

# Socio-Economic Status of Women in North-East India: A Geographical Analysis

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**Abstract:** NE India is situated geographically in a vulnerable zone. Almost 98% of north east borders are internationally connected to Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Myanmar. The problems of the people of north east have been aggravated more by the upsurge of ethnic violence which has been occurring for decades. Such sustained violence led to lack of opportunities for people to flourish in their entrepreneurial skills. The paper examines, in spite of diverse physical and socio-cultural set up of the region and varying degree of socio economic diversity, prevalence of tradition and social prejudices of women the whole scenario of demographic and socio-economic characteristics of women in the region is quite better in comparison to all India average. In this study an attempt has been made to examine the status of women in North Eastern Region with all India average in terms of some selective indicators. This paper will examine the status and role of women in the changing society from a socio economic perspective from traditional society and their changes if any in the present situation. This paper examines the status and role of women in North East India and the trends and direction of transformation, their contribution in economy and participation in political arena. This study is based on secondary data. The data consists of articles from journals, magazines, national reports on status of women. The data were properly structured and analysed.

**Keywords:** North –East India, status, Women

## 1. Introduction

Women constitute nearly half of the total population and their contribution to the different field is highly appreciated. Unfortunately women are still being suppressed and oppressed in different form of social, economic and political sphere. Women in India are not free from different types of harassment, gender prejudices or gender bias in different sphere of life.

North east India comprises of seven states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura; popularly known as the ‘Seven Sisters’. Geographically Northeast India is surrounded by Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar and China. The region is less known to the other parts of the country except on few occasions when some news flash through the print and electronic media. As such information on the condition women in the North East is also less known to those interested on the women’s issue.

It is a fact that women of North East India are enjoying a better position in the society, particularly the tribal women compared to their counterpart of the rest of the country.

Since ages North East Indian women have shared a significant social space as compared to most of the contemporaries living in the other parts of the Indian sub-continent. Apart from doing household chores, the women have shared the work on the field and helped in generating income along with their male counterpart. This has decreased the dependency on the men. For example, among the tea tribes of Assam it is womenfolk who are considered the perfect tea leaf plucker and hence are the primary bread earner of the family.

A lot of women centric social evil practices are not prevalent in NE India unlike the other parts of the country. Evil practices such as Sati, dowry, female infanticide, honour killing are non-existent among the natives of the region. But that doesn’t mean that they are better or high status. The fact that women in North east have to face various social and economic problems such as illiteracy, poor health, domestic violence, early marriage, gender discrimination of wage, discrimination in democratic participation in the decision making at the grassroots or traditional institution at the cost of customary law.

## 2. Data Source and Methodology

The study is based on secondary data. The data are collected from Census report of India, National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO). The status of women in North east India examined on the basis different indicators namely female literacy rate, female workforce participation, sex ratio, women participating decision making and the status is examined with the help of method of ranking of states of different indicators.

## 3. Result and Discussion

### 3.1 Female Literacy Rate

The ranking of the states in the table depicts that the states having high female literacy rate lies in North east India except in Arunachal Pradesh.

State	% of female literacy Rate	Rank
Kerala	92.07	1
Mizoram	89.27	2
Lakshadweep	87.95	3
Tripura	87.22	4
Andaman & Nicobar Island	86.63	5

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Goa	84.66	6
Nagaland	76.11	7
Maharashtra	75.87	8
Meghalaya	72.89	9
Manipur	70.26	10
Uttarakhand	70.01	11
Gujarat	69.68	12
Assam	66.27	13
Orissa	64.01	14
Chattisgarh	60.24	15
Madhya Pradesh	59.24	16
Andhra Pradesh	59.15	17
Arunachal Pradesh	57.70	18
Uttar Pradesh	57.18	19
Jammu& Kashmir	56.43	20

Source-Census of India (2011)

### 3.2 Female Work Population Rate (FWPR)

State	Rank	FWPR	State	Rank	FWPR
Chhattisgarh	1	62.7	Madhya Pradesh	12	41.1
Himachal Pradesh	2	58.8	Jharkhand	13	39.8
Nagaland	3	56.5	J&K	14	38.4
Andhra Pradesh	4	52.7	Gujarat	15	37.9
Meghalaya	5	51.4	Orissa	16	37.8
Rajasthan	6	46.2	Uttarakhand	17	36.6
Mizoram	7	45.4	Manipur	18	31.5
Arunachal Pradesh	8	45.1	Kerala	19	27.3
Karnataka	9	43.0	Punjab	20	26.3
Maharashtra	10	42.9	Assam	21	20.8
Sikkim	11	41.2	Tripura	22	20.8

Source based on calculation from NSSO (2010)

The table reveals the fact that female work participation rate (FWPR) is higher in mostly hilly region. Except Assam, Manipur and Tripura the FWPR are higher than all India average. Higher FWPR can be partially explained by the fact that the community based organisation of subsistence production requires a high level of women labour participation.

### 3.3 Gross Enrolment Ratio

Gross enrolment ratio in class I-VIII of school

State/UT	Girls	Boys	Total
Arunachal Pradesh	138.1	146.31	142.26
Assam	84.9	82.21	83.54
Manipur	147.73	155.44	151.64
Meghalaya	141.86	135.15	138.49
Mizoram	133.58	142.98	138.33
Nagaland	83.45	83.2	83.32
Tripura	121.74	123.56	122.66
Bihar	86.03	100.79	93.72
Goa	86.13	88.75	87.5
UP	96.27	94.65	95.42
Chandigarh	64.71	62.62	63.55
India	101.09	103.75	102.47

Source: Govt of India 2012, Data for the use of Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission, 10 April

The gross enrolment ratio of NER is comparatively higher than some of the other states like Bihar, Goa, UP Chandigarh etc.

### 3.4 Sex Ratio

The Census 2011 reveals that the child sex ratio in NER is comparatively higher than the rest of the country like Haryana, Punjab, Gujarat, Rajasthan and UP.

Sex ratio in India

State	SR	Rank	State	SR	Rank
Kerala	1084	1	Goa	968	10
Tamilnadu	995	2	Karnataka	968	11
Andhra Pradesh	992	3	Uttarakhand	963	12
Chattisgarh	991	4	Tripura	961	13
Meghalaya	986	5	Assam	954	14
Manipur	985	6	Jharkhand	947	15
Orissa	978	7	Nagaland	931	16
Mizoram	975	8	Rajasthan	926	17
HP	974	9	Arunachal Pradesh	920	18

Source: Census of India, 2011

### 3.5 Women Participation in Decision Making

State	Currently married women who usually participate in household decision (%)	Women of age 15-49 who are allowed to go alone to market health facility & outside the community (%)	A bank saving account they themselves use (%)
Arunachal Pradesh	53.5	37.3	18
Assam	60.9	35.3	11.7
Manipur	69.4	53.5	8
Meghalaya	77.3	28.1	16.9
Mizoram	70.4	75.4	8.1
Nagaland	73.1	25.4	7.4
Tripura	30.2	36.8	18.7
Bihar	32.7	25.2	19
Chhattisgarh	26.8	17.9	8.1
Delhi	52	36.6	30.4
Gujarat	36.6	47.3	19.9
H.P	39.2	60.2	22.2
J&K	25.2	51	21.9
Kerala	47.2	34.7	27
Tamilnadu	48.8	54.2	15.9
India	36.7	36.8	18.7

Source: NFHS-3, Kishore Gupta 2009.

The percentage of married women participating in the decision making of the household is more than national average.

### 4. Conclusion

From the discussion on the facts and figure on certain indicators, it is clear that the status of women in NER is comparatively better than the rest of the country.

However, some puzzling contradictions occur within each state like whereas the literacy rates are higher in Nagaland and Assam but at the same time Gross Enrolment Rate is low, which shows a different picture.

The higher rate of female work participation in the North East Region is important variable to empower women in the society. Although the FWPR has increased some part of NER, but the question lies in what type of work the women

are engaged in, because women are more vulnerable to the informal sector. Economic development doesn't guarantee gender equality.

Therefore, it requires specific policy to achieve gender development and gender equality. A detail study of women status even at district level is necessary to have the right information for effective planning and implementation of govt. policies.

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