



## **‘Beti Padhao’- A Reality or Fantasy! Reference to Northeast India**

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### **Abstract :**

Education for girls is a critical component in addressing prejudice and gender disparities. Understanding the current state of girls' education may point to developing a strategic solution to the country's persisting constraints. This paper aims to explore the status of 'Beti Padhao' in the northeastern states of India. The paper deals with eight northeastern states of India since not enough studies were done on the region. This study is based on secondary sources of data and descriptive. The status of female literacy in the northeastern region has been examined with the help of two indicators, i.e., literacy rate and gross enrolment rate. This study found that the females are catching up to males at all levels of education, but not by much; yet, the crucial fact is that the gap between males and females is expanding as education levels rise. The enrollment in elementary education (primary and upper primary) is higher in northeastern states. It might be justified by the Mid-day meal scheme and free education in schools that attract pupil to the school at the elementary level. Furthermore, the 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan' of the Indian government encourages students to attend school by making elementary education accessible and mandatory. Interestingly, dropout rates in northeastern states for girls in school education are higher than all Indian levels. With political will and better policy implementation, particularly emphasizing better economic opportunities and job creation, higher female enrolment could be achieved. The only requirement is the right intent, consistent and efficient execution of all initiatives. The New education policy might play a significant role in its ambitious goal.

**Keywords :** *Beti Padhao; Education; Literacy rate; Gross Enrolment Rate; North East India.*

### **Introduction :**

For a long time, women in our culture have been subjected to discrimination and prejudice. They have been denied fundamental rights, the

most egregious of which is the right to be born. As a result, in certain sections of the country, a falling sex ratio is emerging, which is cause for considerable concern. Every person of India has



the right to equality under the Indian constitution (Article 14). It enshrines the general principles of equality before the law and bans unjustified discrimination among Indian citizens. Gender-based sex discrimination in the elimination of female children, on the other hand, is a violation of human rights and the right to life protected by the constitution.

Son preference and the burden of protecting female sexuality, low value of girl child, social evils such as dowry, rituals; gender-based sex selection, neglect of girl child resulting in higher mortality at younger ages, higher childhood mortality, female infanticide, lineage issues, patriarchal structure, old age security, the low sex ratio at birth are some of the reasons for consistently low levels of child sex ratio (BBBP report, 2015). Empowerment of women is one of the prime critical strategies for establishing a sphere of sustainable development. Sustainable development will be impossible to achieve without a more fair allocation of resources: current imbalances are heavily gendered (UN ECE Discussion paper, 2012). Promoting gender equality has two justifications. To begin with, gender equality—equal rights, opportunities, and responsibilities for men and women – is an issue of human rights and social justice. Furthermore secondly, that greater equality between women and men is also a precondition for (and effective indicator of) sustainable people-centered development. Women's and men's perspectives, interests, needs, and objectives must be considered a matter of social justice because they enrich the development processes.

For the last few decades, there is a continuous rise in awareness of the importance of

women's empowerment and obtaining gender parity through efforts that encourage social, economic, and political justice, as well as increased access to fundamental human rights, nutrition, health, and education. Women's and girls' disadvantages are a vital source of inequality. Women and girls are frequently discriminated against in education, health, and the labour market, with detrimental consequences for their liberties. Education for girls is a critical component in addressing prejudice and gender disparities. Understanding the current state of girls' education may point to developing a strategic solution to the country's persisting constraints. This paper tries to address some significant findings of India regarding girl education, particularly in the northeastern states.

Various researches have been conducted in India and around the world on the broad topic of girl education. This section of the paper contains some of the findings. Mahanta and Nayak (2013) examined the gap in enrolment ratio of classes I to V and VI-VII over 1999-2001 to 2009-10. The gap was highest in Assam (18.89) for class I to IV between 1999-2001 and lowest in Sikkim (0.84). Nevertheless, over time Assam performed better, and the gap became negative between 2009 and 2010. For the class VI to VII category, the gap in enrollment ratio was high in Assam between 1999 and 2001, but it became negative between 2009 and 2010. Das (2013) compared the status of women in the northeastern region to the rest of India using a variety of indicators, including female literacy, gross enrolment ratio, female workforce participation rate, , dropout rates, female infant mortality, sex ratio, age at marriage, and women's



involvement in decision-making. Dhar (2015) used several indices to study gender inequality in northeast India and discovered that there is still a significant gender disparity in enrolment, which is particularly large in higher education. In comparison to men, women have a lower rate of enrollment in higher education. The study found that Assam, Meghalaya witnessed a somewhat higher enrolment ratio of girls at the primary level than boys based on the Economic Survey report (2012-13). Devi (2013) pointed out that the average dropout rate for girls in Assam has increased from 5.0 percent in 2009-10 to 11.9 percent in 2011-12 at the primary level and from 13.5 percent in 2009-10 to 14.3 percent at the upper primary level. Deen (2014) found inter-state variation in gross enrollment ratio for higher education at the national level, and it stood for total, male and female 49.25%, 45.7%, and 60.56%, respectively.

Even though different studies have been conducted, there has yet to be a complete study of India's northeastern states and an examination of some of the region's most basic difficulties concerning girl education. The northeastern section of the country is distinct from the rest of the country in terms of geography, economics, climate, and politics. As a result, it deserves a thorough investigation, which this paper intended to do.

The rest of the paper is laid out as follows. Section 2 outlines the paper's objective, whereas section 3 describes the materials and methods employed in the study. The discussion and findings are presented in section 4, and section 5 concludes the paper.

### **Objective :**

This paper aims to explore the status of 'Beti Padhao' in the northeastern states of India.

It explores the status and journey of girl education in India, particularly in the northeast Indian states.

### **Material and Methods :**

The data used in the study are collected from various secondary sources like census reports of India, various educational reports of government, articles, and research papers. The literacy rate, the dropout rates, and the rank of the states in the gender gap in education were taken from the Census report, 2011; the level-wise enrolment in different educational levels and the gross enrolment rates are taken from the report of Educational Statistics at Glance, 2018. The gender gap at various educational levels is collected from the website of 'indiatat.com.'

The study primarily follows the descriptive research method. The status of female literacy in northeastern states has been examined with the help of two indicators, i.e., literacy rate and gross enrolment rate. These two indicators can be defined as follows-

**Literacy rate:** According to the Census of India 2011, literacy is defined as a person aged seven and up who can read and write in any language with understanding. The so-called Census literacy rate is the effective literacy rate, not the crude literacy rate.<sup>1</sup>

**Gross enrolment rate:** Gross enrolment ratio is the total enrolment in a specific level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the eligible official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education in a given school year (Educational Statistics at a Glance, 2018: p 11). The term 'school-age population' refers to the age group population officially associated with the appropriate educational level.





## Discussion and Results :

This section first discusses the status of girls' education at the national level of India with the help of trends in literacy rate and level-wise enrolment of girls at the different educational levels. The second part of this section analyses the northeastern scenario of girls' education, presenting various indicators of girls' education attainment, like literacy rate, gross enrolment of girls in the region, gender gap, and dropout rates of the girls at the different educational levels.

### Status of Girls' Education at the national level :

According to the 2011 Census, India's overall literacy rate is 74.00 percent, with women's literacy at 65.46 percent. In 2001, the percentage of women who were literate in the country was 54.16 percent. The country's literacy rate has increased from 18.33 percent in 1951 to 74.00 percent in 2011, according to the 2011 census. Female literacy had similarly risen from 8.86% in 1951 to 65.46% in 2011. Table 1 shows the year-wise literacy rate of India.

**Table 1. Literacy Rate in India**

Census year	Males' literacy (percentage)	Females' literacy (percentage)
1951	27.2	8.9
1961	40.4	15.4
1971	46.0	22.0
1981	56.4	29.8
1991	64.1	39.8
2001	75.3	53.7
2011	80.9	64.6

Source: Census 2011, India

Though the literacy rate is a good indicator of education, considering some other data would be helpful to have a deeper insight. Table 2 shows the level-wise enrolment in school and higher education and provides a comparative picture between males and females.

**Table 2. Level wise enrolment in different educational level**

Level of education	Male in percentage	Female in percentage
Elementary	51.64	48.36
Secondary	52.49	47.51
Senior Secondary	52.56	47.43
Higher Education	53.76	46.23

Source: Educational Statistics at a Glance, 2018

At all levels of education, females are catching up to males, although not by much; yet, the essential aspect is that the gender gap is widening as education levels grow. Primary and upper primary education is included in elementary education, with females accounting for 48.20 percent and 48.63 percent of total enrollment. Females account for 48.6% of overall enrolment in higher education, according to All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2018-19, and the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for females in higher education is 26.4 percent, which is higher than the national GER for boys, which is 26.3 percent. In addition, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) has risen over the previous five years, rising from 0.92 in 2014-15 to 1 in 2018-19 (Public Information Bureau 2020).

In terms of the gross enrollment rate (GER) at various levels of education in India, girls



outnumber boys with a GER of 99.59 for girls and 94.53 for boys in elementary school. With a GER of 144.04 for girls in this level, Meghalaya is at the top of the list, while Andhra Pradesh is at the bottom with a GER of 83.11 for females.<sup>2</sup> In secondary school, India has a national average of 80.97 GER for girls and 79.16 GER for boys. With a GER of 126.14, Sikkim is at the top of the list for females, while Gujarat is at the bottom with a GER of 66.82. In senior secondary, Tamil Nadu ranks first among Indian states with a GER (female) of 90.60, while Bihar ranks worst with just a GER (female) of 36.66. Females have a lower GER (23.5) than males in higher education nationwide (25.4). At this level, Tamil Nadu leads the states with a GER (female) of 42.4, while Bihar ranks last with a GER (female) of 12.6. The Union territories, on the other

hand, are performing better, with Chandigarh topping the list with 70.4 GER for females.

### **Status of gross enrolment of girls in Northeast India :**

In this conflict-ridden environment, women in northeast India have also undergone a positional shift from traditional homemakers and passive spectators to peacemakers and combatants (Choudhuri 2021). However, in specific ways, women in India's northeastern area excel their counterparts elsewhere in the nation in terms of mobility, life choices, personal space, and other factors (Choudhuri 2021). Table 3 shows the literacy status of females in the Northeastern states of India by displaying the state's rankings; only the states shown in bold are regarded to be in India's northeastern states, out of a total of 22.

**Table 3. Female literacy and the gender gap in literacy rates**

States/UTs of India	Rank in female literacy	Rank in the gender gap in literacy rate	States/UTs of India	Rank in female literacy	Rank in the gender gap in literacy rate
Kerala	1	2	Gujarat	12	14
<b>Mizoram</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Assam</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>9</b>
Lakshadweep	3	5	Oissa	15	17
<b>Tripura</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	Chhattisgarh	16	22
Andaman and Nikobar island	5	6	Madhya Pradesh	17	20
Goa	6	8	Andhra Pradesh	18	13
<b>Nagaland</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	Arunachal Pradesh	19	11
Maharashtra	8	12	Uttar Pradesh	20	18
<b>Meghalaya</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>	Jammu and Kashmir	21	19
<b>Manipur</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	Jharkhand	22	23
Uttarakhand	11	16	Bihar	23	24
			<b>All India</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>

Source: Census of India, 2011 (Provisional Data) and (Choudhuri, 2021).



In addition to the literacy rate and gender gap in literacy rates, several indicators demonstrate the status of education among girls, including gross enrolment rate and dropout rates.

#### **Gross enrolment rate :**

Gross enrolment rate is the total enrolment in a specific level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the eligible official

school-age population corresponding to the same level of education in a given school year (Educational Statistics at a Glance, 2018: p 11). The term ‘school-age population’ refers to the age group population officially associated with the appropriate educational level. Table 4 highlights the gross enrolment rate in girls of northeastern states of India.

**Table 4. The gross enrolment rate in the northeastern state of India at different education level**

States	Primary	Upper Primary	Secondary	Senior Secondary	Higher Education
Arunachal Pradesh	125.88	133.20	87.58	61.60	28.5
Assam	107.59	98.75	83.04	39.47	14.7
Manipur	132.90	132.94	92.52	64.81	33.1
Meghalaya	143.12	146.20	93.94	47.03	21.1
Mizoram	121.00	133.60	110.85	57.86	23.0
Nagaland	100.96	106.60	74.57	36.44	15.6
Sikkim	98.32	157.85	126.14	75.88	38.5
Tripura	108.36	130.33	120.91	41.53	14.0
All India	108.36	97.57	80.97	56.41	23.5

Source: Educational Statistics at a Glance, 2018

The enrollment in elementary education (primary and upper primary) is higher in northeastern states. It might be justified by the Mid-day meal scheme and free education in schools that attract pupils to the school at the elementary level. Furthermore, the ‘*Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*’ of the Indian government encourages students to attend school by making elementary education accessible and mandatory.

#### **Gender gap in high school and higher education in northeastern states :**

In addition to understanding the state of the gross enrolment rate for girls, it is critical to comprehend the gender gap in the GER. This disparity will reflect the current state of girl empowerment via education and the remaining obstacles to achieving gender parity. The table below shows the gap in the northeastern states.



**Table 5: Gender gap (GG) in GER in northeastern states of India**

State	GG in class IX-X	GG in class XI-XII	GG in above class XII
Arunachal Pradesh	5.4	3.4	4.1
Assam	5.1	3.6	5.0
Manipur	3.4	6.9	3.4
Meghalaya	-0.9	-3.6	-1.6
Mizoram	-2.9	1.0	2.6
Nagaland	-2.1	1.6	1.8
Sikkim	-5.4	-1.9	5.7
Tripura	-0.3	6.9	3.6
India	8.2	6.1	3.2

Source: [www.indiastat.com](http://www.indiastat.com)

Around the world, there is a significant gender difference in schooling, which can be attributed to a variety of intersecting identities. Poverty, geographic isolation, violence, disability, poor infrastructure, or belonging to a minority ethnolinguistic community are the most prominent reasons for the gender gap. According to the World Bank, parents in Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East are concerned about their daughters' safety as they travel to and from school (<https://p4hglobal.org/>). This could result from young girls being sexually harassed or assaulted on public transportation ([data.unicef.org](http://data.unicef.org)). Families have financial hardship due to a lack of free education, particularly at the higher levels. Boys and girls are both affected by a lack of income, but other variables at play keep more girls out of school. Gender equality is essential for eradicating

poverty and growing a country's economy. Women with more education are more likely to work in the traditional job market. As a result, they earn more considerable earnings, allowing them to pull themselves, their communities, and, ultimately, their countries out of poverty ([worldbank.org](http://worldbank.org)).

As table 5 highlights, Meghalaya is performing well among the northeastern states, with a negative gender gap, which denotes more girls' enrolment over boys in education at all levels. It is seen that between IX to X class, all the northeastern states are doing well compared to the national gender gap. In the XI-XII level (i.e., the senior secondary level), six northeastern states, except Manipur and Tripura, are doing better than the national gap. However, in the case of above XII level, only two states are performing better than the national average, which indicates that the gender gap becomes wider at higher education level than the other lower educational level.

#### **School dropout rates of girls :**

A dropout is a student who leaves school before completing a school stage or at a non-terminal or intermediate point in a particular degree of education (Ministry of Human Resource Development). The high dropout rate is related to several situational factors and the resulting inequalities (Choudhuri 2021). These factors may include a combined family arrangement or the 'joint family system, traditional societies' cultural beliefs. It has been correctly observed that the neglect of women's interests is intimately linked to their exclusion from employment prospects, primary education, and property ownership (Sen, 2007). The following table shows the dropout of





the girl students from class I to class X in northeastern states of India.

**Table 6. School dropout rates of girls in Northeastern states of India**

State	School dropout rates of girls (percent)
Arunachal Pradesh	64.7
Assam	77.82
Manipur	55.71
Meghalaya	76.46
Mizoram	60.72
Nagaland	73.97
Sikkim	79.36
Tripura	62.34
All India	51.97

Source: Census of India 2011.

Table 6 highlights high dropout rates of northeastern states of India in comparison to the national average. Interestingly dropout rates in northeastern states for girls in school education level are higher than all India level. Dropout rates are high in Sikkim and low in Manipur among the northeastern states.

#### Conclusion :

This study looked into the level of female literacy in the northeastern states. Furthermore, a comparison of female literacy in the northeastern region to that of India has been attempted. In

northeastern states, enrolment in elementary (primary and upper primary) education is higher than in secondary and higher education in the rest of the country. Both the federal and state governments have recently expressed a desire to promote and support female involvement in all levels of education, notably higher education. The initiatives like 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan,' Right to Education Act (RTE), *Rashtriya Uchachatar Shiksha Abhiyan* (RUSA), Mid Day Meal, *Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana*, *Arundhati Yojana* of Assam government, etc. are being taken to improve the performance in this direction. Though the North Eastern region had the advantage of having fewer societal barriers to female educational involvement before independence, the momentum and pace could not be sustained for various reasons, resulting in this dismal outcome. However, with political will and better policy implementation, we may reach the desired result of more female enrolment soon, focusing on better economic possibilities and job development. The sole criterion is that all initiatives be executed with the correct intent, consistency, and efficiency. The new education policy has a lofty ambition that is also timely. As a result of the renewed emphasis on the Act East Policy and the new industrial policy, demand for a better educated and trained workforce would increase. The moment is ripe to capitalize on the multiplier effects by stressing more gender equity in education at all levels.

#### End notes :

1. The literacy rate computed using the whole population in the denominator is now known as the 'crude literacy rate.' In contrast, the literacy rate derived using seven and above is known as the effective literacy rate.
2. The data provided are taken from the Educational Statistics at a Glance, 2018, published by Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of School Education & Literacy Statistics Division, Government of India. These data are available from pages number 48 to 53 in the report.





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