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Women in labour force in North Eastern states

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Abstract

India has experienced rapid economic growth, structural shifts in the economy, increase in educational attainment levels, and rapid urbanization in the last twenty five years. In the same period there has been a 23% decline in the female labour force participation rate. What's the relationship between economic growth and women's economic activity? Is growth enough or does the nature of growth matter in attracting more women to the labour force? The paper tries to explain the share of women in total labour force in NER. Another objective of the paper is to correlate the level of education of women with the participation rate of women in economic activity. Female literacy rate has been used as an indicator of women education and Female Work Participation Rate (FWPR) is used as a parameter of participation of labour force of women. The paper finds a very paradoxical situation that in other developed states of India where female literacy rate is comparatively higher than the states of NER, female WPR is relatively lower in those states compared to NER. This implies that even if NER records a comparatively lower female literacy rate than that of other developed states of India, female WPR is comparatively higher. The paper ends with certain interesting questions that will open further research avenues in this area.

Keywords: Women labour, FWPR, female literacy, NER, gender composition

1. Introduction

Women in any country play a pivotal role in the development process. Any discussion on development remains incomplete without the inclusion of gender dimension into it. According to UN Fourth Conference on Women, "Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental pre-requisite for equality, development and peace." According to the provisional population totals of Census 2011, out of total population of 1, 21, 01, 93, 422 persons, 62, 37, 24, 248 are males and 58, 64, 69, 174 are females (nearly 50 percent of the total population). This figure clearly indicates that women in India form an integral part in the demographic profile of the country. We cannot think of the overall development of the society neglecting the other half. That is why development of women has been the focus of discussion and it has been given a top priority in the policy formulation of the country.

But the question is how to increase the participation of women in economic activity or total labour force. The first and foremost way is the spread of education among women. Education is a pre-requisite for the development of women and to make them feel that they also comprise an integral part of the society. It is often maintained that education promotes women empowerment, makes them aware of their rights, and makes them able to take part freely in the social interactions.

Against this backdrop, the paper discusses the spread of education and the extent of women participation in labour force in North Eastern states. Female Literacy rate has been taken as indicator of attainment of education level among women and women Work Participation Rate (WPR) as the indicator of the participation of women in labour force. The paper explores that North East Region (NER) differs from rest of India in respect of female literacy level (an indicator of education) and their extent of participation in labour force measured by Work Participation Rate (WPR).

The paper then poses some questions regarding general perception of positive relationship between education and participation of women in economic activities which may open new avenues for further research in this area.

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The paper is organized in the following manner. Section II provides profile of North- Eastern region Section III provides a gender composition of the population in India and NER. Section IV provides a comparative picture of female literacy level and participation of women in labour force in NER and India. Section V provides a paradox emanating from section III and section VI concludes and summarizes the major findings.

2. Profile of North-Eastern Region (NER)

North-Eastern Region (NER) considered the “land of Sun Rising” is situated at the North-Eastern Himalayan sub-region of India. NER is composed 7 (Seven) States namely Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. In 2010 Sikkim also become under the State of NER and now there are 8 (eight) states under NER. The region is bounded by Tibet and China in the north and east, Bangladesh in the south, Myanmar in the south east and Bhutan in the West. In terms of geographical size, Northeast India constitute about 8% of the total India's size, and is roughly 3/4th the size of the state of Maharashtra. Northeast India's population (all 8 states combined) is approximately 40 million (2011 census), which represents

3.1% of the total Indian population (1,210 million). Population of NER region is composed of heterogeneous elements of different races, castes, languages and cultures. There are different types of Tribal population settled both in the plain and hill areas and they maintain different languages and profess different faiths and every tribes has own different identities. The region accounts for one of the largest concentrations of tribal people in the country - constituting about 30 percent of the total population - though with a skewed distribution of over 60 percent in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland taken together. With the only exception of Kerala outside it, three states of the region - Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya contain an overwhelming majority of Christians (90.02, 87 and 70.03 percents respectively). The region is characterized by extraordinary ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity, with more than 160 Scheduled Tribes belonging to five different ethnic groups and over 400 distinct tribal and sub-tribal groupings speaking about 175 languages, and a large and diverse non-tribal population as well concentrated mainly in Assam and Tripura (Bhaumik 2010).

Population	38, 857, 769
Area	262, 230 km2 (101, 250 sq mi)
Population Density	148/km2 (380/sq mi)
Time Zone	IST (UTC+5:30)
States and Territories	Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura
Largest Cities	Guwahati, Jorhat, Agartala, Dimapur, Shillong, Aizawl, Imphal
Official Languages	Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, English, Garo, Khasi, Kokborok, Manipuri, Mizo, Nepali, Sikkimese, Urdu
Religion	Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Animism (Sanamahism, Seng Khasi Donyi-Polo etc.)

Tourist Map of North-Eastern Region (NER)



sex ratio between 0-6 years of age which poses a serious threat to the female population in India in future.

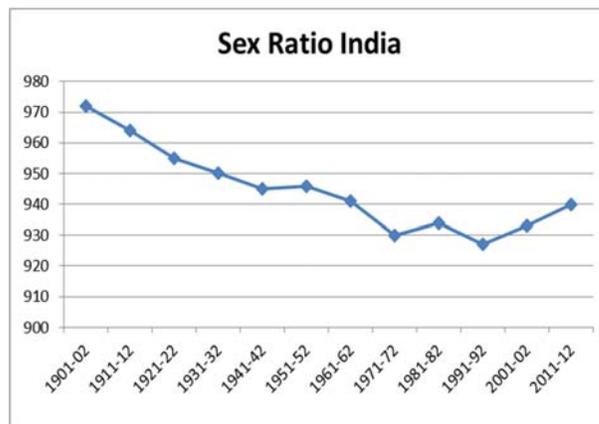
3. Gender Composition of the Population: India and NER

There are different tools to measure gender equity in a population. Sex ratio is one such widely used tool to measure gender balance. Sex ratio is defined in the Census of India as number of females per 1,000 male in the population. Table 1 shows the sex ratio in India and North East Region (NER) from 1971-2011. The table shows that the sex ratio in all the states of NER is close to the national average except Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland where it is far below the national average. Sex ratio in India as depicted in figure 1 shows a downward trend up to 1991 and then it has taken an upward turn. A serious concern is regarding the

Table 1: Sex ratio in India and NER: 1971- 2011

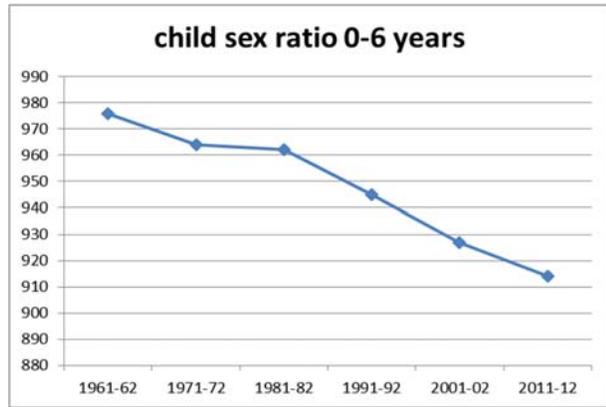
Year	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Assam	954	946	923	935	954
Arunachal Pradesh	861	862	859	893	920
Manipur	980	971	958	974	987
Mizoram	946	919	921	935	975
Nagaland	871	863	886	900	931
Tripura	943	946	945	948	961
Meghalaya	942	954	955	972	986
India	930	934	927	933	940

Source: Census of India 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011



Source: Census of India, 2011

Fig 1: Sex Ratio in India: 1901- 2011



Source: Census of India, 2011

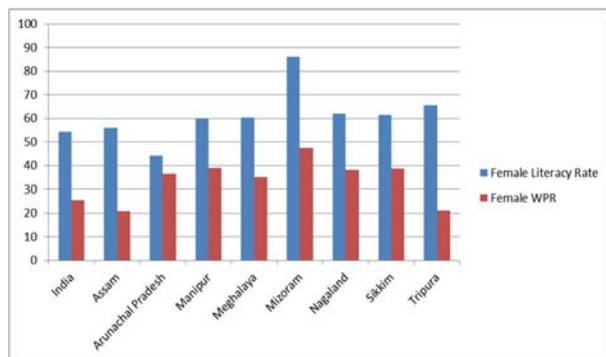
Fig 2: Child Sex Ratio 0-6 Years in India: A concern

Table 2: Female Literacy Rate and Work Participation Rate (WPR) of women in India and NE

Name of the State	Female Literacy Rate	Female Work Participation Rate	Rank in Female Literacy rate	Rank in FWPR
India	54.16	25.63	----	----
Assam	56.03	20.71	7	8
Arunachal Pradesh	44.24	36.54	8	5
Manipur	59.70	39.02	6	2
Meghalaya	60.41	35.15	5	6
Mizoram	86.13	47.54	1	1
Nagaland	61.92	38.06	3	4
Sikkim	61.46	38.57	4	3
Tripura	65.41	21.08	2	7

Source: Census of India, 2001 (Ranks are given by the author only to NE states).

Table 2 clearly shows that female literacy rate and WPR of women are highest in Mizoram (ranks are same). But in case of other states literacy rate and WPR of women are not matching (ranks are not same). The evidence from NE is not supporting the expected positive relation between female literacy rate and WPR of women. There is inter-state variation in NE in respect of two variables. This variation is well captured in the following figure. The female WPR is the highest in Manipur and it is lowest in Assam although Assam is considered as a developed state in NE. Another striking fact that is emanating from the above table is that Tripura is ranked second in female literacy rate but in female WPR it records a far below rank, that is, seventh. There is inter-state variation in NE in respect of two variables. This variation is well captured in the following figure 3.



Source: Prepared by the author

Fig 3: Variation in Female Literacy Rate and Female WPR among states of NE

4. Female Literacy and Women’s Work Participation Rate (WPR) in NE

The female literacy rate has been taken as an indicator of education of women and Women’s Work Participation Rate (WWPR) has been taken as an indicator of the extent of engagement of women in economic activities. Work Participation Rate (WPR) has been defined as the percentage of total workers to total population. So, $WPR = \frac{\text{Total Workers}}{\text{Total Population}} * 100$. The paper tries to correlate female literacy level and their participation in productive economic activities. It is theoretically expected that the higher the level of education, the higher will be the participation rate in economic activities. The picture of literacy level and the participation rate of women in economic activities in NE are given in figure 2.

5. A Paradox

If we compare the level of education of women (literacy rate as the indicator) and WPR in North East Region (NE) with other major states of India a paradoxical situation is observed. That is even though female literacy level in NE is much lower compared to that of other major states of India, WPR of women in NE is higher than these states. This is clearly evident from table 3 which depicts female literacy rate and female WPR in some major states of India. In Kerala female literacy rate is 87.86 percent as per 2001 census but female WPR is figured at a much lower rate, that is, 15.38 percent and ranked 8 in female WPR. Similar trend is observed in case of Delhi, Punjab, and Chandigarh which are developed state. This wide spread variation is well-captured in figure 4. The variation is much higher as compared to the states of NE as shown in figure 3.

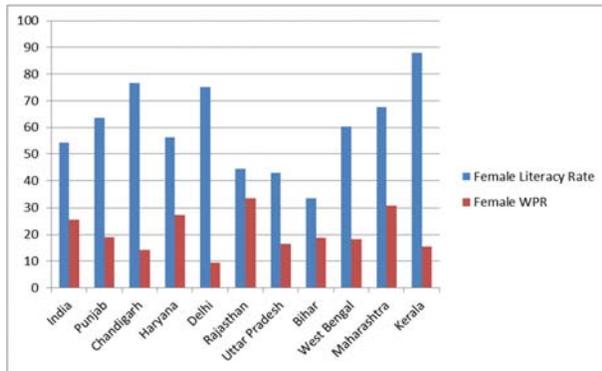
This finding poses a question: Why is WPR of women in NE higher than other economically developed states of India? What are ‘other’ factors that explain the comparatively higher participation of women in economic activities in NE? The paper has no objective to investigate other socio-economic reasons for this paradoxical result. The crux of the paper lies in that it will open further research avenues in this area?

The above finding clearly indicates that it is not only education of women that explains their participation in economic activities and thereby attaining the economic independence in NE. There are other socio-economic reasons which are very much indigenous to their respective communities that can explain this situation.

Table 3: Female Literacy and WPR in some major states

Name of the state	Female Literacy Rate	Female Work Participation Rate	Rank in Female Literacy Rate	Rank in Female WPR
India	54.16	25.63	-----	-----
Punjab	63.55	19.05	5	4
Chandigarh	76.65	14.22	2	9
Haryana	56.31	27.22	7	3
Delhi	75.00	9.37	3	10
Rajasthan	44.34	33.49	8	1
Uttar Pradesh	42.98	16.54	9	7
Bihar	33.57	18.84	10	5
West Bengal	60.22	18.32	6	6
Maharashtra	67.51	30.81	4	2
Kerala	87.86	15.38	1	8

Source: Census of India, 2001 (Ranks are given by the author)



Source: prepared by the author

Fig 4: Variation in Female Literacy Rate and Female WPR among major states of India

An analysis for this paradox can be attempted from table 4 where state-wise work participation rate of women for urban and rural areas of states of NER is given. It is seen that female WPR is higher in rural areas than that of in urban areas. It is a well known fact that agriculture is the main occupation in rural areas and majority of the population gets their livelihood from agriculture. So, it can easily be inferred that higher proportion of female population in NER are engaged in rural areas in agricultural activities.

Table 4: State-wise Rural- Urban Work Participation Rate (WPR) in India and NER

States	Female	
	urban	rural
India	11.88	30.79
Sikkim	21.67	40.60
Arunachal Pradesh	17.15	41.33
Nagaland	15.61	42.48
Manipur	32.25	41.53
Mizoram	40.52	54.55
Tripura	12.45	22.87
Meghalaya	20.98	38.62
Assam	10.61	22.15

Source: Census of India, 2001.

6. Conclusion

The paper has analyzed the trend and pattern of female literacy level and female WPR in the states of NER on the basis of Census Report of 2001. The paper has also given a brief picture of gender composition of the population of India and NER based on the Census Report of 2011. The major finding of the paper is that there is widespread

variation in the states of NER in respect of female literacy rate and female WPR which are summarized in table 2 and figure 3 above. Another aspect of the paper is the comparison of the states of NER with some major states of India in respect of female literacy rate and female WPR and the discovery of a paradoxical situation which is described above. The article has found that it is not only education that explains the female WPR in NER but there are some other socio-economic factors that explain this situation. Lastly, the paper has found that the higher proportion of female work force in NER is engaged in rural agricultural activities.

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