodology will allow a thorough and systematic interpretation of gender inequality in Assam in a wider socio-economic and institutional framework.

Discussions and Results:-

The following section entails an in-depth discussion of the results of the secondary data as per the objectives of the research. It looks at the current patterns and trends of gender disparities in education and employment in Assam and looks at some of the structural determinants that impact on the disparities. The discussion incorporates empirical findings of national survey, census data and available literature to give a holistic picture of gender inequality in the state. The findings are tabulated in an objective-by-objective manner so as to have systematic interpretation in order to be able to derive any meaningful policy implications.

Trends and Patterns of Gender Disparities in Education in Assam:=

The secondary data analysis shows that there are significant positive changes in both access to and participation of women in education in Assam over the last several decades. The rates of female literacy have gone up significantly, as a result of national and state-level initiatives like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Right to Education framework (Government of India, 2011). According to census data, the gender gap in literacy has narrowed steadily, but there are still unequal levels of literacy, especially in rural and socio-economically disadvantaged districts (Census of India, 2011). Girls have been enrolled in the elementary level in large numbers due to the expansion of primary education infrastructure and other incentives like mid-day meals and scholarships.

Nevertheless, the analysis shows that gender differences are still more severe at higher education stages, especially at the secondary and higher secondary levels. Research suggests that the rates of dropout among girls are likely to rise after the primary level because of a complex of socio-cultural and economic reasons, such as early marriage, domestic duties, and security issues (Sharma, 2020). The information provided by UDISE+ reports further supports the idea that although gender disparity is mostly met at the primary level, the retention and transition rates of girls decrease as they advance in the educational system (Ministry of Education, 2022).

The issue of regional differences also contributes to the educational outcomes. Poverty, geographical isolation, and infrastructural deficiencies are the features of the districts that experience larger gender gaps in education (Government of Assam, 2025). Recurrent displacement in char and flood prone regions interferes with schooling and with girls being more prone to end schooling, the displacement affects girls disproportionately. Abdul R. Y. According to (2019), other obstacles to education that affect rural girls include lack of transportation, poor sanitation in schools, and secondary institutions, among others, all of which impede the continuity of education.

In the level of higher education, women participation has been enhanced but still disproportionate in the various fields. The gendered patterns of subject choice are manifested by women being more likely to attend arts and

humanities streams, whereas the proportion of women in science and technical subjects is lower than that of men (AISHE, 2021). The long-term consequences of this segregation are based on employment opportunities because STEM-related areas are more likely to provide better-paying and more stable jobs. The quality of education is another important dimension, but the difference in it is significant in various parts of the country. In rural and disadvantaged schools, there is a high possibility of insufficient infrastructure, trained educators, and digital access, which influence the learning outcomes and disproportionately affect female disadvantaged pupils (UNESCO, 2020). Moreover, socio-economic forces like poverty and parental levels of education affect the educational levels of girls, and this fact supports intergenerational inequalities.

In general, the research results imply that, although Assam has achieved a lot in enhancing female literacy and enrolment, gender disparities in education are conditioned by structural inequalities. The fact that dropout rates, regional disparities and disciplinary segregation have remained stagnant shows that access is not enough but retention, quality and equity should be considered as well. Such trends underscore the necessity of specific interventions that can overcome supply-side and demand-side challenges to education of girls.

Extent and Nature of Gender Gaps in Employment in Assam:-

The comparison of employment statistics indicates that gender inequality in the labour market is still significant in Assam, even after women have become more educated. The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) shows that female labour force participation rates (FLFP) in Assam are considerably lower than those of men, indicating the continuing gender disparities in the access to the labour market opportunities (Government of India, 2022). Although men do mostly participate in formal and wage-earning jobs, women do not take part in anything other than informal jobs and low salary earning jobs or even unpaid jobs.

A major observation is that women are highly concentrated in the agricultural sector and informal sectors where the employment is marked by low productivity, low-income security and social insecurity. Research shows that a considerable share of women in Assam is either doing unpaid family labour or subsistence agriculture, which is usually not recorded in the official figures of employment (Borah, 2018). The result of this is that it underestimates the contribution of women to the economy and the actual level of their involvement in the economy.

Another significant area of gender inequalities in work is known as occupational segregation. Women are over-represented in the traditional feminized industries like handloom, home workers and small-scale trading, with their participation in formal sectors like administration, industry and technology being minimal (Desai and Jain, 2019). As Roy and Barua (2022) emphasize, education raises the chances of women joining the workforce, yet the barriers that prevent their participation include the absence of appropriate employment opportunities, discrimination at workplaces, and social norms.

Gender inequality in employment is also manifested through wage disparity. It is indicated that women tend to earn less than men with equal work, especially in the informal sectors where the regulatory bodies are not so strict (ILO, 2018). This disparity is caused by the lack of equal pay mechanisms and low bargaining power. Moreover, women also have intermittent employment in the household, childcare, and social obligations, which impacts their earning capacity and career advancement.

There are also urban-rural disparities. The women in the urban areas are relatively better educated and have access to more job opportunities, both formal sector jobs and professional jobs. Conversely, rural women are exposed to a variety of limitations, such as unavailability of jobs, restriction on mobility, and reliance on agriculture. This is further exacerbated by infrastructural constraints and absence of skill development opportunities (NSSO, 2019).

A significant paradox observed in the literature is that the rise in education levels among women has not been accompanied by corresponding rises in the workforce participation. Boruah and Das (2022) claim that this disconnection is explained by structural and cultural factors that reduce the possibility of women to transform educational achievements into job results. On the same note, the IWWAGE (2025) report observes that social norms and the absence of childcare facilities largely lower the participation of women in the labour market.

To conclude, it is observed in the analysis that gender differences in employment in Assam are low labour force participation, occupational segregation, wage inequality, and regional disparities. Such trends are indicative of structural and socio-cultural restrictions and are deeply rooted, which restricts the economic opportunities of women despite their education advancement.

Structural Determinants and Policy Implications:-

Gender inequality in education and employment in Assam can be explained by the intricate combination of structural factors, such as socio-cultural norms, economic factors, institutional constraints, and environmental factors. The determinants are important to understand to develop effective policy interventions.

Patriarchal social norms are one of the most important determinants as they define the gender roles and expectations in families and the society. Women are prone to focus on home chores at the expense of education and work thus their level of skills and economic involvement is constrained (Kabeer, 1999). Women also have limited access to education and jobs especially in the countryside due to early marriage and division of labour along gender lines.

It is also strongly dependent upon economic constraints. Sometimes poverty and income insecurity contributes to girls receiving less education as opposed to boys, particularly higher education. The financial means are minimal, which limits access to good education, vocational training, and jobs (UNDP, 2018). Also, access to credit and productive assets is a limitation to the entrepreneurial activities of women.

Disparities are further aggravated by institutional factors like poor infrastructure, poor policy execution and lack of job opportunities. There is a shortage of schools, transport, and healthcare systems in most areas of Assam and remote and flood-prone areas in particular, which impedes access to education and employment (Government of Assam, 2025). Floods are an environmental weakness that upsets schooling and livelihoods with a higher proportion being women and girls. In terms of policy, these challenges have to be tackled in a multi-dimensional and combined approach. The educational policies must be aimed at enhancing retention of girls by use of scholarships, secure transport and better schooling facilities. Regional disparities can be mitigated by extension of secondary and tertiary education institutions in the rural settings.

Policy of labour markets must be geared towards improving the employment of women by providing them with skills and entrepreneurial encouragement and encouraging women friendly work environments. Women should be allowed to be more engaged in the workforce by ensuring that they are paid equally, have childcare centres, and that their labour rights are upheld (ILO, 2018). Moreover, convergence of policies is necessary. Education, labour and social welfare sectors can be coordinated to bring synergies that would promote effectiveness of the interventions. Monitoring systems based on data must be created to trace the progress and find gaps in gender equality efforts.

Finally, the results indicate that the gender gaps in education and employment in Assam are also embedded in the structural and institutional aspects. To tackle these inequalities, a long-term political commitment, specific interventions, and transition to gender-responsive development policies that facilitates access to education and economic empowerment are needed.

Findings of the Study:-

This study shows that the existing gender difference in education and employment in Assam remains even though some of the indicators have significantly improved. In the education sector, the comparison suggests that the literacy levels and enrolment at the primary level among females has been on the rise over the period owing to the government intervention and the rise in social awareness. Nevertheless, the differences are still clear at secondary and higher education levels, whereby girls have a relatively high dropout rate. Early marriages, family commitments, inaccessibility, and security remain to be among the issues that have been affecting the continuation of education among girls especially in rural and economically disadvantaged areas. Furthermore, there is still gender segregation in subject selection where women are still underrepresented in science and technical subjects, which restricts their opportunities of getting jobs in future.

With regard to employment, the researcher concludes that the female labour force participation in Assam is still significantly low in comparison to that of men, regardless of the gains in education. Women are mostly involved in informal sectors like agriculture, handloom and unpaid family work, which are usually marked by low wages, job insecurity and absence of social protection. Occupational segregation is a major problem since women are clustered in low-skilled and low-paying positions, and their presence in formal and high-paying sectors is still scarce. The difference in wages between men and women working on similar jobs also speaks volumes of the ingrained inequality in the labour market.

Another major gap that is found in the study is the lack of connection between education and employment outcomes. Though the access to education among women has been enhanced, this has not been matched by the proportionality in terms of employment. Socio-cultural norms, which favour domestic duties among women, and structural

constraints such as poor employment opportunities, insufficient skills acquisition, and insufficient institutional assistance among others contribute greatly to this gap. In addition, the conclusions reveal that structural determinants, including poverty, regional inequalities, infrastructural constraints, and environmental susceptibility, contribute to gender inequality. Women in marginalized, rural and flood prone regions are also at a disadvantage that is compounded limiting their access to education and jobs. On the whole, the research finds that gender inequalities in Assam are multidimensional and in-depth, and to bring about sustainable and inclusive growth, the combination of gender-sensitive and gender-responsive policy interventions is needed.

Conclusion:-

This paper has reviewed various trends and patterns of gender inequalities in education and employment in Assam by analysing secondary data and available literature. The results show that the state has achieved impressive gains in female literacy, enrolment, and access to education although at advanced stages of education and across the regions there are still significant inequalities. The level of poverty, early marriage, poor infrastructure and socio-cultural norms are structural barriers that still influence the education attainment and retention of girls. Within the employment sector, the research shows that the labour force participation of women has been significantly lower as compared to men and that most women have been concentrated in the informal, low remunerated and unacknowledged sectors. The lack of economic linkage between education and labour market performance points to the weaknesses of the human capital approach, in the sense that labour market institutions, gender normativity, and institutional constraints still limit the economic participation of women.

The analysis also highlights that gender inequalities in education and labour are interconnected and conditioned by more general structural factors, such as regional inequalities, environmental insecurity, and insufficient access to resources and opportunities. The solution to these disparities is a holistic and integrated policy platform that will not only have the effect of improving access to education, skills and increasing women participation in the labour market. Conclusively, gender equality in Assam requires a long-term institutional will, interventions, and gender-sensitive policies which deal with both education and economic aspects. It is necessary to focus on the holistic approach that would question the structural inequalities and create the inclusive opportunities to guarantee that women are fairly involved in the process of state development.

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