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Contents		
Articles		
Global Access to Covid-19 Vaccine: A Game Theoretic Approach Arindam Laha, Sumit Kumar Maji and Subir Kumar Sen		1-11
Capturing the ‘Savage’ and the ‘Civilized’: Seeing Through the Lens of the American Baptist Mission Suryasikha Pathak		12-21
Educational Progress in Sikkim within the North Eastern Landscape Suman Negi		22-40
Dismal Politics: Gender, Risk Aversion and Political Parties in Assam Poonam Kakoti Borah and Vikas Tripathi		41-65
Probing the Socioeconomic and Cultural Position of Women with Mental Illness in Assam Berlin Gogoi, Gargi Das, Gitali Patra and Polly Vauquiline		66-89
Between Need and Lifestyle: Understanding the Significance of Domestic Workers in Middle-class Households of Guwahati Shruti Talukdar and Kedilezo Kikhi		90-109
Book Review		
Community and Nation Ruchira Das and Vikas Pathak		110-112

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Global Access to Covid-19 Vaccine: A Game Theoretic Approach

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Abstract

The socio-economic challenge emanating from the Covid-19 pandemic can be effectively arrested by inoculating the people around the globe. Tiding over the pandemic warrants vaccine solidarity by ensuring equity in the vaccine distribution amongst the countries around the globe. However, the 'Vaccine Nationalism' attitude of many countries especially the countries from global north is threatening the global fight against the pandemic. In this backdrop, this paper considers the global access of COVID-19 vaccine in the perspective of the idealism vis-à-vis realism debate in the international relations. Specifically, this article employs game theoretic approach to determine the optimal strategy under different technology assumptions. Considering vaccine as a global public goods, private contributions of the vaccine producing countries are analysed in financing public goods. A game theory perspective of this paper can explain the real-life outcomes (vaccine nationalism, vaccine solidarity, tepid form of nationalism) under different technology assumptions. On policy implication ground, scaling up vaccine production and promoting vaccine solidarity will remain at the centre of the vaccine policy decision in near future.

Introduction

Vaccination is widely believed as a feasible solution to tide over the humanitarian crisis in the wake of Covid-19. Public health issues related to vaccination can be considered as a constituent of global public goods. In addition to non-rivalry and non-excludability characteristics of any public goods, it can be commonly used as a commodity generating benefits more than one group of countries. Non-rivalry and

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non-excludable benefits of global public goods outreached to the world at large, while regional public goods yield benefits to a more limited geographical area (Sandler, 1998; Sandmo, 2007). Stiglitz (1995; 1999) identified five global public goods: international economic stability, international security (political stability), the international environment, international humanitarian assistance, and knowledge. In addition, eight broad themes related to global public goods are environment, global public health, research, trade policy and transport policy, conflict peace and security, communications, humanitarian international Non-Governmental organisations and other (Development Initiatives, 2016).

On public health, the first institutional intervention can be traced back to 1347-1352, when organized efforts were made in controlling plague epidemic across international borders. Formation of global funds in mitigating challenges related to AIDS, Polio, Tuberculosis and Malaria is also known as a global initiative to control health related communicable diseases. A global partnership in research and development in vaccine can be an effective way to prevent communicable diseases. Participation of private sector in financing global public goods is noticeable in the formation of Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations (GAVI) (Development Initiatives, 2016). Private provision of global public goods (like vaccines) in such contributory funds creates a positive externality beyond citizen of a country as benefits (i.e., a safe world having no more mutants of the virus) cuts across borders of the country. Public goods with positive externality are generally under supplied by the market due to the presence of the free rider problem. Therefore, it can be noted that contributions add to the collective benefit by accelerating the pace of ending pandemic, however, it requires strategic cooperation of the contributing countries.

In this context, this paper conceptualises the case of provisioning of vaccines as a global public good in a game theoretic framework. Idealistic and realistic attitudes are considered as the strategies chosen by the donor countries, while vaccine solidarity and vaccine nationalism are the outcome of the game. Payoffs of the game are derived by considering collective benefit and private cost implications of the country.

Conceptual Framework: Formulation of a Game

Consider a formulation of a game played by two symmetric donor countries aimed at accelerating the pace of vaccination to lower-middle-income countries. Contribution adds to the global public goods (McAdams et al, 2020) by means of unilateral gifts, sale, or COVAX initiative. However, contribution depends on their choice of idealist or realist strategy.

Learning from the experience of World War I, idealist view dominated in the literature on international relations in the 1920s and the early 1930s. However, in the wake of great depression in 1930s and the 1940s, the idealist doctrine was replaced by realist (Lekon, 2003). Drawing lesson from the past, realist perspective (in contrast to normative

idealist perspective) stresses the need to protect national interest (i.e., ‘ultimately for its own survival’) over international morals. By criticizing the universal moralism of idealist stand, realists, on the other hand, believes in moral relativism⁴(Lekon, 2003). The policy of vaccine solidarity is rooted to the idealist perspective, which believes in internationalist morality over nationalist interest. Vaccine nationalism, on the other hand, believes in realist perspective, which upholds the spirit of national interest and therefore prioritized the statesman’s duty to their own nations.

Depending on their choice of strategy, the conventional form representation of the payoff matrix is presented. Adoption of idealist strategy by both the countries results in vaccine solidarity through cooperation (C). On the other hand, non-cooperation (NC) of both the players through choice of realist strategy can be guided by their vaccine nationalist attitude. These are two extreme situations. A conflict in the choice of strategy arises in other two situations. Sub-optimal allocation in the provision of global public goods is the most likely situation performed by a few well-to-do nations (Olson, 1965).

Table 1: Formulation of the Game

		Country 2	
		Idealist	Realist
Country 1	Idealist	C, C (Vaccine solidarity)	C, NC (Vaccine conflict)
	Realist	NC, C (Vaccine conflict)	NC, NC (Vaccine nationalism)

Note: C stands for cooperation, NC stands for non-cooperation

Development of a Model

Notations

- Si: Contributions of public goods by country i
- Ci: Cost incurred by country i in the provisioning of public goods
- B: Collective benefits derived from such provisioning
- V: Payoff derived from the collective benefit received and cost incurred

Model Framework

In the framework of two countries, countries must decide on their level of voluntary contribution. In reality, public goods (specifically, distribution of vaccine) are provided by voluntary contribution, rather than by actual contribution (Palfrey & Rosenthal, 1984). Depending on their idealistic or realistic strategies, they determine their level of contributions: $S_i > 0$ (for country $i=1,2$). The private cost to provide the public goods are: $C(S_i) = k_i S_i$, where $C'' > 0, C''' > 0$. The collective benefit depends on the

⁴ Moral relativism sets boundary through its own particular code of morals within its borders. In the realist ‘un-normative’ objective analysis, international arena is divorced from domestic arena(Lekon, 2003).

contribution of both the countries in a social composition function, i.e., $B=b(S_i)$, where $B^{\wedge}>0, B^{\wedge} \leq 0$. Social composition function takes into account different possible ways of amalgamating individuals' contributions into social availabilities of a public good⁵. Three simple cases of social composition function include summation, weak link and best shot (Sandler, 1998; Arce, 2001; Arriagada & Perrings, 2011).

- *Summation technology*: each nation's contribution to the public goods adds to the overall provisioning of the goods, i.e. $B=b()$
- *Weakest link technology*: the overall benefit to all countries is limited to the benefit offered by the least effective provider (or least effort level), i.e. $B=b(\min[S_i])$
- *Best shot technology*: the overall benefit to all countries is determined by the most effective provider (or largest effort level), i.e. $B=b(\max[S_i])$

The payoff for each country (say country $i=1$) depends on the collective benefit and cost:

$$V_1(S_1, S_2) = b(S_1, S_2) - k_1 S_1$$

Any strategy S_1 is the best response for country 1 to strategy S_2 of country 2 if it yields higher payoff in comparison to any other strategy, i.e.

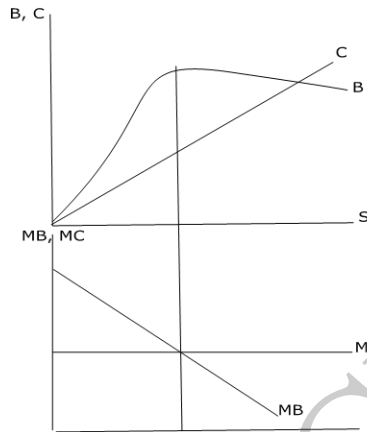
$$V_1(S_1, S_2) \geq V_1(S_1', S_2) \text{ for all } S_1'$$

The pair (S_1, S_2) constitutes Nash equilibrium as these strategies are mutually best replies to each other.

The first order conditions can be derived from the payoff functions: $\delta b / \delta S_i - k_i = 0$ (for country i). Intuitively, it suggests that public goods should be provided as long as the overall benefit to consumers from that good are at least as great as the cost of providing it (Samuelson, 1954). This condition is popularly known as Samuelson condition for efficient provision of public goods. It can be considered as the generalized supply and demand concepts from private to public goods. In figure 1, MB presents demand for public goods (or willingness to pay or contribute), while MC is the supply of public goods under competitive markets. By the interactions of MB and MC schedules, the optimal level of contribution can be determined.

Assume that country 1 can produce the vaccine at lower marginal cost than country 2, i.e., $k_1 < k_2$. In order to satisfy the first order condition, it requires $\delta b / \delta S_1 > \delta b / \delta S_2$. Higher marginal benefit of country 1 provides an incentive for the country to contribute more vaccines: $S_1 > S_2$.

⁵ The role of technology of public supply aggregation in social composition function was first mentioned by Hirshleifer (1983).

Figure 1: Derivation of MB and MC curves from Benefit and Cost Schedules

Let us now incorporate these payoffs in the normal form presentation of the game⁶.

Constellation 1 (Summation): Summation is the mostly used assumption relating to the provision of public goods. Contributions made by countries are assumed as perfectly substitutable and anonymous in the sense that contributions add the same at the margin regardless of the country. The Nash equilibrium corresponds to cooperation in the provision of public goods in each country (table 2a).

Constellation 2 (Weak Link): Let us now consider a case of inadequate provisioning of public goods ($S_a < S_n$), where S_a denotes actual number of contributions, and S_n denotes number of contributions necessary to produce the public good. The problem can be solved by the matching behaviour of the other country exercising lowest effort. This weak link technology is extensively applied in controlling epidemic (where least effort of the nation sets the safety level of all nations) or immunisation programme (where the nation with the smallest efforts at immunisation determines the chances of eradicating a disease) (Sandler, 1998). However, it may provide a disincentive to the countries who are adopting idealist strategy unless a favourable response from the other country. Otherwise, it can unduly incur a cost of financing without any gain in terms of collective benefit. However, the game is similar to Stag hunt game, which is extensively used in international relations (especially international treaty, environmental regulations) (Gibbon, 2013). There is a possibility of cooperation through active participation of the countries in provisioning of public goods (table 2b). For this reason, this stag hunt game is alternatively known as assurance game, whereby the interest of the countries does not conflict, but there is need of assurance that the other country shall abide by the game plan (Rose, 2010).

⁶ In general, all technologies relating to public supply aggregations exhibits diminishing returns in some form (Daniel & Arce, 2001). However, in this paper we have considered only discrete numerical figures associated with benefits and costs (excluded fractional figures) to make the payoffs comparable. In some situations, therefore, diminishing returns property may be violated.

In this game, Nash equilibrium are located along the diagonal of the payoff matrix, and therefore suggest a matching behaviour of the countries. The focal equilibrium is where each country follows idealist strategies in making contributions, since these payoffs Pareto-dominate the no-contribution cell's pay-offs. Such focal equilibrium provides us a Nash equilibrium solution, which can be chosen by default. In deriving such equilibrium, we assume that the collective benefit of the contributor is sufficiently large in meeting the private cost of provisioning public goods (i.e., $B > C$).

Constellation 3 (Best shot): In practice, the world can be safe (i.e., no more mutants of the virus) if sufficient number of contributions is made. Assume that there is an adequate private provisioning of public goods, i.e., $S_a \geq S_n$. From the payoff matrix, the solution of this game invites a conflict like situation, which provides an incentive to one country to free-rides (table 2c). Cost implications in this game generate fear motivation for free-rides of one country in the hope that other country shall follow idealist strategy and thereby meets the minimum requirement of public goods. In practice, some countries control over the final vaccine producers and vaccine ingredient producers (Evenett et al. 2021). Members of such 'vaccine production club' can adopt idealist strategy in immunizing the rest of the world. Adequate provisioning of vaccines by such countries results in an opportunity of other countries to free-rides. This game is similar to the chicken game, or anti-coordination game, where it is mutually beneficial for the countries to play different strategies. If the game is played repeatedly, then it may lead to cooperative response as nations can retaliate by adopting tit-for-tat strategy to punish non-cooperators.

Table 2: Role of Technology Choice in Determination of Nash Equilibrium in a 2x2 Game

		Country j	
		Idealist	Realist
Country i	Idealist	0,0	b,b-c
	Realist	b-c,b	2b-c, 2b-c

Table 2(a): Summation Technology

		Country j	
		Idealist	Realist
Country i	Idealist	0,0	0,-c
	Realist	-c,0	b-c, b-c

Table 2(b): Weakest Link Technology

		Country j	
		Idealist	Realist
Country i	Idealist	0,0	b,b-c
	Realist	b-c,b	b-c, b-c

Table 2(c): Best Shot Technology

Extension of the Model

Through the lens of realist-cum-idealist strategy in the perspective of game theory approach, let us now examine the case of tepid form of nationalism as a solution to the problem of public goods provisioning. It calls for a proper balancing in such provisioning so as to meet the domestic as well as international demands. Therefore, solution lies in a synthesis of optimistic view of liberalism and the pessimistic view of realism. In this direction, tepid form of vaccine nationalism which propagates prioritizing domestic needs without compromising the needs of other countries may be argued for. This alternative policy can be realized by following limited national partiality in allocating vaccines as a component of justice rather than an obstacle in distributing vaccines to other nations(Ferguson & Caplan, 2020).A similar policy of ‘convergence of idealism and realism in strategic decision making’ is proposed by other researchers (Pant, 2021; Kliem, 2021; Prabhu, 2021).

Inclusion of synthesis strategy in the constellation form of game theory presentation under different technology assumptions is shown in the following table 3. As observed earlier, the presence of these alternative technologies of public goods aggregation has important implications in providing public goods. Inadequate provision of public goods calls for matching behaviour from other countries. An aggregative and weakest link technology opens up the possibility of matching behaviour as an equilibrium strategy. Specifically, a practice of matching behaviour along the diagonal of the matrix is an essential feature of weakest link technology (Sandler, 1998). The collective action in the form of adopting synthesis or idealist strategy is more pronounced in a weakest link scenario than summation-based technology. In contrary, either country 1 or 2 make largest effort in the provisioning of public goods adequately under best shot technology.

Table 3: Role of Technology Choice in Determination of Nash Equilibrium in a 3x3 Game

		Country j		
		Realist	Synthesis	Idealist
Country i	Realist	0,0	b,b-c	2b, 2(b-c)
	Synthesis	b-c,b	2b-c, 2b-c	3b-c, 3b-2c
	Idealist	2(b-c), 2b	3b-2c, 3b-c	4b-2c, 4b-2c

Table 3(a): Summation Technology

		Country j		
		Realist	Synthesis	Idealist
Country i	Realist	0,0	0,-c	0, -2c
	Synthesis	-c,0	b-c, b-c	b-c, b-2c
	Idealist	-2c, 0	b-2c, b-c	2(b-c), 2(b-c)

Table 3(b): Weakest Link Technology

		Country j		
		Realist	Synthesis	Idealist
Country i	Realist	0,0	b,b-c	2b, 2(b-c)
	Synthesis	b-c,b	b-c, b-c	2b-c, 2(b-c)
	Idealist	2(b-c),2b	2(b-c), 2b-c	2(b-c),2(b-c)

Table 3(c): Best Shot Technology

Implications to Practice and Policy

In practice, it is also imperative for a country to safeguard its own population by trying to save the world. However, this can only be possible by ramping up the production of the vaccines by making heavy investment in no time, speeding up the domestic inoculation process and allowing a greater number of pharmaceutical companies to go for clinical trials so that other vaccines can be approved and manufactured for domestic use.

In practice, global solidarity, cooperation and collective actions are the only alternatives to address any health crisis as severe as Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, global solidarity is extremely important in making the vaccines available to all parts of the globe. In this vaccine race, ‘we can either win together or loose together’. In practice, there is a stark north-south divide in dealing with the Covid-19 crisis. While developed countries of the global north has adequate financial resources to combat the crisis, the developing countries in the global south are struggling on fiscal, monetary and external payments fronts(UNCTID, 2020). Collective actions and global solidarity, therefore, is the need of the hour. South-South Cooperation(SSC) & South-South Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) can be considered as the effective measures to ensure that the low-income developing countries can get equal access to the Covid-19 vaccines.

Upholding the spirit of global solidarity and in a drive to expedite the development, production, and equitable distribution of the vaccines to all the countries and to fight against the vaccine nationalism, COVAX programme was launched by the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, WHO and UNICEF. The COVAX programme aims at inoculating around 20% of the population of the low-income countries (with per capita GNI of less than \$4000) along with those which receives World Bank international development assistance. COVAX programme will ensure the availability of the vaccines to people of participating economies (including 92 low- and middle-income economies) simultaneously irrespective of their economic status. In doing so, Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) has ensured volume guarantees for some vaccine manufacturers before the approval and the market-wide guarantees, so as to encourage manufacturers in making investments in production capacity. Under the COVAX initiative the high-income economies were required to make payment for the vaccine doses that they wish to obtain in advance. Such advance payment will enable

the COVAX initiative to speed up the development and manufacturing the vaccines. However, the vaccine requirement for low-income countries will be funded by the COVAX Facility through Official Development Assistance, donations made by the private sector and philanthropy. In fact, the core principles of COVAX initiative are similar to the basic principles of the global solidarity which is free from any distortions, exploitations and restrictions. Majority of the developed economies such as United States, Germany, France, Italy, United Kingdom, Japan etc. have made significant donations of vaccines under the COVAX initiative in the spirit of global solidarity (see table A1 in the appendix). India has also played an important role in extending its support to the global cause by donating 52.027 millions of Covid-19 vaccines doses to the COVAX programme under ‘vaccine maitri’ initiative of the Government of India. Additionally, 15.127 million doses of the vaccines were donated voluntarily to different countries especially the neighboring countries such as Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan. The export of vaccines to 97 countries under (most of which are low-income developing countries from Asia, Africa, Caribbean and Latin America) upholds the spirit of SSC. The distribution of vaccines under COVAX initiative to different countries of the globe is also the example of SSTC. However, it is also to be kept in mind that the COVAX initiative is largely underfunded and has failed to prevent bilateral agreements between the Governments and the pharmaceutical companies (Ghosh, 2021). It has resulted in under supply of the vaccines to the COVAX initiative in the first instance and allowing the few advanced countries of the globe to hoard the vaccines which is only going to worsen the supply and pricing of the vaccines.

Appendix

Table A1: Top 10 Countries donated Covid-19 Vaccines under COVAX Initiative

Countries	Vaccine Donated under COVAX (in millions)
United States	237.6
Germany	92.1
France	61.3
India	52.027
Italy	42
Spain	39.6
United Kingdom	29.7
Japan	18.1
Canada	14.2
Netherlands	14.2

Source: Ourworldindata website

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Capturing the ‘Savage’ and the ‘Civilized’: Seeing Through the Lens of the American Baptist Mission

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Abstract

Oriental discourses' simplified construction of natives as 'primitives' and 'savage' was further reified and nuanced with the advent of missionary accounts. These images were further strengthened as missionaries started taking pictures from the foreign fields. The success stories of the foreign field were regularly sent home and those were used to evoke social and financial support for the foreign mission cause. The missionary discourses in the late 19th and early 20th century marked out differences between the new converts and the indigenous population. The impact of mission and the missionaries were measured in terms of 'civilization progresses made by both groups. This contrast was represented in the missionaries' accounts of their work among the heathen population and studies in photographs. These photographs published in mission magazines and from private collections are used as a tool of differentiation, and as sources. These photographs were highlighted as a visual evidence of 'civilized' and 'uncivilized' and 'Christian' and 'heathen' dichotomy. Whereas the indigenous population was largely constructed from earlier and current ethnographic accounts, projected as 'savage', 'headhunting', 'primitive', 'naked' and the new converts were presented as 'civilized', 'educated', 'clean', 'clothed'. It served to make the missionaries' work seem like an adventure, a brave struggle not just on the topographical jungle but also metaphorically the jungle of wild 'unbelievers'. It served to shock and also to move the pity and the piety of the post-industrial west and re-affirm their belief in the superiority and necessity of such works.

The earliest missionary interest in the northeastern part of India was shown by the Serampore Baptist Mission, which after 1837 was amalgamated again into the parent body of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS). During the brief period of its independence from its parent body (1816-1837) the Serampore Mission started its work in Assam and Meghalaya. The work of the Mission was encouraged by David Scott, and they started with translation work of the Bible, one school in Guwahati

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though no before they could have a strong base the difficulties of the mission coupled with the amalgamation led to handing over the field to the American Baptists. The American Baptist also had official sanction to start its work. Commissioner Francis Jenkins invited the mission to work among the Khamtis and Singphos of the eastern most part of the Brahmaputra valley. It has of course become a part of the lore of the history of Christianity as how the American Baptist Mission was not merely interested in evangelizing the 'tribes of the frontier' but thoughts of it as a springboard to reach the Shan tribes of upper Myanmar and Southern China. Soon enough the futility of attempting to cross the eastern section of the Himalayas became apparent and the American Baptist Mission started focusing on the Brahmaputra Valley and its 'natives'. By 1845 the Baptist Church of Assam was established with three branches located at Guwahati, Nagaon and Sibsagar respectively, though the body was disbanded after few years, the individual mission centres functioned in lines of the mission structure.

Soon schools were started in the Brahmaputra valley among the caste Hindu Assamese people. But despite relative success of the schools the number of converts among these people were disappointing for the missionaries. This led to attempts to work with the non-caste Hindu population of the region, the 'tribes' of the hills and the plains. Though as a part of the earlier Shan Mission the American Baptist Mission had attempted some mission work among the Nagas. In the 1850s they started working among the Karbis, a 'tribe' living in the hills near Nagaon. By 1860s started working with the Garos the American Baptist Mission encountered a field where the possibility of evangelization was vast. Initially the Mission Centre was the Goalpara but with growing members in the church they relocated to Tura by 1877 and soon the Tura Station became one of the largest for the American Baptist Mission. After the failure to launch the Namsang mission in 1841 the real mission among the Nagas was renewed when in 1871 Godhula, an Assamese evangelist started from Sibsagar to work among the Ao Nagas. In 1876 E.W. Clark moved to the Naga Hills and started living in Molung and by 1880 another mission centre was established in Kohima among the Angami Nagas and in 1885 among the Lotha Nagas in Wokha the third centre was established. From Nagaland the mission's expansion to the neighbouring princely state of Manipur was by accident rather by design. William Pettigrew of the Arthington mission was allowed to work among the Manipuris after the Political Agent of Manipur gave him permission to open a school in Imphal in 1894. British reluctance to jeopardize the political situation in Manipur and keeping in line with their policy of 'non-interference' the political agent asked Pettigrew to shift from Imphal to the adjoining hills which were under the direct control of the former. Pettigrew sets up the mission at Ukhrul among the Tangkhul Nagas and following this he resigned from the Arthington Mission and joined the American Baptist. By the end of the nineteenth century the American Baptist Mission's stations dotted the map of northeast India ranging from Garo hills, cutting across the Brahmaputra valley and climbing the Naga and Manipur Hills. The mission official records document this successful journey of the Mission in celebratory terms referring usually to converting the 'fierce head-hunters' to good people of Christ.

Visual Sources of History

Historians have often relied more on archival sources for reconstruction of pasts. But as photography emerged as a modern tool the sheer number of cameras and captures created another repository which was often relegated to a secondary status as compared to a written text. As mentioned by Schendel it was much later that the “social life of photographs and social practices in which photography is embedded or gets entangled” are explored.²

In the written texts certain aspects are often absent, like ‘material culture and everyday life’ which can be located in visual sources; and others – “the history of memory, of the body, of landscape – are inextricably bound up with the image.”³

Though there are several ethnographers who used illustrations or photographs in their accounts of northeast India, visual sources abound too though not in similar large number. Whereas ethnographers and officials recorded the native cultures and practices accompanied by visual sources. Another mode of knowledge construction existed parallel with and in relation with the official ethnography. Missionary accounts of peoples and places are rich with imagery, often not constrained by official diktats. They also photographed the places and people and often very with very different social lenses than the official ethnographers. As mentioned by Joy Pachuau, missionaries were “visually adept and used images to help proselytize the initially illiterate inhabitants” but also to “inform congregations back home about their achievements and hardships – and raise funds to expand their work.”⁴

Van Schendel’s pivotal essay on the Chittagong Hill tracts the photographs of northeast India are interesting because they open up to us the world of photos, clicked by non-professional photographers, and represent ‘certain non-elite categories.’ Whereas official ethnographic record had in mind collection of anthropomorphic data which was expected to lead up to a certain understanding about characteristics of ‘races.’ Missionary photographs deviate from that end though the civilizational differentiation persist in photographic representation. In the official photographs the agency of the individuals’ photographs, as specimens, was limited by their ‘tribal’ label, whereas in the missionary photographs heathen and Christian emerged as major delineating markers, and Christian converts assumed an individuality beyond their ‘tribal’ identity.

² Schendel, *The ‘Naked Mru’ of Bangladesh*, p. 343

³ Horsley, “Eyewitnessing? History and Visual Sources”, p. 1318

⁴ Joy L.K. Pachuau and Willem van Schendel, *The Camera as Witness: Social History of Mizoram, Northeast India*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p. 12

Image 1: The 'scantily' garo men and women. The 'unclean' appearance of these people served as a perfect case for conversion and salvation. Head hunting, heathen Garos needed to be saved. Studies in contrast, before and after were used to generate interest in the work of the foreign mission fields. (Image scanned from Frederic Harding)



Christian and Heathen: Stories of Before and After

The complicit nature of the relationship between the colonial state and the missions pushes its head up in every aspect: “Speaking of British colonialism and colonial evangelism in the south African context, John Comaroff (1995, p.226) remarks that it ‘was two faced, everywhere a double gesture’. On the one hand, he argues, ‘it justified itself in terms of difference and inequality: the greater enlightenment of the colonizer legitimized his right to rule and to civilize. On the other hand, the legitimacy was founded, ostensibly on a commitment to the eventual erasure of difference in the name of common humanity and modernity.’”⁵ Similar trajectory of knowledge production and circulation can be applied to the history of the missionary endeavor in Northeast India, where the American Baptist Mission “articulated notions of a common humanity, that is, a humanism, but at the same time promoted themselves as superior and civilized in comparison” to the tribes who they considered in need of “civilizing and conversion.”

Therefore, parallel to the colonial state’s civilizing mission ran the mission’s civilizing mission, and how did the mission reconcile the apparently contradictory ideas of common humanity with notions of superiority.

Photography was an important tool in the American Baptist Mission project, useful for both the metropolitan and colony, becoming simultaneously an ethnographic record keeping, an administrative exercise, and also a record of the personal journey of the individual missionaries. Reproduced in the magazines at home it marked the triumphant journey of the mission, in the wild frontier, jungles, and hills marking a journey of first trials and success. Hence, “Stories and images of “Savagery” needed to be coupled with stories and images of salvation, achieved through narratives of conversion, statistics of burgeoning attendance at church, ‘before and after’ photographs...”⁶

⁵ Richard Eves, ‘Black and White, a significant contrast’: Race, humanism and missionary photography in the Pacific”, p. 725

⁶ Richard Eves, ‘Black and White, a significant contrast’: Race, humanism and missionary photography in the Pacific” p.728



Image 2: Unnamed woman with all jewelry and traditional dress. This was an often used photograph in the missionary magazine. The popular comment was regarding the heavy brass earrings that women wore on their ears, weighing several grams. (Image scanned from Frederic Harding)

Image 3: Dobaki, a Christian came from one of the earliest Christian families in Tura, which is the centre of Garo Hills. Here she is clothed in modern designs made with factory made clothes. She also has draped a shawl in a modern style. (Image scanned from Frederic Harding)



Dobaki, daughter of one of Tura's first Christians.

This transition or transformation remains one of the focus of official mission narratives, wherein the visual field the numerous presences of the native or the indigenous communities are present. Generally, “In the colonial encounter, space and race are reciprocally related, spatial distance often being used to signify racial distance.”⁷ But the mission photos do not tell the same tale of colonial segregation, but subvert colonial power by bringing together spatial proximity.

The encounter of the western missionary with the ‘heathen’ remained a fundamental, focal point of the narrative departure, marking the overcoming of challenges of race, fear and other barriers. The superiority of race is very profoundly realized in these early encounters, as if insurmountable challenges of racial difference makes evangelizing overwhelming. Hence the establishment of racial superiority and its fracturing is a part of the missionary posturing and poster too.

As this piece of auto-biographical writing by Frederic Harding demonstrates his conundrum regarding mission work among the Garos:

*“On the first sight these Garos were repulsive to me and I was disappointed. I wonder how I could ever come to these people. I wondered how I was going to live the rest of my life for them...their smell, Ugh! Ugh! “Na’kam,” Ugh! Ugh! Ugh!”*⁸

Such was the disgust that the stench of the food was compared to sin. Its all-pervading nature and deep presence needed to be challenged and civilization be brought to the Garos and cleanse them of sin. Narrowing the racial fissure was the challenge of the

⁷ Richard Eves, p.729

⁸ Frederic Harding, p. 51-52, Na’kam is dry fish and is considered an essential staple for the Garos. The Garos are a tribe belonging to the northeastern state of Meghalaya. But they are also found in Assam and Bangladesh.

missionary, which required the dissolution of segregation premised on the concept of love and redemption. The work of the missionary hence required realization about both, as Harding wrote:

“Once I heard a Garo preacher use ‘na’kam” as an illustration. He likened it to sin. Men who sat in “Na’kam” shops got so used to its stench that they never smelled it. Sin was like that. One could get so used to it, one did not notice it...I knew that if I did not honestly love these Garos, my coming out would be in vain.”⁹

The schools, the preaching, the touring, the church and even the home brought different people together. These photos while constructing a before and after narrative bring together the plausible imagery of a Christian brotherhood, which was not merely breaking racial barriers but also breaking tribal barriers.

The schools drew pupils from diverse background, and imparting knowledge often was not handled by the white missionary alone. Native teachers were actively taking part in teaching since the early days of the mission. Teaching broke hierarchies, since at the very onset the missionaries themselves had to be educated in the language of the people. Since it was impossible to reach the people without their language the relation between a pupil and a teacher was established even before the schools started and the civilizing mission took off. Every activity in the mission was in close collaboration, it was unthinkable to move the mission without native presence. The preaching and touring were dependent on indigenous preachers and support bases in villages.

The domestic space which was with colonial authority an inconceivable idea to penetrate was the site of traffic of ideas and objects. As the mission quite successfully moved into the private space of the indigenous communities the private space of the missionary home was not sacrosanct either. Though servants were a feature of any colonial official bungalow, or a tea planter bungalow, it was also a common feature of the mission bungalow or home. The strict hierarchy and social distancing of the sahib bungalow was not replicated in the domestic spaces of the mission bungalow.

These photos do have an afterlife, as demonstrated by Geraldine Forbes' work on Samuel Perrine, who was an American Baptist Missionary in Nagaland. He was an avid photographer and after his stint as a missionary he became a travelling lecturer, and he used his rather large collection of photos from India, some clicked by him and some by others. This shift of profession also marks a shift in the narration about the photos as Geraldine Forbes writes: “Perrine, the missionary believed the hill tribes of northeast India would accept Christianity and with this acceptance, begin their inevitable climb out of darkness towards the light. In contrast, his popular lectures consigned these peoples to lives of savagery.”¹⁰

⁹ Frederic Harding, p. 52

¹⁰ Geraldine Forbes, *Good Christians and Bloodthirsty Savages: Samuel Perrine's Presentations of the Nagas*, ICHR lecture Series publication, lecture xxxii, ICHR, NERC, Guwahati, 2016, p.3

Sartorial Changes: From ‘Naked’ to ‘Civilized’ in Missionary Photos

Photographs also reflect the change in sartorial taste in the new converts in northeast India. The debates around clothing, traditional wear had become a controversial debate in colonial India, the debate moving away from the issue of local industries and western machine-made clothes to the clothes and the idea therein. Hence, clothes and clothing in this context “becomes a marker of civilization and authority.”¹¹ While many of the ethnographic photos showed the tribes in the indigenous dresses, mission photographs convey the sartorial change, the transformation from ‘naked or semi-naked savages’ to civilized subjects as the “the visible cast of the body was considered a marker of character” for the mission.¹² The new mode of clothing “signified that the wearer had converted to Christianity or has at least come under its influence.”¹³ Clothes marked a severance of a relation with the past. Mission influences marked the identity which played out on the body of the convert as a canvas. Missionaries were concerned with notions ‘decency’ or ‘indecent’ and hence the question of attire of women in India, especially in context of nudity or semi-nudity became fundamental in the civilizing mission. Modest dressing code was a universal for Christian womanhood and Indian experiences could not depart from the norms. Bernard Cohn writing about the breast cloth controversy marks out the trajectory of covering the upper body of Nadar women, a shift which challenged existing caste hierarchies.¹⁴

As critiques of ‘savage’ ‘naked’ communities grew the new converts needed to be clothed. Initially some Naga converts adopted the “Assamese Jacket and body cloth. Later, more explicitly European Styles were adopted, such as long shirts, mauve coats, khaki shorts, or white blouses imported from the plains.”¹⁵ Exploring a similar idea Satish Kumar and Sajal Nag writes, Missionaries detested the tribal insistence on wearing their respective costumes. At the first session of the Ao Baptist Association held in 1897 it was acrimoniously discussed “by what changes in food, houses, sanitation and clothing shall Christians better their mode of living?”¹⁶

Writing about Garo Hills, Harding notes about non-Christian attires: “They were scantily clad. A piece of cloth six feet long and as broad as a primitive kerosene stove wick, wound around the loins, constituted a Garo man’s overalls, while a piece of cloth twice the size of a man’s hanky tied around the hips constituted the usual dress of the women – this piece of cloth, plus a many beaded necklace and huge brass

¹¹ Richard Eves, p. 729

¹² Richard Eves, p. 734

¹³ Richard Eves, p. 734

¹⁴ Bernard S Cohn, p. 87-88

¹⁵ Richard M Eaton, p.13

¹⁶ Satish Kumar and Sajal Nag, “Noble Savage to Gentlemen: Discourses of Civilization and Missionary Modernity in North East India” in Contemporary India, Vol 1, No. 4, Oct-December 2022, p. 123

rings worn in the ears, as much as 15 lbs. in weight, and often tearing the lobe of the ear.”¹⁷ As the comparative visual eye was active, his later notes made during a tour commented on the very apparent difference and transformation: “These Christian Garo boys were clean, unsmelly, and more decently clad in dhotis and undershirts and their hair was cut and tidy. How different they were from the jungly Garos I had met that same morning! It seemed much easier to like and to love and to live for these Christians Garos. One sign that a Garo is thinking of becoming a Christian is that he begins to use soap and water. But these Christians had once been just like these wild men before they were won for Christ.”¹⁸

Richard Eaton observes that by the early decades of the 20th century sartorial preferences became a controversial topic between the missions and the colonial state. J.P Mills who was stationed among the Aos, in Naga Hills from 1917 to 1937, “vigorously attacked this practice, stating hot, baggy western clothing not only exposed converts to new diseases and interfered with their field work, but had the adverse psychological effect of causing its wearers not to see themselves as Nagas, but in some ways as foreigners.”¹⁹ So serious had this controversy become that, in 1925 British local officers refused to allow the Mission to start work in a new area until they agreed not to impose western clothing on their converts.” Colonial officials like J.H Hutton, in fact, accused the missionaries of creating a market in the hills for cloth traders of the plains.

H.K Barpujari, one of the early historians of northeast India to have worked on the Baptist Mission and also British relations with tribes wrote “The Cross followed the British flag.”²⁰ This line is instructive as it establishes the link between the mission and colonialism which makes it a different entry point from the earlier mission histories. As he goes on to mention: “Political and security reasons, not so much of evangelism, that had actuated the local authorities to welcome missionaries into Assam or Northeast Frontier.”²¹

Before the arrival of the missions, colonial ethnography and race theories constructed ‘tribes’ as ‘savage’, ‘blood thirsty’ and ‘uncivilized’. Early encounters with Garos and Lushais in the Bengal frontier and Nagas and Kukis in the Assam frontiers concretised on this definition based on barbaric practices, like raiding and head hunting. The success of the missionaries in Burma and in some fields of Africa was encouraging enough to test whether evangelising would civilize the ‘savage tribes’ and ‘tame’ these ‘unruly’ elements.

¹⁷ Frederic Harding, p. 51

¹⁸ Frederic Harding, p. 52

¹⁹ Richard M Eaton, “Conversion to Christianity among the Nagas, 1876-19”, IESHR, Vol, 21, Issue 1, March, 1984, p. 14

²⁰ H.K. Barpujari, *The American Missionaries and North-East India (1836-1900 AD)*, p.xi

²¹ *Ibid*, p. xiii

To 'Humanise' the Garos who were always at feuds and at times carried their raids into British Districts, as early as 1826, David Scott asked for help.²² Jenkins, another official reiterated that colonial position: "To put an end to their outrages, there could be no other means than a reformation of their feelings and habits through religion."²³ Moreover as briefly discussed by Roderick Wijunamai the East India Company's economic interests especially of tea and oil well explorations were also served by missionary interventions.

Missionaries arrived in the region informed with notions of 'work among savages.' Hence early missionary texts reflect this knowledge, their own racial superiority. Everything about the tribes, their way of life, mode of cultivation, way of dressing, food, social customs, consumption of alcohol and opium, seem barbaric. This refrain is constant.

Hence, becoming Christian meant a total transformation, at least for the early mission, which would mean developing a 'Christian character' involving morals and ethics and a change of everyday life. Some aspects of social life received more importance – like temperance, hygienic living, role of women being defined in a Victorian way, halt to inter-tribal warfare and headhunting and abolition of certain tribal institutions like bachelor's dormitory and slavery.

Though such transformations slowly took place and it in return shaped the society but over a period of time the notions of identity were incorporated into this newly fashioned self for the tribes. As theological historian Frederick Downs mention Christianity did not sharply break the tribal societies, the challenge of change was tempered with dialogue where the tribes continued with many of their traditions and some traditions were Christianised.

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²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid, p. xx

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Educational Progress in Sikkim within the North Eastern Landscape

Suman Negi¹

Abstract

India's North Eastern Region expresses parallels in aspects related to its physical, social, cultural, political and economic fabric. But when we look at the development trajectory each state stands out self-reliantly telling its own story. This paper in the backdrop of these trajectories explores the educational development in the state of Sikkim in context to its seven sisters. Sikkim the newest member to region has witnessed a fast-paced growth in a relative short span of time. Education in the region stands out when compared to many states that began at the same time but has a long way to go to achieve its desired targets. Focusing on school education, an attempt has been made to study the attributes related to the key performance indicators of education to understand the progress made and further identify the challenges in the last few decades of planned development.

Background

Education, especially in developing countries is placed at the center of all social and economic development strategies. As a measure they have invested in strengthening the overall ability of their education systems. India too has followed suit and has initiated many targeted educational developmental programmes in the last few decades with the aim to maximize the number of children entering the schooling system and also completing the same. Such strategies have contributed to the overall development and India has performed well as reflected in the educational development indicators across all levels of education and across the different regions of India. Although in the pursuit of development the pace has not been the same across the different regions of India and in this entire development trajectory the North Eastern Region of India holds a special place, not only for its geographical and physical location but also for the social, economic, political and cultural variations.

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The Paper in this context is an attempt to understand the educational development indicators in the North Eastern States, with a special focus on the state of Sikkim. This is being done with the target to see how far the region stands from achieving universalization of school education within the North East and identify some emerging issues and developmental challenges specific to this region.

The provision of schooling facilities in the region has also increased manifold and this can be attributed to the constitutional commitment of the State to provide free and compulsory education to all upto the age of 14. The Government of India has in place several schemes specially targeted for the region, but it must be noted that some of these schemes were introduced in the North East Region as late as in 2000-01. Except Assam where the District Primary Education Project (DPEP) was launched in the 1990s in 9 selected districts, no special efforts, in the form of projects or programmes, were made in the region for achieving Universal Elementary Education (UEE) despite the fact that the region was far flung, mountainous and backward. The Sarva Shikha Abhiyaan (SSA) was the first serious effort made in the country to achieve the goal of UEE, which also covered the North Eastern Region (Zaidi, 2006).

Sikkim, located in the North Eastern part of India is one of the smallest states of India, but apart from its territory being undersized its location is strategically significant, as it shares most of its borders with other countries viz. Nepal, China and Bhutan. West Bengal is the only Indian state with which it shares its boundary. Sikkim with its chequered history encompassing a kingdom ruled by generations of Chogyals (Kings), existed as a British protectorate and then as an Indian protectorate from (1950-1974) that culminated in its merge as the 22nd State of the Republic of India in 1975 (Bhutia, 2005).

Sikkim in the North East Context

Sikkim was not born out of India and it was not a part of the contiguous seven northeastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura which is commonly referred to as the seven sisters. Sikkim was included as a part of the North East Council (NEC) in 2002, under the Department of Development of North-East Region (DONER). Therefore, very often it is referred to as the brother to the seven sisters of the North Eastern States.

India's North East Region comprising of eight states covers 7.98 percent of India's territory and collectively represents 3.76 percent of the country's population of over 45.77 million. Within North Eastern Region, the state of Sikkim is the smallest in terms of population as well as area, but the performance of the state on various social and economic indicators when compared with the other states of the North East Region shows better performance.

The state has four administrative districts named according to their regional location which include the North District, West District, South District and East District. Sikkim comprises of only 0.05 percent of India's total share with 6,10,577 persons according to the 2011 Census and represents a rather lower sex ratio at 890 females per 1000 males. The population during the decade (2001-2011) registered a relatively lower growth rate of 12.89 percent as compared to 33 percent between the decades 1991-2001. The proportion of those living in urban area has more than doubled with 25 percent of the population living in urban areas as compared to 75 percent in rural. 47 percent of the population resides in the East districts which is also most urbanized, as compared to the North district where 7 percent of the population lives and the density is 10 persons per sq.km.

Historical Overview of Education in Sikkim

There is limited historical evidence of the existence of any formal educational system in Sikkim, although, the existence of monastic educational system primarily to train monks traditionally existed. This was the only education that prevailed for 250 years until the British came in. It was in 1830's that formal modern education took its shape under the British rule and a missionary school was established at Gangtok in 1833. This was followed by the establishment of two more schools in 1906 that were later combined in 1924 and renamed after the then Monarch as Tashi Namgyal Higher Secondary School, and the school exists even today as a Government Aided School. (Bhattacharya, 1986).

Looking into the administrative set-up of education in the state it was in 1920 that the King of Sikkim reorganized the Education Department and placed it under the administration of a full-fledged Director of Education who was assisted by a 'Board' under the headship of a president. In 1922, the Education Department was placed under the Judicial Secretary (Mahajam 1995). In 1945 the first Inspectors of Schools was appointed in Sikkim. In 1950, an officer was given the charge of the Education Department, and in 1953 the first Executive Councilor of the department was appointed. In 1954, the first Director from outside the Kingdom was appointed and he was assisted by three Inspectors of Schools. One such inspector was posted at the headquarters and the others in the districts. In the early sixties, at the directorate level the administration set up comprised of the Director of Education, an Inspector of Schools in charge of planning and administration, an Office Superintendent and about a dozen clerical staff. In 1975 when Sikkim became the twenty-second state of the Indian Union, efforts were made to further strengthen the educational administrative set-up and certain new posts which include the posts of Joint Director (Planning), Joint Director (Administration), Joint Director (Academic) and four Joint Directors one for each district were created (Mahajan 2005). According to the Sikkim government gazette (2005), it was in May, 2004 that the state Government of Sikkim notified the existing Education Department as Human Resource Development Department (HRDD). The HRDD exists as a separate Department and is headed by a Minister and has the normal

administrative set up as any other state, with Joint-Directors in the four Districts heading the education at the district level.

Literacy Trends and Status

One of the basic indicators of progress in education is the literacy rate. These rates have a direct bearing on the educational opportunities available to the population. The literacy rates in the North Eastern states have been rather impressive as all the states apart from Arunachal and Assam (marginally) have literacy rates higher than the national average. The five states of Mizoram, Tripura, Sikkim, Nagaland and Manipur respectively figure amongst the top ten states with highest literacy. Also, the pace of growth in literacy has been higher in most states than the national level compared with the national average. Mizoram represented the highest literacy rates while Arunachal Pradesh the lowest. Sikkim within the North Eastern states represented the third highest literacy rate after the states of Mizoram and Tripura. The gender gap in the state also narrowed from 15.6 percent to 10.9 between 2001 and 2011.

Table 1: Literacy Rates in North Eastern States

States	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Arunachal Pradesh	7.13	11.29	25.55	41.59	54.34	66.95
Assam	32.95	33.94	–	52.89	63.25	73.18
Manipur	36.04	38.47	49.66	59.89	70.53	79.85
Meghalaya	26.92	29.49	42.05	49.1	62.56	75.48
Mizoram	44.01	53.8	59.88	82.26	88.80	91.58
Nagaland	21.95	33.78	50.28	61.65	66.59	80.11
Tripura	20.24	30.98	50.1	60.44	73.19	87.75
Sikkim	–	17.74	34.05	56.94	68.81	82.20
INDIA	28.3	34.45	43.57	52.21	64.84	74.04

Source: Census of India, various years.

Education Sector Diagnosis

One of the fundamental mandates of educational planning is an exhaustive assessment of the current educational situation of a given administrative unit. This assessment is often referred to as the Education Sector Diagnosis (ESD) that forms the basis for the formulations of developmental programs and policies. An Education Sector Diagnosis is a critical examination of the status, functioning and results of the education system, designed to identify its strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improvement (UNESCO, 2010). It is the diagnosis of the educational indicators that helps to analyse the performance and identify the gap between target and achievement. It is on the basis of these indicators that further prioritization is done and further targets are set so as to rationalize input costs.

In an Education Sector Diagnosis the state of the education system is evaluated from eight main perspectives of Context, Quality, Access, Internal Efficiency External Efficiency, Costs and Financing, Equity and Management. The present paper focuses on some of these perspectives and the Key Performance Indicators under the government flagship programme of Samagra Shiksha, has been taken to have an in-depth review of the different sectors and sub sectors.

a. Demographic Setting

The requirements and demand for education is a direct outcome of the size of the relevant school aged population and therefore it becomes necessary to examine the demographic distribution of the school going population to be prepared for any future situation. Such an analysis provides the number of children to be enrolled at each level, which is the starting point for assessing requirements in terms of resources, including teaching staff, pedagogical material, textbooks, and classrooms (UNESCO 2014).

The table below represents the age wise distribution of the population in the North Eastern States from the 2011 Census. The distribution of the population into different age groups shows that Meghalaya has 16.4 percent of its population below 5 years of age as compared to only 8.7 percent in Sikkim. The average for India was 11.5 percent and the NER was 12.3 percent. Meghalaya also has the highest proportion (30 percent) of population in the school going age group (6-17 years) whereas Assam has the lowest (17.7 percent) and Sikkim had about 25 percent of its population in this age group. It must be noted that more than half the population in all the states except Assam was below 25 years of age. The median age calculated for the population for these states represents that Meghalaya is the youngest state with the median age at 19 years as compared to Assam being the oldest state with a median age of 31 years. The median age for both the national level and Sikkim were 25 years.

Table 2: Age wise Distribution of Population -2011

Age	All ages	Below 5 Years	6-17 Years	18-25 Years	Below 25 Years	26-60 Years	Above 60 Years	Median Age
Arunachal	1383727	12.8	29.8	16.2	58.8	37.4	3.7	21
Assam	31205576	10.3	28.4	15.8	54.5	40.0	5.4	23
Manipur	2855794	9.0	27.2	16.2	52.4	41.4	6.0	24
Meghalaya	2966889	16.4	30.1	15.8	62.4	33.4	4.1	19
Mizoram	1097206	13.2	25.3	16.3	54.7	39.5	5.6	23
Nagaland	1978502	12.3	29.2	16.9	58.4	37.0	4.5	21
Tripura	3673917	10.7	22.8	16.5	50.0	43.1	6.9	26
Sikkim	610577	8.7	25.0	17.8	51.5	42.3	6.0	25
NER	45772188	12.3	25.8	16.3	54.4	39.8	5.7	23
India	1210854977	11.5	25.2	15.5	52.2	40.3	7.1	25

Source: Calculated form Census 2011.

From the data and information, it is evident that a large portion of our population is in the school going age group or below the school going age group, therefore the need to plan for educational requirements becomes important. The policy and planning needs to focus on developing strategic interventions keeping in view the demographic features.

School Age Population in Sikkim: The growth rate of population of Sikkim has seen a considerable decline over the decades. The overall decline in growth is also reflected clearly in the population in the school going age groups of 6-17 years that comprised of 29.7 percent of the state's total population in 2001, but the share of the same group declined to 25 percent in 2011. Within this age group the share of males was higher for both the periods as compared to females at 31.5 percent in 2001 and 26.2 percent in 2011.

The age group wise distribution was further desegregated into relevant age groups for the four different levels of schooling. The share of those between the age groups 6-10 years who belong to the primary level of schooling comprised of 9.77 percent of the population in 2011 as compared to 11.81 percent share in 2001. The share of those at the Upper Primary level in age group 11-13 years too was higher in 2001 (7.7 percent) as compared to 2011 (6.5 percent), likewise the share of those at the Secondary level (14-15 years) and Higher Secondary level (16-17 years) also declined in 2011 at 4 percent for both the levels. Therefore, the share of the population in the relevant school age groups have declined over the years indicating that the overall demand or requirement for education in terms of school size could also decline.

Projected Population in the School Age Population: Any planning exercise without the availability of requisite data can become a futile exercise. Without accurate data it poses as a big challenge to identify existing issues and further set required targets and availability of school statistics in India has made great progress in the last three decades. Annual school census is conducted by the government regularly on various aspects of school related information across all levels of schooling. Although this data is regularly uploaded on government websites, challenges do exist as data on many attributes are not shared with the public.

However demographic data poses a big challenge as it is collected once only in ten years at the household level through Census. As the Census 2021 is yet to be launched, therefore, age specific data required for planning has been done using population projections for the purpose.

Population projections can be done using multiple methodologies to support the planning processes. Keeping this in view the Government of India constituted a Technical Group on Population Projections to look into the population projections in 2019. The Committee's Report was released in July, 2020. The expert committee group made projections for all the states and union territories of India based on the previous census years.. The projections were made for every 5 years from 2012 upto

2036, and the data has been used in the present analysis too..These projections were made on the basis of the population size of the states. Since the state-wise population for each state in the northeastern region is relatively small, the Technical Group combined the population together for the seven states in the region excluding Assam. The combined population was projected using the Cohort Component Method, after which the percentage share of population in each state based on the Census 2011 share was applied to this projected population to get the value for each state from 2012 up to 2036

b. Current Status of School Education

School education in India has witness tremendous progress as far as access and participation are concerned, but the moot question that remains is how long it would take to achieve the targets set for universalization of Education and issues pertaining to quality and desired outcomes...This section of the paper looks into the current status of Education in Sikkim in context of its neighbouring states of the North Eastern Region. An attempt is also made to understand the the temporal trends for Sikkim pertaining to selected educational indicators. The indicators analysed are: Access to school education, status of basic Infrastructure and Teaching-Learning Facilities, Educational Participation, Availability of Teacher and Educational Performance. These indicators have been examined using the U-DISE/ UDISE + data.

Access to School Education: Access to basic schooling facilities is mandated by law to all citizens in the school going age group. Provisioning of these facilities with basic minimum standards is the responsibility of the State. It is well documented that school education has seen its fastest growth in the last few decades, systematic programme interventions by the government have boosted access to schooling across the country.

Table 3 gives the population served by each school across all levels of schooling in the North Eastern Region. The average population being served by each school in the NER was 530 persons in 2021-22, that increased from 426 persons in 2016-17, although it must be noted that this average is much lower than the national average of 914 persons. Within the North-eastern states, Meghalaya indicated better levels of accessibility, wherein one school was available for 221 persons as compared to 826 persons in case of Tripura. Overall, the population served by each school in the NER showed an increasing trend between 2016-17 and 2021-22, these trends were also better than the national averages.

To examine the physical accessibility in terms of school distributions, the area served per school in square kilometers was taken for these states. This becomes pertinent especially for the region as it is mainly mountainous and the connotation of distance changes in a hilly terrain. On this parameter, the national average was slightly better at one school available for every 2.2 square kilometers, compared to one school for every 2.72 square kilometers for the North East Region. Among the states, Arunachal

Pradesh had the largest area of 23.24 square kilometers being served by each school, whereas Assam and Meghalaya have smaller area coverage per school (1.29 square kilometers and 1.53 square kilometers respectively), this could mainly be attributed to the topography in these states which is mostly plain.

Table 3: Access to Education in the North Eastern States

States	Population (2021 Project)	Total Schools 2021	Population Served by each School	Area in Sq. Kms.	Area Served by each School (Sq. Kms)
Arunachal Pradesh	1533000	3603	425	83,743	23.24
Assam	35043000	60859	576	78,438	1.29
Manipur	3165000	4617	686	22,429	4.86
Meghalaya	3228000	14600	221	22,327	1.53
Mizoram	1216000	3911	311	21,081	5.39
Nagaland	2192000	2718	806	16,579	6.10
Sikkim	677000	1259	538	7,096	5.64
Tripura	4071000	4929	826	10,486	2.13
NER	51125000	96496	530	262,179	2.72
All India	1361343000	1489115	914	3287240	2.21

Source: UDISE+, December 2022; Census of India, 2011

Table 4: Total Schools and Distribution of Schools by Level

India/ State/UT	Total Schools	Primary	Upper Primary	Elementary	Secondary	Higher Secondary
India	1489115	51.07	29.27	80.34	10.10	9.56
Arunachal Pradesh	3603	51.26	35.33	86.59	8.85	4.55
Assam	60859	66.52	17.54	84.06	11.98	3.97
Manipur	4617	52.46	20.92	73.38	20.75	5.87
Meghalaya	14600	63.17	24.17	87.34	10.01	2.64
Mizoram	3911	37.87	38.84	76.71	18.05	5.24
Nagaland	2718	42.57	28.96	71.53	21.19	7.28
Sikkim	1259	54.41	24.38	78.79	11.91	9.29
Tripura	4929	51.17	24.87	76.04	14.24	9.72

Source: UDISE + 2021-22.

Distribution of Schools by level of Education: The availability of schools has largely increased across all the north eastern states. The following tables highlight the current status in availability of schools across the four levels of schooling, between grades I to XII in the north eastern states. The proportion of Primary Schools was highest in the state of Assam at 66.52 percent followed by Meghalaya (63.5 percent). Mizoram on the other hand had the least share of primary sections (37 percent) followed by Nagaland (42.57 percent). Taking the elementary level of schooling for the region

except Manipur and Nagaland all the other six states in the region had more than 75 percent of the schools upto the Elementary level. The availability of Secondary and Higher Secondary schools across all the states were lower as compared to Elementary schools. The states of Nagaland (20.75 percent) and Manipur (21.19 percent) had the highest share of secondary schools percent. Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya had the lowest share of Higher Secondary Schools. The sates of Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur had a higher proportion of secondary schools. Tripura (7 percent) and Sikkim (6 percent) have the highest proportion of composite schools as compared to a 2.7 percent national average.

Distribution of Schools by Management of Education: The share of private schools is growing across the country; the North Eastern region also has seen a steady increase. The distribution of schools in terms of their management represented a varying trend at elementary and secondary levels of schooling. At the elementary level a higher proportion of schools were managed by the government and at the Secondary level a higher proportion of schools were under private management across all the states. The distribution of schools by management at the elementary level shows that, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh had higher share of Government Schools at the elementary level whereas, states of Sikkim and Mizoram had a higher share of private schools. At the secondary level Nagaland and Manipur had more than 50 percent of the school under private management and Sikkim and Tripura had a higher share of schools under Government management.

Table 5: Total Schools and Distribution of Schools by Management

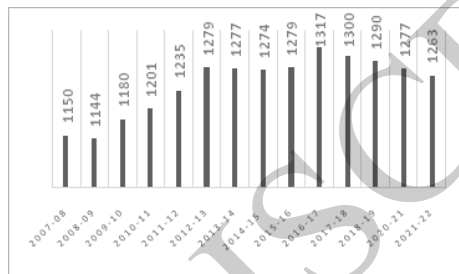
States	Total Elementary Schools	Govt. Schools (%)	Private (%)	Total Secondary Schools	Govt. Schools (%)	Private (%)
Arunachal Pradesh	3120	85.03	12.4	483	68.74	24.2
Assam	51154	79.71	5.1	9705	48.57	33.5
Manipur	3388	71.46	10.0	1229	38.08	54.6
Meghalaya	12752	59.96	10.5	1848	7.41	42.2
Mizoram	3000	73.93	22.2	911	37.87	40.4
Nagaland	1944	84.83	15.1	774	40.18	59.8
Sikkim	992	65.12	34.1	267	81.65	14.2
Tripura	3748	86.79	6.2	1181	85.44	11.2
India	1196265	75.65	17.5	292850	40.10	43.3

Source: UDISE + 2021-22.

Trends in Availability of Schooling Facilities in Sikkim: In the backdrop of foregoing discussion an attempt is made tounderstand the temporal trends in availability of schools with reference to Sikkim. Trends in availability of schools for the last decade, using the DISE, U-DISE and UDISE + data according to its availability, as given in

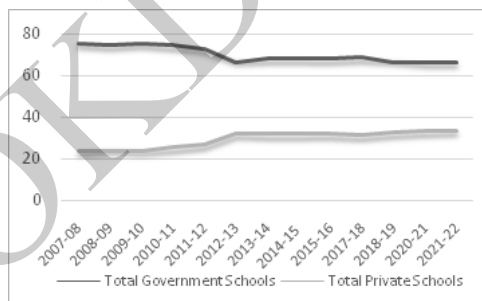
Figure 1 clearly represents that the number of schools rose from 1150 to 1317 schools in 2016-17. Post this period there has been a steady decline, with 1263 schools available in 2021-22. This mainly could be attributed to school mergers and closures due to shift in policy. One important fact that can be observed with the changing pattern in schools by management in Sikkim is the steady shrinking size of government managed schools and a steady increasing share of privately managed schools. The share of Government and Private schools was at 75: 25 in 2007-08 and in a span of less than 15 years the proportional share changed to 66:33. The government needs to take cognizance of the on the same, as there is also a shift in enrollments from government to private schools impacting state expenditures on education.

Fig. 1: Availability of Schools in Sikkim



Source: DISE, U-DISE, UDISE (Different years: 2007-08 – 2021-22)

Fig. 2: Distribution of Schools in Sikkim



Source: DISE, U-DISE, UDISE (Different years: 2007-08 – 2021-22)

Current Status of Basic Infrastructure and Teaching-Learning Facilities

The availability of infrastructure facilities in schools plays a very important role in determining the participation and further the performance of students in an education system. As the availability of these physical facilities supports the entire process of teaching and learning and students are better equipped and more comfortable. Most of the basic facilities like drinking water, toilets, toilets for girls etc. have been provided in majority schools, although the latest data from UDISE Plus 2021-22 data shows that the most essential necessity like drinking water was not available in 48

percent of the government schools in the state of Meghalaya and 25 percent of the Government schools in Tripura. Some select basic facilities have been examined in this section to get an understanding of infrastructure development within the schools in the North Eastern states. Schools with functional computers, availability of electricity connections, availability of library, book bank and reading corner facilities in schools.

The availability of electricity and computers in schools has significantly risen compared to the previous years, but are still far from where it should be. Information technology forms an integral part of an education system in today's day and time. Although evidence suggests that, these are far from the reach of many students in almost all the states. The table below reflect the dismal situation in most of the states with 75 percent schools in Meghalaya, 45 percent schools in Manipur, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh do not have basic electricity connections in schools. Sikkim was the only state which had electricity connection in more than 94 percent of the schools. This situation when compared between the government and the privately manage schools the data very clearly reflects that the privately manage schools across all states from the region were better equipped with electricity connections.

Table 6: Percentage of Schools with Functional Computers and Electricity Connection

India/ State/ UT	Functional Electricity Connection				Functional Computers			
	Total	Govt.	Govt. Aided	Pvt. Unaided	Total	Govt.	Govt. Aided	Pvt. Unaided
Arunachal Pradesh	53.8	45.4	97.1	94.6	21.7	12.2	85.3	67.4
Assam	75.1	87.8	21.1	76.5	8.4	6.7	3.3	32.1
Manipur	54.5	43.5	30	95.9	20.3	7	4.3	65.6
Meghalaya	24.7	16.2	31.6	37	12.5	6.9	17.3	21.8
Mizoram	79.6	74.8	95.7	87.3	20.3	15.9	30.9	28.2
Nagaland	67.1	57.8	0	91.2	38.1	25.8	0	69.9
Sikkim	98.4	97.7	100	100	61.2	54.2	57.9	77.4
Tripura	55	53	86.1	89.3	16.6	12.8	58.1	60.3
India	86.6	85.4	86.9	91.7	25.9	16.5	50.3	49.1

Source: UDISE + 2021-22, Ministry of Education, GoI.

The post covid era needs to focus on strengthening the IT support systems in schools as the most fundamental requirement towards the E-Learning initiatives. The first step in doing so is by providing functional computers to schools, but the data from 2021-22 school statistics on availability of functional computers in schools presents a very decimal situation. Most of the schools in the region seem to be far from having even minimum requirements of computers. The State wise data reflects that 91 percent of the schools in Assam 88 percent of the schools in Meghalaya, 85 percent schools in Tripura, and close to 80 percent of the schools in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Mizoram did not have the provision of a basic facility like a computer. The situation was even worse in government managed schools, Sikkim was the only state where more than 54

percent of schools had functional computers. The availability of functional computers in Government run schools in all the other 6 States stood at less than 20 percent. This is an alarming situation despite government initiatives to support schools with all inputs. The matter assumes particular significance in light of the NEP 2020 targets.

Availability of Teachers

The academic support system in the schools of the North Eastern region reflects a better scenario as compared to the physical infrastructure, wherein the availability of teachers is relatively high when compared to the number of students studying in these schools. The distribution of female teachers was by and large proportional across the states. The Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) is one of the key performance indicators for school education. It is calculated by taking the Ratio of teachers to that of the number of students enrolled. The data for the primary and upper primary level separately shows an adequate number of teachers available for the states of the NER. The highest PTR was for the state of Assam, which had one teacher available for every 18 students, on the contrary the lowest was for the state of Sikkim, which had one teacher available for every six students, followed by Nagaland with a PTR of 1:9. Meghalaya had 3 teachers per school to teach eight grades of the elementary level. These statistics also reveal that the availability of teachers in most of the schools in these states is relatively high but still there were a high proportion of schools that were being run by a single teacher. Taking the average number of single teacher schools, Assam had the highest proportion with 21 students at the primary level and 14 students for every teacher at the upper primary level, followed by Meghalaya (20/14) and Tripura (18/ 20). These three states were also the most populated states in the NER, accounting for a higher PTR. Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland on the other side had extremely low PTRs, in a way representing small school sizes.

Table 7: Availability of Teachers at the Elementary Education Level

State/UT	Total Teachers	Female Teachers (%)	Pupil-Teacher Ratio: Primary/ UP	Single Teacher Schools* (%)	Average Teacher per School	Distribution of teachers		
						Govt.	Govt. Aided	Pvt. Un-aided
Arunachal Pradesh	23707	48.52	12/9	20.56	6.6	71.07	3.73	23.44
Assam	352944	41.01	21/14	3.80	5.8	63.03	9.91	19.66
Manipur	42684	54.31	13/11	8.23	9.2	40.99	6.11	47.26
Meghalaya	55160	58.42	20/14	6.87	3.8	42.94	32.33	22.56
Mizoram	23366	47.12	16/8	2.37	6.0	55.44	7.90	35.00
Nagaland	31402	55.56	11/8	0.67	11.6	61.82	\$	38.18
Sikkim	13613	60.02	7/8	0.54	10.8	70.70	1.60	27.70
Tripura	36433	34.95	18/20	0.06	7.4	83.98	2.57	11.49
India	9507123	51.30	26/19		6.4	53.87	9.08	33.14

Source: UDISE + 2021-22; * 2017-18

The distribution of teachers is a crucial element in school education and teacher deployment comes as a big bottleneck in our country setting. The latest UDISE + (2021-22) dataset does not give us the data for single teacher schools on the public domain, therefore the U-DISE 2017-18 data has been used to examine the single teacher schools that existed in the NER. The results for Arunachal Pradesh are very alarming, with 21 percent schools having single teachers, followed by Manipur and Meghalaya where 8 to 7 percent schools have single teachers.

Educational Participation

Planned interventions of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan(SSA) and Rashtriya Madamik Shiksha Abhiyaan (RMSA) along with several other initiatives have yielded positive results with a significant increase in participation levels and a decline in the wastage. Some the indicators that are used to capture educational participation include percentage of girls enrolled, schools with enrollments less than or equal to 50 students, Student flow rates, Gross Enrollment Rates and Net Enrollment Rates. It must also be noted that the sex ratio in these states varied from 987 females/1000 males in Manipur to 890 females /1000 males in Sikkim. The sex ratio has a bearing on male female differences in educational participation outcome. At the elementary level the proportion of girls enrolled to total enrollments crossed the 50 percent mark only in Assam, rest all the states were marginally below 50 percent. On the contrary a higher proportion of girls were enrolled across all states at the secondary school level in comparison to its population share in the state, and Mizoram represented the highest share with 55 percent girls enrolled. Only Arunachal Pradesh had a share below the national average of 51 percent.

Table 8: Total Enrollments and Percentage of Girls Enrolled

States	Total Enrolled at Elementary	percent Girls enrolled at Elementary Level	No. of Schools having ≤ 50 Enrollment at Elementary*	Total Enrolled at Secondary Level	percent Girls enrolled at Secondary Level
Arunachal Pradesh	248991	48.0	60.6	79315	48.1
Assam	5551138	49.8	46	1550434	51.0
Manipur	460886	50.3	60	170585	52.9
Meghalaya	774398	50.6	67.6	180540	49.7
Mizoram	208598	48.9	58.3	68739	55.3
Nagaland	274394	49.5	49.8	92781	51.8
Sikkim	75359	48.5	60.2	40970	52.0
Tripura	491957	48.3	42.7	192222	52.9
India	188632942	47.9		67107681	50.8

Source: UDISE +, 2021-22. *U-DISE 2016-17.

The school size also forms an important criterion to understand school participation and closely looking at the school size in the region, it is clearly evident that large proportions of school consist of small schools and have less than 50 children enrolled. The higher populated states of Assam and Tripura have a lesser number of smaller schools as compared to the other states. More than 67 percent of the schools in Meghalaya had less than 50 students enrolled, followed by Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Mizoram where more than 50 percent of the total schools had less than 50 students enrolled in each school. This becomes a cause of concern as large amount of resources are being invested into educational systems, and schools with low PTR and low enrollments do not make the best utilization. The number of students enrolled in a school is also significant as a smaller size may increase the per student cost incurred, this calls for the greater involvement and engagement of state governments, civil society organizations to work out better planning methodologies to rationally open new schools only where required.

Table 9: Enrollment Ratios

India/ State/ UT	Gross Enrolment Ratio			Net Enrolment Rate			
	Elementary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Primary	Upper Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary
Arunachal Pradesh	109.9	66.5	53.7	99.3	57.6	37.3	31.2
Assam	109.8	74.5	40.1	100	73.9	48.6	26.7
Manipur	117.6	76	69.9				
Meghalaya	155.7	85.1	46	100	75.7	47.2	24.8
Mizoram	137.5	93.4	61.3	100	76.7	51.7	35.6
Nagaland	87.3	62.2	35.8	82.2	48.5	36.4	21
Sikkim	92.9	89.1	64.2	84.8	52.8	44.4	32.2
Tripura	109.1	81.3	56.3	100	79.8	68.1	47.1
India	100.1	79.6	57.6	88.6	71.3	47.9	34.2

Source: UDISE + 2021-22

The population participating in the education system demonstrates the accessibility s/he has to education. Looking at the Gross Enrollment Ratios (GER), which is calculated by taking all those enrolled at a particular level of education, in relation to the population in the age groups for a particular level of education shows that GER at the Elementary level in most states were above the national average, except the states of Sikkim and Nagaland that were marginally low at 87 and 93 percent respectively. The secondary and Higher Secondary GER represented a better scenario in most states when compared to national averages of 79.6 percent. The GER for Nagaland was as low as 36 percent. Age-appropriate learning is often stressed, so that a child learns according to his mental and physical capacity. The Net Enrollment Ratio (NER) is an important key indicator based on age wise enrollment in a grade to the actual age wise population for a particular grade. The NER rules out those who are

overage and underage children at a particular level of schooling. The NER represents a sharp decline when compared to the GER for the states with the lowest being for Meghalaya, and Mizoram at the Elementary level. The NER for the secondary level of schooling represented an even dismal picture and only in Tripura (47 percent) the ratio was close to 50 percent market.

Educational Wastage: The total numbers of students who drop-out of an education system have significantly reduced over the years; this could be an outcome of the various initiatives taken by the government along with incentives given to students. Although the number of those who dropped out are relatively low at the elementary level compared with the secondary level dropouts, the data from UDISE + for the two indicators of repetition rate and drop-out rates, for the North Eastern states presents varying picture. At the elementary level the repetition rates have improved significantly. Nagaland represented the highest proportion repeaters followed by Sikkim, which were slightly higher than the national average.

Table 10: Repetition and Dropout Rates

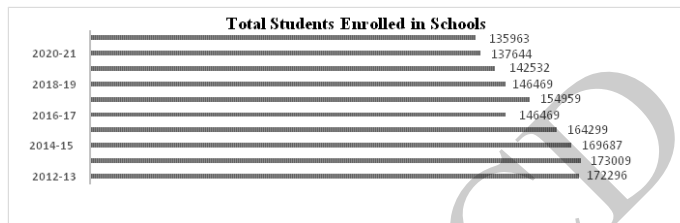
States	Repetition Rate			Dropout Rate		
	I-V	VI-VIII	XI-X	I-V	VI-VIII	IX-X
Arunachal Pradesh	2.4	1.7	1	9.3	6.7	11.7
Assam	0.2	0.3	1.1	6	8.8	20.3
Manipur	0.2	0.1	0.1	13.3	5.6	1.3
Meghalaya	1.3	1.6	4	9.8	10.6	21.7
Mizoram	0.1	0.1	1.9	6.4	2.7	11.9
Nagaland	1.7	2.2	3.9	5	4	17.5
Sikkim	0.1	0.2	2.1	1.8	0	11.9
Tripura	0.2	0.3	1.3	1.1	4.5	8.3
India	0.5	0.7	1.1	1.5	3	12.6

Source: UDISE +, 2021-22

The second indicator taken to measure wastage in this section is the dropout rate, which also represents a varying trend. A commonly known fact is that the average number of students that dropout from the schooling system increases as one moves up in the educational ladder, but the same was not the case in most of the north eastern states, as some states represented higher dropout rates at the primary level. At the Elementary level the dropout rates were higher in the states of Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya. Except Tripura all the eight North Eastern states have a higher dropout rate when compared to the national average of 1.5 percent. The dropout rates at the secondary level further increased in most of the states and the increase was most sharp in the states of Meghalaya (21.7 percent), Assam (20.3 percent) and Nagaland (17.5 percent). Therefore, dropping out of the schooling system comes as one of the main challenges in most of the states that needs to be looked into.

Enrolment Trends in Sikkim: Ironically number of students enrolled in school education Sikkim has declined over the years, which is a direct outcome of the shrinking demographic size. The state had over 17 lakh students enrolled in 2012-13, which declined 13.5 lakh students in 2021-22. Overall, the decline in the number of students enrolled has been steady in the last ten years. In such a scenario, planners need to focus on school requirements and its related inputs for the future years and utilize resources systematically.

Fig 3: Total Students Enrollment in Sikkim 2012-13 to 2021-22



Repetition Trends Figure 3 shows the decline in the number of repeaters at both the primary (17 percent) and upper primary level (18 percent) in 2007-08 to below 1 percent by 2015-16. These are also outcomes of policy decisions taken under the SSA and Right to Education of not detaining students. On the contrary the dropout rates represent a fluctuating trend, which declined from 5.2 percent in 2007-08 to 2.2 percent in 2012-13 but again increased to 4.6 percent in 2014-15 and declined in 2015-16. The dropout rates at the secondary level taken for three years represents an increasing trend which is great cause of concern, as the average dropout rate at the secondary level was 9.23 percent in 2013-14 and it increased to almost 16 percent in a matter of two years. A higher proportion of males dropped out as compared to females.

Fig. 4: Average Repetition Rate

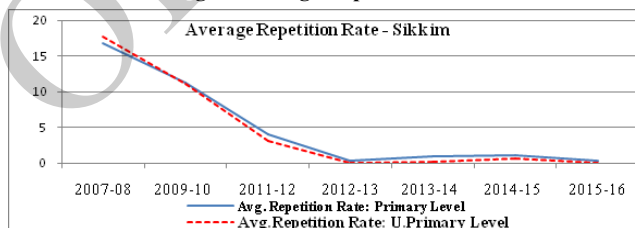
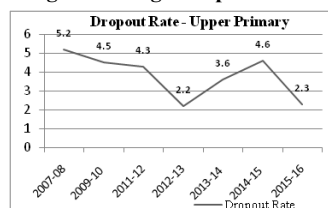
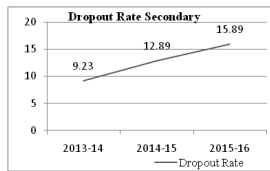


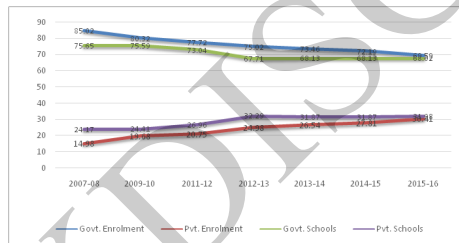
Fig. 5: Average Dropout Rates





Management-wise Schools and Enrollments in Sikkim: Figure 4 below represents the percentage share of students enrolled in schools and the percentage share of schools under government and private management. It is clearly visible that the gap in both the number of schools and enrollments in the schools is narrowing over the years.. Overall, there were 75.6 percent government schools that had 85 percent of the total enrollments, in relation to 15 percent private schools with 24 percent enrollments in 2007-08. The share drastically changed to 68 percent of Government schools having share of 69 percent enrollments as compared to a share of 30 percent private schools with 32 percent enrollments in 2015-16.

Fig. 6: Management wise Schools and Enrollments Sikkim



Source: UDISE 2016-17

Some Major Findings

The literacy rates in the North Eastern states have been rather impressive as all the states apart from Arunachal and Assam. The five states of Mizoram, Tripura, Sikkim, Nagaland and Manipur respectively figure amongst the top ten states with highest literacy. The literacy trends have shown a steady increase with most states above the national average. Demographically India is a young country and the eight North Eastern States contribute to the composition of this young population, with the average age being 23 years, as compared to 25 years for the country as a whole. Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland had the highest share of those in the school going age groups, whereas Sikkim and Tripura has the lowest share. Physical accessibility in terms of school distribution was highest in Meghalaya and Mizoram while Assam and Meghalaya had a higher density of schools. There were a higher proportion of stand-alone schools, with 75 percent of schools being at the elementary level across the states. . The SCR at the secondary level were relatively high with the states of Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam has a higher ratio than the prescribed norms of 40 and the lowest was in the state of Mizoram Another major concern is the availability

of electricity in schools. Sikkim was only state which had electricity connection in more than 94 percent of the schools. Overall educational participation was high in the region, but showed declining trend as one moved up the ladder of education. The school size was bigger for the highly populated states of Assam and Tripura, whereas, more than 67 percent of the schools in Meghalaya had less than 50 students enrolled, followed by Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Mizoram where more than 50 percent of the total schools had less than 50 students enrolled in each school.

Conclusion

Although northeast region has been known for its economic backwardness, however in respect of development of education, most of the states in the region have done well when compared to national level notwithstanding the many shortfalls that need special focus. Schools in the region need to be provided with minimum standards to enhance learning levels of students, which needs immediate attention. The IT support system provided in schools is negligible, in light of the E-learning revolutions taking place, the government schools need to strengthen its base.

It is a well understood fact that the states in north east India have their own internal challenges of political unrest, international boundaries, cultural and ethnic tensions and employment opportunities to name a few. But moving beyond these the governance mechanism in the region also needs to be strengthened, with stakeholders taking educational planning and monitoring as a priority.

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Dismal Politics: Gender, Risk Aversion and Political Parties in Assam

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Abstract

Women's low representation in the electoral process has triggered attention not just from scholars but from civil society as well. Arguments have hinged mostly around the inevitability of interventions like gender quotas to counteract the historical as well as social disadvantages that have hindered women's participation and representation in legislative bodies. Studies have also probed the reluctance of political parties in upholding women's candidature due to their inherent patriarchal bias. The present study is an attempt to investigate the ways in which political parties help or hinder women aspirants in politics. It uses data from the Assam Legislative Assembly elections from 1962-2021 to study the patterns in which women are recruited by different political parties and the implications thereof. By using not just nomination data but also deposit forfeiture data, the paper is able to show the centrality of political parties in augmenting the chances of women's electoral success. It was seen that as far as women candidates are concerned all the categories of political parties display risk-aversion. Especially, National and State Parties which have become extremely crucial within the electoral system use higher standards of selection while nominating women. Moreover, as parties are unwilling to put stakes upon women, they tend to mainly nominate women who bring with them the social capital from kinship networks. Therefore, the domain of electoral politics not only continues to be gendered but also dismal.

Introduction

The elections to fifteenth legislative assembly elections of Assam were held in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic- March and April 2021- and recorded a spectacular voter turnout of 81.8%. With the visible angst against the Citizenship Amendment Act across the state in 2019, the election was seen as an opportune moment by the anti-incumbents to raise it as a core poll issue. The protests against the CAA, which began in December 2019 saw the participation of thousands of women and awakened

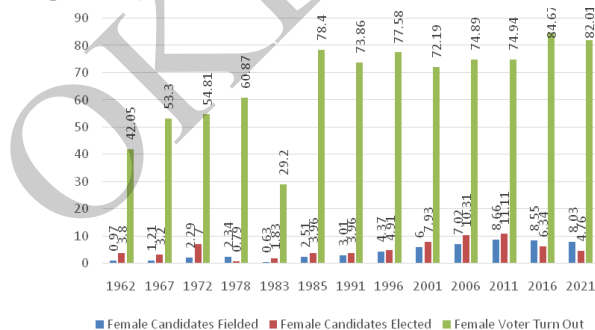
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memories of the Assam Agitation. In close resemblance to the political developments after the agitation, in this instance too, women’s participation in the protest movements did not pave the way for increased representation of women in the legislative body. In fact, in comparison to the previous elections of 2016 when eight women returned as legislators, the number declined to six. In a house of 126 members, therefore, women constituted merely 4.76% which is the lowest since the 1991 elections when it was 3.96%. The maximum number of women was elected to the thirteenth legislative assembly though it did not even cross 12%. The decline is specifically worrisome as the percentage of women contesting the elections has roughly been similar and yet there has been a decline in the number of successful candidates. Accompanied by the fact that female voter turnout in 2021 exceeded male voter turnout by 0.41%, paradoxical questions regarding women’s participation and representation in politics have arisen. As Figure 1 below shows, there was no positive impact of women electoral turnout on women’s political representation.

If the Lok Sabha results of 2019 from Assam are examined, a similar pattern can be seen there as well. While seventeenth Lok Sabha returned the highest number of women members to the Parliament (14.6%), the number of female candidates elected from the state declined from 14.28% in 2014 to 7.14% in 2019. This is, despite the fact, that the female voter turnout in Assam (81.3%) was substantially higher than the All-India levels (60.9%). Thus, the case of Assam provides another example where even though women are being recognised as voting blocs, the glass ceiling at the highest echelons of power continues to endure.

Figure 1: Comparison of Female Voter Turnout, Female Candidates Fielded and Elected



Source: Author’s own. Data compiled by author based on statistical reports of the Election Commission of India

Assam provides an interesting micro-study of how women’s substantial presence in informal politics does not transform into increased participation in the electoral arena. Assam was one of the first states to reserve fifty per cent of seats for women in its village-level bodies, thereby allowing more women to be trained in politics since 2012. Despite this, political parties continue to discriminate against women when the ticket distributions for Legislative Assembly happen. This paper uses data from

the Legislative Assembly elections from 1962-2021, as available on the website of the Election Commission of India, though the focus is mainly on 2016 and 2021. The data takes 1962 as the starting point as gender-disaggregated data collection was not followed by the ECI prior to that. By using election data from thirteen assembly elections, the paper argues that the political parties, especially National Parties have a significant role to play in ensuring women's success in state-level politics. Therefore, when political parties continue to be negative gatekeepers for women candidates, achieving gender parity in political representation becomes nearly impossible. The paper starts with the use of aggregate data and moves beyond it by discussing the variations within the parties in the nomination of specific women candidates. By doing so, the paper also aims to establish that women candidates are adversely placed in comparison to men when it comes to nomination. The paper agrees with Carole Spary's (2014, 2020) basic argument that political parties use higher standards in women's recruitment due to their risk-averse stance and uses the case of Assam legislative Assembly elections to examine the same.

The present paper while attempting to investigate the impact of party nominations on women's candidature does so by structuring the argument into four segments. The first section deals with trends in the nomination of female candidates in the legislative assembly elections from 1962 onwards. Herein, the attempt is not just to look at the variation within the parties across the years but also to examine the implications of being nominated by political parties vis-à-vis fighting the elections as Independents. The second section of the paper discusses the variation across the political parties: national, state and Registered Unrecognised Parties. As Assam has been witness to strong regional parties, this section throws light on if State Parties are similar or different in the way it treats female political aspirants. The third section of the paper uses data on forfeiture of deposits by the male as well as female candidates to understand if and how participation has differential financial impacts for men and women. The final segment of the paper is interested in uncovering the familiarity of women contestants with their constituencies-not only by using the classification that Spary develops but also by exploring how kinship networks affects political opportunity. In 'Women Candidates and Party Nomination Trends in India- Evidence from the 2009 General Election', Carol Spary develops two predictors for testing the winnability of women candidates: first, the distinction between marginal and non-marginal seats and, second, constituency familiarity. Within Spary's (2014) formulation, a marginal seat is 'one where in the previous election, the margin of votes was 5 per cent votes or less' (Ibid: 128) while 'a non-marginal seat may be either a safe seat if the sitting MP is from the same party or an unwinnable seat if the incumbent is from a rival party' (Ibid: 128). She clarifies that higher number of nominations do not guarantee that the number of women elected may necessarily rise due to the nature of the constituency from where women are contesting. As parties determine not just the contestant but also the constituencies, an examination of the constituency can provide valuable insights into how political parties view female candidates.

In addition to the marginal-non marginal distinction of seats, familiarity with the constituency adds another dimension to examine the proportion of women candidates nominated by political parties and the likelihood of their success (Ibid: 128). Spary (2014) provides a three-fold model for categorising candidates based on their constituency familiarity. As per this model, Category A refers to situation where the same individual candidates are re-nominated from the same constituency by the same party as the previous election, Category B refers to as the scenario where the party which was either the winner or the first runners up in the last two elections changed its candidate and Category C is where neither the candidate nor the party was the winner or the first runners up in the last two elections. Spary explains that,

candidates in categories A and B are deemed to have a higher chance of success because they are a known quantity with established links in the constituency. Candidates and parties classified in category C are determined as relative outsiders for the purpose of comparison and assumed to be less likely to win. (Ibid, 2014: 129)

What emerges from the study is that within the emerging electoral system, the success of women candidates is leveraged upon the support from National Parties but, unlike men. There are stringent conditionalities' on women's recruitment. This can only be explained through the long-standing risk-aversiveness that political parties display towards women's candidature.

Trends in the Participation of Female Candidates

Gender differences in political behaviour started to receive consistent academic attention with the works of scholars like Nelson and Caudhuri (1999), Paxton (1997), Norris (2005), Lovenduski (2005) and Tremblay (2007) among others. Though the presence of women in protest movements in the late 1970s and early 1980s made political parties across the world cognisant of women as consequential political actors, there has been a glaring absence of women in legislative bodies. As discussed above, the Indian scenario also presents a similar picture where women's political participation as voters has increased manifold without any substantial change in women contesting elections. Kapoor and Ravi (2014) point out that the poll percentage of women started increasing in the 1980s and the pace became faster in the two subsequent decades. The increase in voluntary participation of women across all the states has been interpreted as 'a silent revolution' in Indian democracy and is indicative of women's self-empowerment (Ibid.). Kumar and Gupta (2015) indicate that the increase in women's turnout is worth noting as it 'not only has an intrinsic value but also generates certain positive externalities' (p.17), one of which is the expectation that female voters, as a bloc, are being able to exert pressure on political parties for feminising the electoral arena (Krishnaswamy, 2022). Arguments explaining the increase in women's turn out include empowerment, better literacy rates, increasing media exposure, changes in decision making within the household, efforts by the Election Commission of India,

safe and secure voting procedures, women's participation in local elections, solidarity formed through self-help groups and political participation as a mechanism for being heard (Banerjee, 2022). Despite this noteworthy emergence of women as an interest group, women's issues continue to be an add-on to legislative deliberation and policy decisions. As Kittilson (2016) states, 'casting the ballot is the most ubiquitous form of participation and carries the least amount of policy-specific input' (p. 12). Effectively, therefore, the attention is turned towards the necessity of women's presence beyond voting.

Praveen Rai's (2017) pyramid shaped multi-stratified participatory model is able to show the differentials at different levels of electoral participation. Despite the formidable presence of women as voters, the number of women progressively decreases as political engagement increases. Therefore, we have lesser number of women as contestants when compared to campaigners for political parties which in turn is lesser than the voters. At the top of this pyramid sits the scant number of elected women legislators (Rai, 2017). The feminisation of politics thesis, thus, has a limited applicability as 'women's representation at national and state level rajniti remains at abysmally low levels' (Banerjee, 2022: 23). The incongruence between the number of women in 'lokniti' and 'rajniti'³ can be attributed to the important role played by political parties in the recruitment of women.

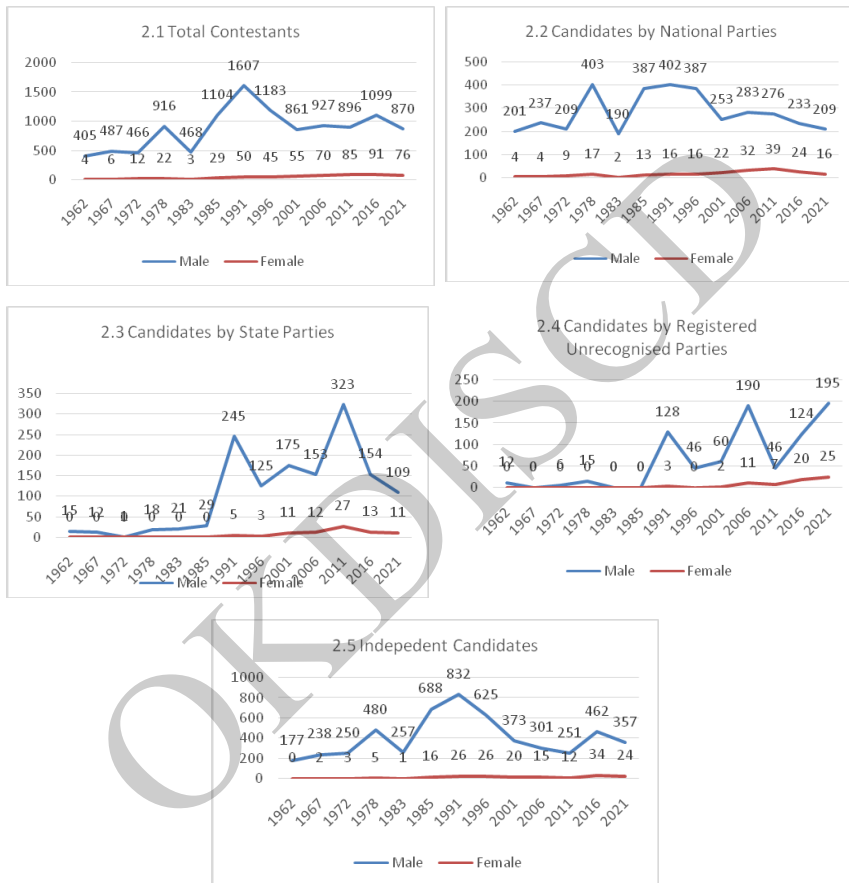
Political parties are the first 'filter points' which either helps or hinders in producing political outcomes for women. The reluctance of political parties, across the world, to recruit women has been widely studied (Lovenduski and Norris, 1993; Hassim and Goetz 2003; Sawer, 2010). Apart from the preferences of the electorate and the type of regime, political parties exercise significant impact as they initially select and subsequently support candidates (Kunowich and Paxton, 2005: 512). The aversion of political parties to women's political recruitment is marked especially within the First-Past-The-Post System as it encourages the distribution of tickets to 'lowest common denominator candidates these rarely turn out to be women or minorities' (Reynolds, 1999: 555).

In Assam as well, political parties tend to favour the recruitment of men as Figure 2 (below) shows. Across the thirteen Assembly elections, maximum number of women candidates contested under National Parties or as Independents. State Parties and Registered Unrecognised Parties have a poorer record. The maximum number of women contestants were seen in the elections of 2016. The lowest number of women contestants were seen in the 1983 election which had two candidates from National Parties and one running as Independent. Barring four elections (1985, 1991, 1996, 2016), more women candidates have contested elections under National Parties than as Independents. Though on a cursory sight this may appear to be an extremely encouraging picture, when seen against the number of male candidates who are fielded

³ M. Banerjee (2022) uses 'Rajniti' to refer to institutional democracy and 'Lokniti' to democratic culture.

by the National Parties, the situation appears dismal. The highest rate of women’s recruitment by National Parties was around 4% in the year 2011. The corresponding figure for recruitment of men was 49.1% which was in 1962.

Figure 2: Comparison Between the Total Candidates and Female Candidates Contesting Legislative Assembly Elections in Assam.



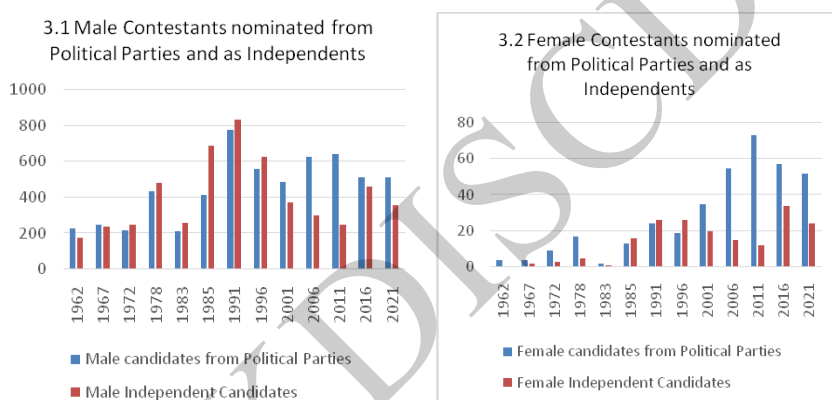
Source: Author’s own. Data compiled by author based on statistical reports of the Election Commission of India

As far as Independents are concerned, except for 1962 and 2011, men are present in an overwhelming number. In fact, in 1985, of all the contestants 60.7% were men who were contesting as Independents. The lowest participation from men as Independents came in 2011 when they constituted 25.5% of all the contestants. Even when the categories of National, State and Registered Unrecognised Parties are combined together, in six elections (from 1972-1996)men as an Independent category dominate. In a sharp contrast, for women, except in 1985 and 1996, political parties overshadowed the Independents.

Therefore, an interesting gender pattern emerges from the data - while an overwhelming number of men are open to contesting elections as Independents, women are mostly contesting elections under the aegis of National Parties, followed by the next category of Independents. The data from Assam legislative assembly elections shows that women candidates from Assam also gravitate more towards party candidature than contesting as Independents similar to the all-India elections (Spary 2014, 2020)

The significance of political parties for women in Assam emerges even more clearly when the categories among the different political parties (National, State and Registered Unrecognised Parties) are merged. This is evident from Figure 3 (shown below) itself.

Figure 3: Comparison Between Male and Female Candidates Nominated by Political Parties and as Independents in Legislative Assembly Elections in Assam.

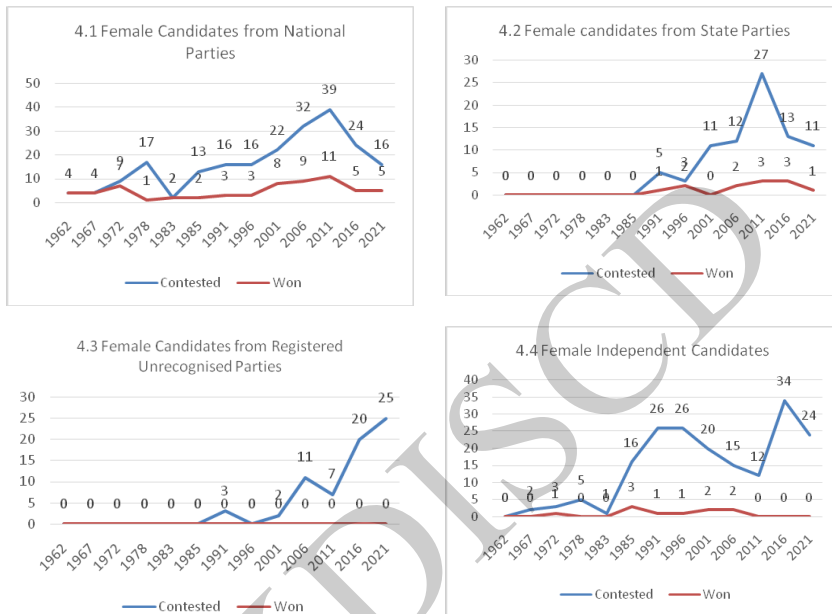


Source: Author's own. Data compiled by author based on statistical reports of the Election Commission of India

Nevertheless, it is discernible that whether as candidates from discrete categories of political parties or as Independents, a huge gender gap in nominations is visible across the categories. As ‘electoral political is sandwiched between an entry gate, the political party, and an exit gate, the ballot’ (Krishnaswamy, 2022: 45), the winnability of candidates is predicated upon the recruitment from political parties. The figure below (Figure4) reveals that the chances of women candidates winning increases substantially when they are fielded by political parties rather than contesting as Independents. As can be seen, the majority of successful women contestants are from National Parties, followed by State Parties and Independents. It was only in the elections of 1985 that the number of Independent women candidates who won the elections exceeded those from the National Parties. The legislative assembly elections of 1985 were significant because it signaled the entry of Assam Gana Parishad as a formidable regional party. Pai (2013) discusses that the decade of 1980s was significant because of democratisation and increasing politicisation. It was expected that factors such as ‘improved literacy levels; decline of the Congress Party and the emergence of regional, backward caste

and Dalit-based parties; and improved levels of growth in some states' would create new spaces for women's participation (Ibid, 112).

Figure 4: Comparison Between Different Political Parties Regarding Female Contestants and Elected.



Source: Author's own. Data compiled by author based on statistical reports of the Election Commission of India

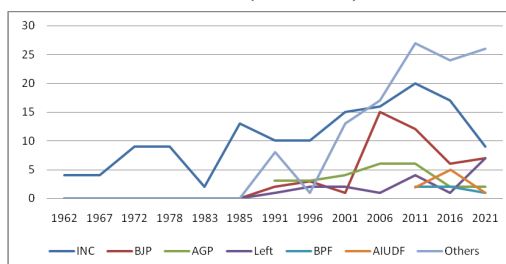
The low winnability of Independent candidates has raised questions on their political significance. While in the general elections, Independents display 'non-existent success rate among female Independents' (Spary, 2014: 118); in the case of legislative assembly elections of Assam though it was low, success among female Independents is seen from 1972-2006. Bhattacharya (2014) notes that though the number of successful Independent candidates has decreased since the 1970s, their vote share has remained above 4% (96). Independent candidates play a strategic role in FPTP system and may also be clones for major political parties to decrease the vote share of the winning candidates (Kapoor and Magesan, 2018; Bhattacharya, 2014). However, as far as women are concerned, such conclusions are doubtful. In a situation where political parties are averse to fielding women as genuine contenders, it is doubtful if such actors will be willing to fund women as clones. Moreover, given the fact that women have lower levels of resources the number of females as Independents will continue to be low (Kittilson, 2016:12; Tambiah, 2003). In a nutshell, though political parties are biased against women's candidature they remain central to women's entry into the decision-making bodies.

Do All the Political Parties Treat Women Similarly?

As seen from the section above, political parties are crucial not only because they select but also ‘are the major source of support for candidates in their bid for public office’ (Kunovich and Paxton, 2005: 512). This explains the low winnability of Independent female candidates. As far as political parties are concerned, there is divergence on how they are poised with regard to women’s political participation. For Hassim and Goetz (2003) the presence of gender responsive political parties and strong left parties help women access and participate in political competition (Ibid: 12). Ideologically, left parties are viewed as positively inclined towards women’s political participation (Hassim and Goetz, 2003; Sawer, 2010). However, in the Indian scenario, a contrary scenario is observed. Spary (2020) points out that in India the Left Parties have a weaker record of nominating women (Ibid: 4). The same trend is seen in the case of Assam Legislative Assembly elections as well. Across the thirteen elections since 1962, on an average the Left parties have consistently fielded lesser female candidates in comparison to other National Parties like Indian National Congress (henceforth INC) and Bharatiya Janta Party (henceforth BJP), State Parties like Assam Gana Parishad (henceforth AGP). In fact, in 2016, while newer entrants like All India United Democratic Front (henceforth AIUDF) and the Bodoland People’s Front (henceforth BPF) had fielded five and two candidates respectively; there was only one female contestant from the Left. In 2021, there was a positive change with seven female candidates contesting the aegis of the Left ideology which included parties like CPI, CPM, RSP, CPI(ML)(L), SUCI, RPCI (R).

As seen from Figure 5 (below), the INC has distributed the maximum number of tickets to women till 2006 when it was superseded by a combination of all the other parties (not mentioned specifically in the paper). The party fielded the maximum number of twenty female candidates in 2011, with its lowest being two in 1983. Until 2011, the party kept increasing the number of female contestants with every election, but in 2016 and 2021, it reversed the practice. In fact, it recruited only nine female contestants in 2021 which is precisely the same number of female contestants it fielded in 1978.

Figure 5: Female Contests Nominated by Political Parties in Legislative Assembly Elections (1962-2021).



Source: Data compiled by author based on statistical reports of the Election Commission of India

The BJP fielded two female candidates for the first time in the 1991 elections. In 2006, the party fielded the maximum number of fifteen candidates but thereafter has reduced the support to female candidates. In 2011, the number went down to twelve and thereafter to six in 2016 and marginally increased to seven in 2021.

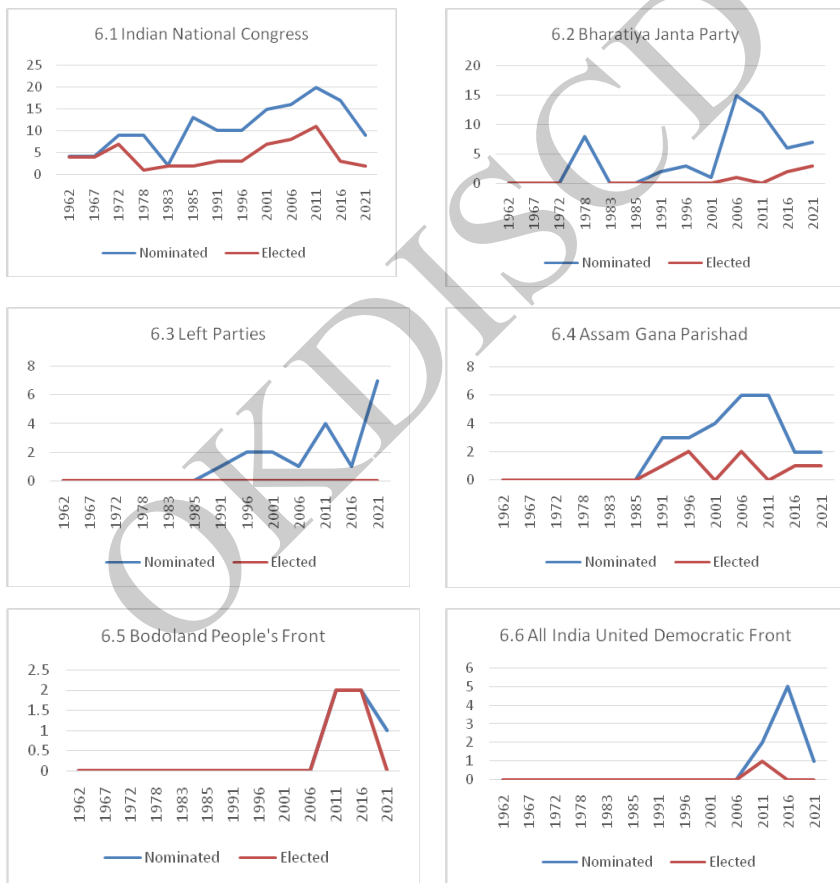
Three State Parties-AGP, BPF and AIUDF- also showed similar trend of declining support towards female candidates. The AGP, which has a longer history than the other two, fielded only two candidates in 2016 and 2021 elections as against six candidates in 2006 and 2011. The BPF also decreased its support to one candidate in 2021 from two candidates in 2016. The AIUDF drastically decreased its ticket given to women to one in 2021 as against five in 2016. As mentioned earlier, the left parties had increased the number of women contestants in 2021. This is in stark contrast to all other parties where the number of tickets distributed is on the decline.

As evident from Figure 5 (see above), all political parties display a negative trend in nominating women over the years. With the nominations decreasing, it is not surprising that the number of women in the Assam Legislative Assembly is on the decline. Though the Left increased the number of women contestants, but this did not have any electoral outcome as none of its women contestants were returned to the legislative assembly. The BJP which had fielded lesser candidates than in 2006 and 2011, was able to have the maximum number (though only three women candidates) as legislators in comparison to any other party. For the INC, in 2021 there were two successes from nine nominations. This is unlike, in 2016, when it had fielded seventeen female candidates and was able to get only three successes. The AGP nominated only two candidates, in both 2016 and 2021 and was able to have one success in both the elections. In 2011, it had nominated six women but did not have success with any of its female candidates. The BPF and AIUDF nominated women for the first time in 2011. The BPF nominated two candidates in 2011 and 2016, both of whom were elected. In 2021, however, the number of nominations decreased to one and it had no success. AIUDF which had nominated two candidates in 2011 and was able to have success with one candidate, increased its nomination to five female contestants in 2016 but was unable to win any seats. In stark contrast, in 2021 the AIUDF fielded only one female candidate in 2021 and no success was registered. The reluctance of political parties in nominating women can be attributed to its risk averse nature (Spary, 2014; Pai, 2013). Political parties tend to presume that women will be unwinnable candidates (Sanbonmatsu, 2006) and hence have lowered the number of women that they recruit for the elections. As can be seen from the Figure 6 (shown below), both national and State Parties have reduced the number of women recruited for the elections of 2021, thereby displaying a common trend of risk-aversiveness.

The decrease in the number of nominations is not just a matter of concern because it directly affects women's entry into legislative bodies but also because it is indicative of the stricter conditions that political parties may be imposing while nominating women (Spary, 2014). For instance, the INC re-nominated only six of the sixteen candidates

who fought the 2016 elections. It is significant that while two among these six had won the elections in 2016 (Nandita Das and Roselina Tirkey) and all of them were able to secure at least 37 % votes in the 2016 elections (including Angkita Dutta, Bismita Gogoi, Pallabi Gogoi and Pranati Phukon). Similarly, the BJP renominated only three female candidates among the six nominations of 2016 elections; two among these three had won the 2016 elections (Angoorlata Deka and Suman Haripriya) and the remaining one was placed second with very high votes secured (Surabhi Rajkonwar). Even the AGP used strict conditionalities by renominating only the candidate who won 2016 election from its list of two candidates (Renupoma Rajkhowa).

Figure 6: Party-wise Comparison in Nomination and Election of Female Candidates (1962-2021).



Surprisingly, though the BPF had two successful female candidates in 2016, it renominated only one (Pramila Rani Brahma). The AIUDF did not renominate any of the five female contestants that it had fielded in 2016. This is even though its candidate from Chenga had stood second in 2016 (Manowara Khatun). These facts prove that political parties, both national as well as State Parties, behave similarly while recruiting women. Political parties have set the bar higher for women, with the assumption that women are most likely to lose. Thus, they re-nominated only those women who either won the previous elections or had been able to get extremely high votes despite failing to win.

In stark contrast to this trend, the INC in 2021 re-nominated eight male candidates including Gautam Roy, Rajib Lochan Pegu, Joy Prakash Das who had not performed as well as its female candidates like Monika Bora, Jonjonali Barua, Bithika Dev etc. The same bias against women is also seen from BJP. For instance, while Jabeen Barbhuyan (Goalpara West) was not re-nominated, Dr. Debamoy Sanyal (Dhubri) was even when both of them had won approximately similar vote share. The AGP also re-nominated three male candidates from the 2016 elections who had performed poorly. Thus, as far as women contestants are concerned all political parties are prone towards renominating only the strongest or the most experienced candidates. Such stringent criteria are not applied for male aspirants. This establishes the risk-averse behaviour that political parties display when it comes to women.

Table 1: Female Candidates Fielded from Marginal and Non-Marginal Seats by Different Political Parties in 2021 Legislative Assembly Elections.

	Non-marginal Seats	Marginal Seats
BJP	Nandita Garlosa (Haflong)	Angoorlata Deka (Batadroba)
	Suman Haripriya (Hajo)	Moon Swarnakar (Algapur)
		Surabhi Rajkonwar (Sibsagar)
		Hasinara Khatun (Baghbar)
		Ajanta Neog (Golaghat)
INC	Nandita Das (Boko)	Sibamoni Bora (Batadroba)
		Roselina Tirkey (Sarupathar)
		Bismita Gogoi (Khumtai)
		Angkita Dutta (Amguri)
		Pranati Phukan (Naharkatia)
		Pallabi Gogoi (Teok)
		Mira Borthakur Goswami (Guwahati West)
		Ashima Bordoloi (Guwahati East)
AGP	Renupoma Rajkhowa (Teok)	Kalpana Patowary (Sarukhetri)
BPF	Pramila Rani Brahma (Kokrajhar East)	

Note: AIUDF and Left Parties are excluded as no female candidates were elected in 2016 under their party tickets. Ajanta Neog belonged to INC till 2021 when she was expelled.

Thereafter, she joined the BJP and won the 2021 election.

Source: Author's own. Data compiled by author based on statistical reports of the Election Commission of India

Table 1 (shown above) uses Spary's (2014) classification to show the nomination patterns of women candidates for the 2021 elections by the major political parties in Assam (which were able to return female candidates in 2016 and/or 2021).

As can be seen, most of the female candidates were fielded from marginal seats, thereby compromising their chances of winnability. This establishes the fact that though political parties nominate women, they continue to be risk averse and therefore nominate women from marginal seats.

Spary(2014) introduces the factor of incumbency along the marginal/non-marginal seat distinction to predict 'winnability'. Using this schema, when the data of Assam is examined, it is found that winnability was high for Nandita Garlosa (BJP), Suman HariPriya (BJP), Nandita Das (INC), Renupoma Rajkhowa (AGP) and Pramila Rani Brahma (BPF). This proved to be true because Pramila Rani Brahma, all the other four women won. Sibamoni Bora and Ajanta Neog, the remaining two female candidates elected to the 2021 Legislative Assembly came from marginal seats. It is noteworthy that Neog had the advantage of being the incumbent herself though she was from INC till 2021. As far as Sibamoni Bora, a first-time candidate is concerned, though she was fielded from a marginal seat, she was able to win as the incumbent was from rival party. In a nutshell, political parties nominated women mostly from marginal seats in the 2021 elections, thereby affecting their chances of winnability. In such a scenario, when women win (for instance, Sibamoni Bora for INC) it is a bonus for the party and if women do not win, no loss to the party is incurred (for instance, Moon Swanakar for BJP). In fact, all political parties appear to mirror each other as far as assignment of constituencies is concerned. Not only do they use higher standards for recruitment of women but also field women from marginal seats. Such divergence is the recruitment pattern of men and women stem from the inherent bias that permeates the upper echelons of all political parties wherein a deep-seated belief that 'women don't win' continues (Sanbonmatsu, 2006).

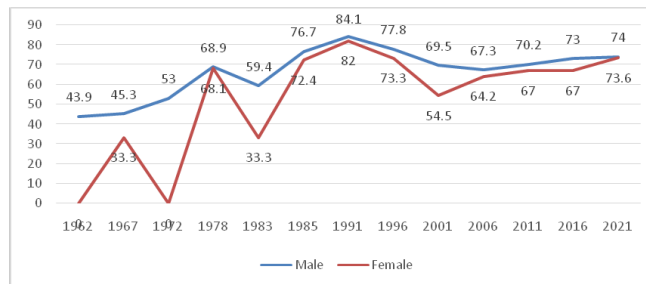
Deposit Forfeiture and Women's Prospects in Politics

The impact of political parties on women's candidacy derives not just because it recruits, but also because it supports a candidate throughout the campaign. In a scenario where women's participation in politics is hindered by myriad factors such as poorer levels of literacy (Gleason, 2001; Chaurasia, 2022), gendered division of labour within the family (Tambiah, 2003; Gleason, 2001), absence of political networks (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu, 2013; Rai, 2017; Prillaman, 2017), low self-perception (Lawless and Fox, 2008), violence (Singh, 2017), mobility (Tambiah, 2003), incumbency (Hassim and Goetz, 2003) limited property rights (Hassim and Goetz, 2003; Tambiah, 2003),

absence of political training (Prillaman, 2017), lack of personal financial resources (Khalil and Mookerjee, 2019) and lack of access to information (Bari, 2005), political parties can buttress female aspirants to a large extent. Some of the 'supply side factors' that inhibit women's entry into politics can be effectively addressed by political parties (Norris and Lovenduski, 2005; Kandawasvikas-Nhundu, 2021).⁴ Access to funds can determine not just the chances of victory but also the nature of campaign experience (Cantrell and Ohman, 2020). In the context of India, Veniers, Sharad and Sunaad (2022) have however argued that 'the cost of entry in politics is now so high that it erases differences of wealth between men and women MPs' (Ibid: 15-16) but the adverse impact of campaign cost on women candidates is established by several studies (Hassim and Goetz, 2003; Maguire, 2018; Kanthak and Woon, 2015; Murray, Muriass and Wang, 2023). The challenge is encapsulated by Kanthak and Woon (2015) as 'campaigns are at once too costly and too noisy affairs' (Ibid: 596). Candidates entering into politics do a cost-benefit analysis and women, just like men, 'enter when their chances of winning exceed the costs of entering' (Cox cited in Kapoor and Magesan, 2018: 3). Apart from the hidden costs involved in campaigning, the costs of entering the electoral fray may include procedural restrictions like filling fees (in USA), educational requirement (in Pakistan), election deposits (in Japan and India) etc. While procedural entry barriers are known to affect the nature and extent of political competition (Coats and Dalton, 1991; Ansolabehere and Gerber, 1996; Hall, 2005; Afzal, 2013; Harada and Smith, 2014; Sebo, Horvath and Balazs, 2017), it produces differential results for different groups of people (Evans and Reher, 2021; Kapoor and Megesan, 2018; Faravelli, Khalil and Ponnusamy, 2022). Entry deposits, in the Indian electoral context, were envisaged to work as a procedural barrier for frivolous candidates. All candidates who are unable to secure one-sixth of the vote-share in their constituency must forfeit their deposits. The sum was fixed at Rs. 250 for reserved seats and Rs. 500 for general seats till 1996 when it was increased by twenty times to act as effective deterrent. Kapoor and Magesan (2018) show that while the increase in entry deposit disproportionately affected Independent candidates from unreserved constituencies, it did not have the same impact on Independent candidates from reserved constituencies and party backed candidates from either kind of constituencies. This is despite the fact that deposit forfeiture is only a minute fraction of campaign costs.

Similar to nominations and selections, deposit forfeiture among male and female contestants also presents a gender specific pattern. Spary (2014, 2020) notes that deposit forfeiture is highest among Independents across all years, irrespective of male or female but in 2019 more men were likely to lose deposits than women. In the case of the Assam as well, a similar pattern is seen for all the years (except 1968) where male candidates have routinely lost more deposits than female candidates.

⁴ Barriers on the 'demand side' includes the role of political parties themselves. The discriminatory treatment of the parties towards women in Assam has already been discussed in Section 1 and 2 of the present paper.

Figure 7: Comparison Between Men and Women on the Deposits Forfeited (1962-2021)

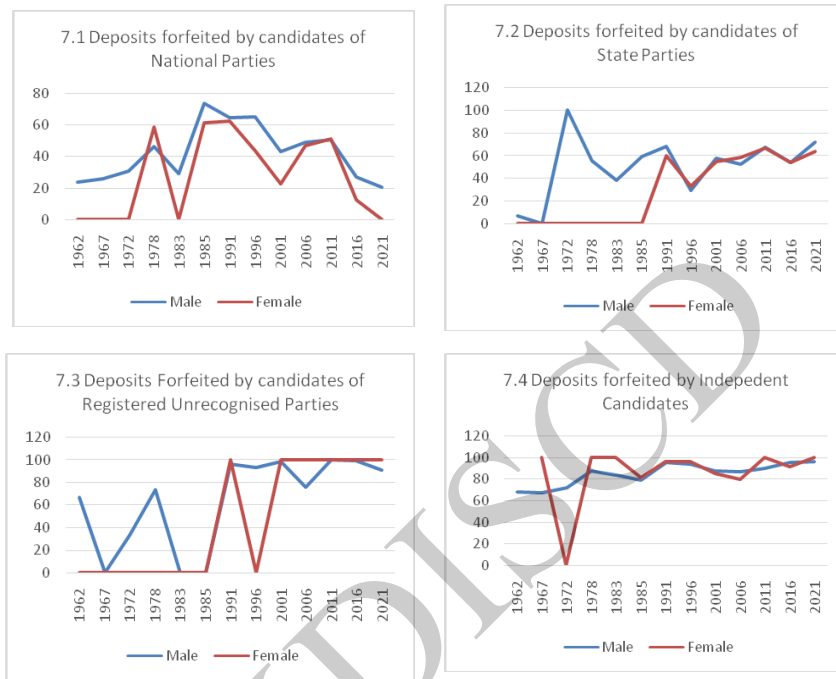
Source: Author's own. Data compiled by author based on statistical reports of the Election Commission of India

A cursory look at Figure 7 shows that women candidates tend to lose lesser deposits and therefore to the interpretation that women are better at elections. This would be similar to Deshpande's (2004) optimistic assertion regarding the success rate of women candidates. However, women are lesser likely to lose their security deposit because of the strict norms of recruitment that is followed by political parties towards women.

The figure above shows there has been a decline in the forfeiture rates, both from men as well as women, from 1996 to 2006 (after which it has started to increase again). The decrease can be attributed to the rise in deposits stipulated by the Election Commission in 1996. It is worth returning to Figure 2.1 here which showed that while the number of male candidates contesting elections declined from 1996, the number of female candidates did not. Yet the increase in the entry deposit barrier had differential impacts on women and men. Even when lesser number of total candidates are losing their deposits, the consistent trend of lesser forfeiture by women contestants proves that a women contestant has crossed higher standards for being recruited.

Figure 8 provides an understanding of the nuances that exist in deposit forfeiture among the candidates from different categories. Female candidates contesting as Independents or under Registered Unrecognised Parties were the most prone to losing deposits across all the elections. For the State Parties, except in 1996 and 2006, women have lost lesser deposits than men. It is within the National Parties that women have the least chances of losing their deposits. Except in 1978, women contesting from National Parties have lost lesser deposits than men. The similar trend for National and State Parties proves the centrality of established political parties in ensuring electoral success for successfully recruiting women. At the same time, one cannot lose sight of the fact that the entry-gates of these political parties are rigidly monitored for women. The low forfeiture trends also substantiate the argument that National and State Parties are more cautious while recruiting women than Registered Unrecognised Parties. However, within the emergent party system the relevance of Registered Unrecognised Parties and Independent candidates is being increasingly questioned (Suri, 2005; Abbas, 2019; Chhibber and Verma, 2019).

Figure 8: Comparison Between Different Categories of Political Parties Regarding Deposit Forfeiture Between Male and Female Contestants (in %)



Source: Author's own. Data compiled by author based on statistical reports of the Election Commission of India

Though women are less likely than men to lose their deposits yet as Faravelli, Khalil and Ponnusamy (2022) show women are more likely to quit elections than men when their deposits are forfeited (3). Further, for those few women who persist in the next elections, they are likely to be fielded by a different political party- one which has a lower popularity- as the previous party is likely to deny a second chance to female forfeiters. They show that a similar case is not observed for men. This is because ‘male dominated parties exclude Indian women from the political process and are risk averse with female candidate nominations’ (Ibid: 33)

In the case of the Assam, it was seen that none of three women nominated from National Parties who lost their deposits in 2016 were re-nominated by any party in 2021. Similarly, none of the four women candidates from State Parties who lost their deposits in 2016 were re-nominated by any party in 2021. Of the total 90 women who forfeited their deposits in 2016, only six re-contested the elections in 2021. Of these six, Saheba Ahmed (Naoboicha constituency) fought as Independent in both the elections from the same constituency, while Swarnalata Chaliha (Panery) and Paheswari Barua (Sipajhar) were re-nominated by the same registered unrecognised

party from the same constituency. Though Bapi Aich was renominated by the same Registered Unrecognised Party, her constituency changed (from Jalukbari in 2016 to Guwahati East in 2021). Rijumoni Gogoi (Dispur) and Juri Mali (Palasbari) who had contested from Registered Unrecognised Parties in 2016 and lost their deposits, fought the 2021 elections as Independent candidates. In a nutshell, forfeiture of deposits is not simply a monetary barrier for women aspirants in politics but more importantly, used by political parties as a barrier for future recruitment.

‘Formidable Candidates’: Candidate Familiarity and Kinship Networking

Since all female candidates who fought the elections as either Independents or from Registered Unrecognised Parties in 2021 lost their deposit, only a mere number of twenty candidates (out of seventy-six) remain who can be studied as ‘non-frivolous’ candidates. The growing centrality of National and State Parties for women’s candidature (as discussed in first section of the present paper) is also seen when out of these twenty candidates, sixteen were nominated from National Parties, while four were nominated from State Parties. As far as women contestants are concerned, the legislative assembly elections of 2021 were interesting on three counts: first, in two constituencies (Teok and Batadroba) women emerged as the winner as well as the first runners-up; second, in three constituencies (Haflong, Algapur and Sarukhetri) male contestants of 2016 were replaced by female contestants in 2021 and; third, four times legislator Ajanta Neog (from Golaghat) who was expelled from INC and she was nominated by the BJP. It is noteworthy that of the six candidates who won the elections in 2021, only two were new entrants (Sibamoni Bora of INC and Nandita Garlosa of BJP) while the other four were incumbents (Suman Haripriya of BJP, Ajanta Neog of BJP, Nandita Das of INC and Renupoma Rajkhowa of AGP). Thus, this sits comfortable with Spary’s (2019) formulation that the probability of the incumbents winning increases was not only because of the nature of the seat from where they are contesting but also due to the level of familiarity that candidates enjoy in their constituencies.

Using Spary’s model of candidate familiarity (2014), when the nominations for the 2021 assembly elections are examined it emerges that the most parties tend to nominate female candidates from Categories A and B where the party has reasonable chances of winning.

Table 2 shows that Moon Swarnakar of BJP and contested from Algapur is the only candidate from Category C. Swarnakar is, however, not a newcomer to politics. She had earlier fought the elections of 2011 with AGP nomination but from Ratahbari. Though constituency familiarity is an important indicator for electoral success, kinship is also emerges as an important feature among candidates under Categories A and B. Of the nineteen candidates from Categories A and B, eleven have kinship networks available for significance of kinship networks in determining chances of electoral success becomes even more apparent when the data is narrowed down to include only those women who were finally elected to the Legislative Assembly. From among the six women elected in 2021, only Nandita Das from INC has no kins preceding her in

politics. In fact, both the new entrants into the Assam Legislative Assembly (Nandita Garlosa from BJP and Sibamoni Bora from INC) both benefit from belonging to politically networked kinship.

Table 2: Candidate Familiarity and Party Nominations of Female Contestants in 2021 Legislative Assembly Elections.

	Category A	Category B	Category C
BJP	Angoorlata Deka	Nandita Garlosa	Moon Swarnakar
	Suman Haripriya	Hasinara Khatun	
	Surabhi Rajkonwar		
	Ajanta Neog*		
INC	Roselina Tirkey	Sibamoni Bora	
	Nandita Das	Mira Borthakur Goswami	
	Bismita Gogoi	Ashima Bordoloi	
	Angkita Dutta		
	Pranati Phukon		
	Pallabi Gogoi		
AGP	Renupoma Rajkhowa	Kalpana Patowary	
AIUDF		Minakshi Rahman	
BPF	Pramila Rani Brahma		

* *Ajanta Neog contested from INC in 2016 elections, but in 2021 shifted to BJP. Though her constituency remained the same for both the elections.*

Source: Author's own. Data compiled by author based on statistical reports of the Election Commission of India

Women's recruitment into leadership positions in politics has been classified differently by different scholars (Tambiah, 2003; Hassim and Goetz, 2003; Spary, 2007; Deshpande, 2009; Pai, 2013; Spary, 2014; Basu, 2016). 'Insiders' refers to those who follow the 'institutional ladder path' and therefore are recruited through a 'bottoms-up' method. The path of 'institutional ladder' is the one 'which provides long-term exposure to male-oriented political organisations – demonstrates how structural gender bias can impede the career progression of women' (Spary, 2007: 256) and therefore the number of women in this category is extremely limited (Surabhi Rajkonwar, Nandita Das, Pramila Rani Brahma, Hasinara Khatun, Mira Borthakur Goswami and Minakshi Rahman). Kinship networks is the most popular pathways to power for female candidates has been kinship networking. This is not a just a feature peculiar to Assam but is a phenomenon that is seen in the All-India as well as the South and Southeast Asian context (Basu, 2016; Skoda, 2004; Tambiah, 2003; Wardani and Subetki, 2021). These 'outsiders' are 'surrogates' who enter through 'top-down' measures (Spary, 2007; D' Amicio, 1995; Pai, 2013). Another path for entering politics, discussed by Spary and mainly seen in Southern states, has been as a 'culture hero'. Within the context of Assam, the recruitment of Angoorlata Deka by

BJP (since 2016) and Kalpana Patowary by AGP seem to follow this route. Pai explains that though family connections enable a large number of women to enter politics, it may not ensure ascent in politics (2013). The presence of women as ‘proxy’ for men have been widely studied not just from the purview of grassroots politics but also at the national level (Pai, 1998; Singh, 2000; Buch, 2010; Pai, 2013).

Pai (2013) and Spary (2014) argue that in contexts where political parties display risk aversiveness towards women, there is utility in relying upon kinship networks. Basu (2016) argues that kinship ties off-set three entry barriers that are posed for female contestants:

1. The deterrent effect of the increasing violence and criminalization of politics, from which dynastic women may be better protected;
2. A bias against women in the organizational structures of political parties; and
3. The absence of reservations in both national and state legislatures (Ibid: 151).

Political parties are inclined to recruit from existing political kinship networks mainly because of three reasons: first, informational advantages that come when dynastic candidates are nominated, second, dynastic families are able to provide necessary financial support and third, a network of loyal supporters who work at the grassroots becomes available (Wardani and Subetki, 2021; Basu, 2016). ‘Brand name recognition’, therefore, emerges as an important consideration for political parties when recruitment of women contestants take place (Basu, 2016: 149). This would explain not just the nomination but also the subsequent victory of Nandita Garlosa and Sibamoni Bora. Similarly, the renomination of Roselina Tirkey, Angkita Dutta, Bismita Gogoi and Pranati Phukon is not just because they were able to secure at least 37 % votes in the 2016 elections but also because of the pragmatic advantages that accrues from nominating women with kinship networks. In brief, women are seen as formidable contestants not only when they are able to cross a higher threshold but also when they come from families that are already entrenched in politics.

Table 3: Party Nominations from Marginal and Non-Marginal Seats and the Availability of Kinship Networks Among Female Contestants in 2021 Legislative Assembly Elections.

	Kinship Networks Available	No Kinship Networks Available
Marginal Seats	Sibamoni Bora Roselina Tirkey Bismita Gogoi Angkita Dutta Pranati Phukon Pallavi Gogoi Ashima Bordoloi	Angoorlata Deka Moon Swarnakar Surabhi Rajkonwar Hasinara Khatun Mira Bothakur Goswami Kalpana Patowary Minakshi Rahman
Non-Marginal Seats	Nandita Garlosa Suman Haripriya Ajanta Neog Renupoma Rajkhowa	Nandita Das Pramila Rani Brahma

Source: Author's own. Data compiled by author based on statistical reports of the Election Commission of India

As can be seen from Table 3, all women in non-marginal seats who have kinship networks available were able to win the 2021 elections. While it is not necessary that all female candidates who have availability of kinship networks will be nominated from non-marginal seats, all those nominated from non-marginal seats are extremely likely to have kinship networks available. This facilitates a smooth electoral victory. Women need to use the family 'brand-name' as their skills and attainments are not adequately respected (Basu, 2016: 151). Political parties 'tend to look for candidates who have strong grassroots networks and appeal at the local level' (Wardani and Subetki, 2021: 44) instead of institutional climbers as 'local dynasties are... often able to build lasting political loyalties at the grassroots, making their candidates formidable competitors' (Wardani and Subetki, 2021: 43). Basu (2016) explains that in a context where the opportunity structure for women is inherently circumscribed, women's dependence on kinship association must be seen as an antidote to discrimination by political parties (Ibid: 151)

However, Hassim and Goetz (2003) cautions that such paths of entry 'may favour individual women but does not generally facilitate a long-term increase in the total number of women active in conventional politics' (Waylen cited in Hassim and Goetz, 55). The growing importance of dynastic succession and the narrowing of the institutional path to power happens at almost the same time (Wardani and Subetki, 2021: 29) which affects female candidates who may not have won the elections but could secure substantial votes (like Jabeen Barbhuiyan of BJP, Anurupa Hannan of INC and Manowara Khatun of AIUDF who were not re-nominated by their respective parties in 2021 despite their commendable performance in 2016). Notably, as Table 3 shows the group of contestants who are fielded from marginal seats and have no kinship networks available are the least formidable candidates within this opportunity structure.

Conclusion

As far as country-wise performance on SDG Target 5.5 (ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life) is concerned, Assam ranks 19th among the different states of India. By using data from the thirteen legislative assembly elections, it was seen that women's representation in Assam's legislative Assembly presents a dismal picture. The situation is unlikely to change till political parties continue to be negative gatekeepers for women candidates. It is in this context that the UN Resolution on Women and Political Participation (2011) which states that political parties must be encouraged 'to remove all barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate against the participation of women' becomes important (cited in Kandawasvika-Nhundu, 2021: 1). However, as the study shows, not only do political parties nominate lesser number of women in comparison to men but also use differing criteria while recruiting them. As the women are recruited with higher standards, not only do a higher proportion of women contesting elections appear to win the elections but also the forfeiture of deposits among women is also lesser. The inevitability of

political parties for ensuring higher participation of women, especially National Parties, can be implied from the almost negligible electoral success of women contesting as Independents and those nominated from Registered Unrecognised Parties. The high rate of deposit forfeiture among these two categories also shows that any effort to increase women's political representation must pass through the corridors of National Parties.

Though women's entry to politics can also happen through alternative routes, such as participation in social movements and through support from non-governmental organisations; such routes are couched with additional difficulties as elections require sustained assistance, including financial and grassroots supporters. Therefore, political parties continue to play an important role in the electoral process. Especially, in a context where gender quotas are unavailable, a sustained examination of the role of political parties in facilitating women's entry into politics is extremely necessary. The case of Assam is particularly important as the state had reserved one-half of the seats for women in local governance. This makes available a substantial number of women trained in electoral politics but there is no forward linkage available for them. Using Spary's model, this paper is able to show the reluctance of political parties in recruiting women. Despite the huge number of women leaders at the grassroots, political parties continue to work with the perception that women candidates may compromise the electoral victory of the party. The present paper was an attempt to engage with the question of women's descriptive representative in Assam, based on election data from 1962 to 2021, though the focus is mainly on 2016 and 2021 when it deals with the question of constituency familiarity of female candidates. The paper also explores the advantages that kinship networks provide to women in the context of narrow opportunities that political parties provide. However, as the paper is based exclusively on quantitative data from one state only, caution must be exercised in generalising the findings of this paper. Future research around the question of women's recruitment and legislative politics using in-depth interviews can enrich the field further. Moreover, comparative studies across different states using Spary's framework would also generate further insights into the field of gender and electoral politics. An extremely important point that emerges from the study is that though women may contest elections as Independents or under Registered Unrecognised Parties, the possibility of their winning is extremely circumscribed. In light of this, it would be worthwhile for future research to probe the motivation of all such candidates who decide to enter into the electoral fray knowing well that the space is inherently constrained. Moreover, studies on gender and political participation can generate important insights when the organisational structure of political parties, especially the role of women's wings is studied, particularly if and when can the women's wings work as feeders for women's recruitment into the electoral fray. Apart from the question of women's political recruitment, an important area for future research can also be the examination of manifestoes by political parties. Considering that all political parties avow to support women's entry into politics and women's issues, such studies can complement the present effort to demonstrate how political parties continue to act as negative gatekeepers for female candidates.

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Probing the Socioeconomic and Cultural Position of Women with Mental Illness in Assam

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Abstract

Gender is the most prominent social division ingrained through culture and socialization. The intersection of gender and mental health cannot be overlooked. Studies reveal the prevalence of gender discrepancies in the context of mental health and illness. Some mental illnesses are more prevalent in women than men. Women are more likely to suffer from emotional and neurological illnesses such as depression, while men suffer from personality disorders.

The present research looks at the issue of women's mental health from a feminist perspective, as gender is a critical determinant of mental health. This study is based on an exploratory approach from a feminist perspective. Primary data collected from stakeholders, caregivers and women who have recovered from mental health forms the basis of this study.

This research shows that social attitudes and stigmas were indeed associated with the mental illness of women and are influenced by prevalent patriarchal notions and gendered society. Interestingly, their socioeconomic position both within and outside the house has an impact on their mental illness and the treatment thereafter. This study found that a patient's economic status, marital status, family support, upbringing, social attitude and associated stigmas played key roles in their treatment-seeking experiences and well-being.

Introduction

Gender approach to mental health is important because it provides guidance for identifying appropriate responses from the mental healthcare system, as well as

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from public policy. Women's mental health affects others in society. Their increasing presence in the workforce means that their mental health affects national productivity (Afifi, 2007). Research also indicates that in adolescence, girls have a higher prevalence of depression and eating disorders, and are more likely to engage in suicidal ideation and self-harm. They try harder than boys, who are more prone to engage in highs, perform risk behaviours and commit suicide more frequently (Parker & Roy, 2001). To look at it in a global context, in 2022, the National Institutes of Health reported that among non-Hispanic Black women, prescription drug overdose deaths are more common among women than men (Perham-Lippman, 2022). In addition, female health workers experienced more depression, insomnia and mental distress during the Covid-19 pandemic (Thibaut & van Wijngaarden-Cremers, 2020, Vauqueline, 2021).

Gender is the most prominent social division in grained through culture and socialization. Therefore, mental health is also gendered in nature; the intersection of gender and mental health cannot be overlooked (Anand, 2020). Rosenfield and Mouzon, state that internalizing disorders and externalizing disorders vary among men and women. Women show more internalising disorders such as depression and anxiety but men show more externalizing disorders such as substance abuse and antisocial behaviour, which are problematic for others (Rosenfield & Mouzon, 2012). In their analysis, Rosenfield and Smith emphasize on overriding gender conceptions such as power positions held by men and women and associated differences in responsibilities associated with gender roles and personal characteristics as relevant for mental health (Rosenfield and Smith, 2010). Definitions of masculinity and femininity also impact men and women psychologically by creating gender differences in major risk factors, which, such as differences in the stressors experienced, their coping mechanisms, social relationships, vulnerabilities (Rosenfield & Mouzon, 2013). Hence, women and men are not affected by mental health problems in equal proportions, but by different types of complications. Women primarily experience anxiety and depression, while men are mostly affected by behaviour and personality difficulties, including alcohol and drug dependence (Payne, 1999; Prior, 1999; WHO, 2001a; Brawman-Mintzer, 2002; Busfield, 2002; WHO, 2004, WHO, 2022). According to the World Mental Health Report: Transforming Mental Health for All, 'slightly more women (13.5% or 508 million) than men (12.5% or 462 million) live with a mental disorder, while more than 10% of pregnant women and women who have just given birth experience depression' (WHO, 2022, p. 43). The report further states that,

"Women who have experienced intimate partner violence or sexual violence are particularly vulnerable to developing a mental health condition, with significant associations found between victimization and depression, anxiety, stress conditions including PTSD, and suicidal ideation. Women living with a severe mental disorder are much more likely to have experienced domestic and sexual violence during their life than other women." (WHO, 2022, p. 43)

Furthermore, gender variations are further reflected in their symptoms, treatment and outcomes (WHO, 2001; Kornstein & Clayton, 2002). Therefore, gender is a critical structural determinant of mental health and mental illness that intersects with and deepens the disparities interconnected with important socioeconomic determinants (WHO, 2001). This statement also highlights the importance of other social factors linked to the prevalence of mental health problems. Amongst such factors, disadvantage is the one most clearly associated with the development of mental illness (Prior, 1999; U.S. Surgeon General, 2001; Morrow, 2003; WHO, 2003).

The gender dimensions of mental health issues have also concerned the feminist movement. The basic reason for this is that women's health concerns, particularly, mental health concerns and experiences have often been pathologized. According to Dr. Mindy J. Erchull, it is more likely for women to be called 'crazy' in daily conversations as well as in media and their distinctive life experiences are also marked as 'disordered'. (Fabian, 2017)"

Thus, the adoption of a feminist perspective that encompasses a broader analysis based on the social determinants of health is necessary for the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of mental illness and the promotion of healthy mental health in the population.

Rationale of the Study

Studies show evidence of a strong prevalence of gender discrepancies in the context of mental health and illness (Bhatiya & Goyal, 2020). Some mental illnesses are more prevalent in women than men. For example, women suffer from insomnia more than men by around 40% (Hale, et al., 2009). Besides hormonal variation between men and women, research has found some sociological explanation behind it. Generally, women are involved in some time-consuming work such as child rearing, food preparation, and cleaning. It can affect a woman's sleep (Hale, et al., 2009). Women are also more likely to suffer from emotional and neurological illnesses such as depression, while men are more likely to suffer from personality disorders (Dohrenwend, 1980). For example, in a study conducted in Pakistan to examine 'Gender Difference in the level of Discrimination and Stigma' experienced by people diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder found that a high level of associated stigma and discrimination with their mental illness is experienced both by men and women. But women experience significantly greater levels of internalized stigma in spheres of discrimination experience and social withdrawal (Khan, N., Kausar, R., Khalid, A., & Farooq, A. 2015).

Socio-cultural models suggest the significance of socio-cultural factors on mental health in a range of ways. Research into different socio-demographic factors from a gendered lens have found that in understanding the exact determinants of how gender effects on mental health is still lacking (Bhatia & Goyal, 2020). For, example, being

single and unemployed had a direct connection to an increased rate of mental disorders in men than in women (Bhatia & Goyal, 2020; Klose & Jacobi, 2004).

But other studies have failed to find any difference between the sexes (Schwartz 1991; Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend 1976). In relation to mental illness, one finds that a lot of prejudice has accumulated in the minds of people far more than other forms of physical illness. People with mental illness across countries, societies and cultures are discredited and devalued compared to people without mental illness (Rössler, 2016).

For a long period, women have been over-represented in prevalence studies of mental health problems (Prior, 1999). This situation has been attributed to historical views of women as inherently irrational and mentally weak (Prior, 1997). Women are always considered to be twice as likely as men to be depressed or suffer from anxiety disorders and the reason for this disparity in mental illness is unclear and is linked to biology, unique personality characteristics, and a lack of control in society (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

The concerns for women's mental health also extend beyond specific conditions or problems. They encompass the structures that govern the provision of health-related education, information and health care delivery, the processes that influence women.

Today, an accurate need for assessment of women's mental health, remains vulnerable due to inadequate sources of data, an overly biological and individual focus in research as well as theoretical models which often neglect to consider – how women's low social status and material circumstances intersect with their family roles and their participation in paid employment. All of these play a critical role in determining mental health outcomes. And the omission of these social factors from studies of women's 'vulnerability' to mental health problems, amounts to a form of selection bias which precludes the possibility of examining how gender inequalities might determine women's emotional well-being. Here, the argument is in the context of gender, it is a term that refers to the socially constructed understanding of what the male and female characterizes (Vauqueline, 2021).

The advocates of the sociological perspective forward the opinion that biological and psychological characteristics of the human subjects are not the sole determinants of their mental health; structural features which determine role and status of members of a society, shape their behaviour and influence the logic of resource allocation, thereby privileging some members of the society to the detriment of others (Vauqueline, 2015).

Socio-cultural perspectives are important because people grow up and live within larger scale social organizations. Different types of institutions affect their socialization process. These institutions include family, school, city, state and many more. The surroundings of people, the institutions, and communities related to these institutions shape people's language, their belief system, values etc (Lemke, 2001; Vauqueline,

2015). Therefore, the impacts of these institutions may vary within and between cultures from person to person. And the definition of mental health can change over time. Therefore, it is important to study about the socio-cultural determinants such as gender, race, ethnicity, etc. which may contribute to the mental health of a person. People's cultural background affects their mental health. Family, religion, social norms, etc. play a role in shaping a person's mental health and these factors affect each person's mental health differently (Brands, 2022). Gendered socio-cultural obstacles may prevent women from gaining a better treatment for mental health.

Socio cultural factors contribute to gender differences in health and mental health. Attributes and experiences of men and women are different including some variables such as sex roles, social support, social isolation, marital status, educational status etc. The demographic burden of men and women are different. For example, regarding poverty, unemployment, and care-giving responsibilities, the experiences of men and women are different (Shear, Halmi, Widiger, & Boyce, 2007). Structural gender inequality limits access to health services for girls and women and contributes to health inequality (Barr & Temkin, 2022).

Likewise, the stigma and discrimination associated with mental health are also different for different genders. Within the field of mental health, the notion of stigma which denotes relations of shame and nonconformity from the 'normal', has been ongoing for a long time. There have been different approaches to the notion of stigma which ranges from a 'social psychological emphasis on prejudice to structural critiques, emphasizing a social disability model' (Rogers & Pilgrim, 2021, p. 232). It is a culturally enduring phenomena which has existed through times and regions maintained consistently through social structures and cultural variations and through individual responses to what is considered deviant behaviour (Rogers & Pilgrim, 2021).

Historically, the mentally ill have always been stigmatised and the word also carries a negative implication (Rössler, 2016). The word 'stigma' is derived from the Greek practice of marking bodies of individuals who supposedly have unusual or bad moral conduct through cuts or burns, to advertise someone who should be avoided. However, today, stigma has become an attribute, behaviour or reputation which is socially discredited and disapproved (Bos et al., 2013; Crossman, 2018; Goffman, 1963; Rössler, 2016). Society never treated people experiencing mental illness such as depression, autism, schizophrenia, etc. any differently from criminals. They would also receive imprisonment, torture or death. During Middle Ages, they were thought to be punished by God or to be possessed by the devil. They were burnt at the stakes or chined to bed in the madhouses (Rössler, 2016). Even today the general population is largely ignorant to the problem of stigmatisation faced by the mentally ill. This is an important social problem which still exist and is unavoidable.

Structural discrimination of the mentally ill is still prevalent, in legislation as well as in rehabilitation efforts (Rössler, 2016). Stigmatisation promotes social differences leading

to “spoiled social identity” (Goffman, 1963) and it occurs through social interactions (Bos et al., 2013). This implies that stigma does not exist on the body but on the social context meaning stigmatisation may differ depending on the social situation and function as a tool for exercising power through exploitation and dominance (Bos et al., 2013). It can also function as a tool for exercising social norms to prevent deviant behaviour and for disease avoidance (Bos et al., 2013). Consequently, stigmatisation of mental illness can be a barrier for health seeking behaviour among women with mental illness. Also, due to culturally constructed behaviour norms for women through gender roles and negative attitudes, the perceived stigma towards women with mental illness is higher. As stated by Bhatiya and Goyal (2020), “The fear as well as experience of stigma in case of women therefore often leads to non-disclosure of their psychiatric illnesses, and shying away from treatment facilities; thus, potentially leading to poorer outcomes as compared to men with psychiatric disorders” (Bhatiya & Goyal, 2020, p. 55).

In this regard the present research seeks to look at the issue of women’s mental health from a feminist perspective. Mental illness among women needs to be understood in the context of a myriad of realities.

Mental health can be threatened by factors other than biological and psychological. Social factors certainly affect the mental health of women, and undermining the role of the same would amount to delegitimization of women’s experiences and their voices (Davar, 1999). As Bhatiya and Goyal point out,

“The origins of much of the pain and suffering particular to women can be often traced to the social circumstances of lives of women. Socialized to be submissive, tolerant and timid, women often undergo bouts of depression, hopelessness, exhaustion, anger and fear, are overworked, face domestic and civil violence, entrapment and economic dependence.” (Bhatia & Goyal, 2020, p. 50)

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives are taken for the study

1. To study the societal attitudes and stigma associated with women’s mental health.
2. To probe the role of socioeconomic and cultural factors associated with women’s mental health.

Research Questions

1. What affect women with mental illness more, social attitudes’, stigmas and taboos or her socioeconomic and cultural positions?

Database and Methodology

The study used exploratory approach to probe the problem from feminist perspective. In-depth understanding of issues revolving around mental health through gender lenses is very challenging because of the challenges imposed in the data collection process. Thereby, through exploratory research the researchers made an in-depth investigation of the research questions not studied previously (Singh, 2021). Exploratory research aims at applying new words, concepts, explanations, theories and hypotheses to reality with the expectation of offering new ways of seeing and perceiving how this segment of reality works, how it is organized, or more specifically how and in what ways different factors relate to each other (Reiter, 2017).

Or non-exploratory research may reflect what is already known and there is a risk of repetition of the results (Swedberg, 2020). Grounded Theory supported and shaped the methodology. Grounded theory generates or discovers new theory from the data in social science research rather than forcing data into a few existing theories (Urquhart, 2022). Through Grounded Theory the researches tried to explain how mental illness was stigmatised by the social relationships and social behaviours of the care providers with women with mental illness (Noble & Mitchell, 2016). The study went deeper to relate these behaviours with gender and understand them from feminist perspectives.

Database

Primary Data

There is evidence of a wide range of barriers in conducting interviews and processing information attached to mental illness/ health. To overcome these barriers data triangulation was applied for this study. As such data were collected from the stakeholders, caregivers and female patients as well as researcher's observation will be taken into consideration to understand the stigmas and social attitudes attached with mental illness.

- I. Stakeholders included Psychiatrist, Psychiatric Nurses, Psychiatric Social Worker and Counsellors. Interviews of these stakeholders were conducted to get insights of those participants who were not in a position to interact efficiently on their own because of their mental state. This was particularly common in the case of participants from Ashadeep.
- II. Caregivers included parents, nearest relatives, spouses and children who were interviewed to understand the social factors and medical assistance seeking behaviour associated with mental health of women.
- III. Female patients who have undergoing treatment and were mentally fit to respond to the questions asked.

Data Collection Period

Data was collected from in-depth field interviews and a combination of participant observation by using the qualitative methodology and quantitative method wherever necessary. It was conducted from October, 2019 to March, 2020 at LGBRIMH, Tezpur, Sonitpur. And again, from April, 2022 to May, 2022 both at Ashadeep –a Mental Health Society, Bamunigaon, Kamrup (Rural) and in LGBRIMH, Tezpur.

Secondary Data

Materials were collected from different e-books, articles, journals and books by visiting Gauhati University and organizations like SNEHA (Mumbai), and Ashadeep a Mental Health Society.

Sample Size

The care- givers of the 23 female patients that is 23 care- givers staying in LGBRIMH, Tezpur were interviewed. For the female patients at Ashadeep their caregivers those who were also the stakeholders were consulted for taking their interviews. At least 31 key individual interviews with the stakeholders including psychiatrist, psychiatrist nurses, psychiatric social workers, and counsellors were taken which included from both the organizations for the study. Additionally, in order to make the interviews more efficient, interviews were conducted in those languages which the participants felt comfortable to communicate such as Hindi, Bengali, English, and Assamese

Selection of the Sample

The sample taken for the study was purposive and based on accessibility as well as willingness of the participants to be part of the study. Permissions from the consulting psychiatrist were taken prior to selecting interviewees, particularly of those women who have recovered from mental illness. The stakeholders were the mental health professionals who were working in the institute and caregivers selected for the study were the corresponding guardians of the women patients admitted in Lokopriya Gopinath Bordoloi Regional Institute of Mental Health, (Tezpur, Assam) and Ashadeep, which is a Mental Health Society at Bamunigaon, Kamrup (Rural), Assam.

Tools

Quantitative and qualitative semi - structured interview schedules were used to understand the experiences, actions, views and attitudes of the female patients, caregivers and stakeholders of the study.

Different Sets of Questionnaires were Prepared

- i. For stakeholders.

- ii. The Care- Givers/Providers of the participants.
- iii. Female patients

In this research, the main sources of data are qualitative in nature collected from the semi- structured interviews. The research does not intend to generalize the whole population but instead explore in-depth the problem and spend a sizable amount of time with a small population (Krueger, 1988; 1994; 1998; Krueger and Casey, 2000; Wimmer & Dominick, 1997).

Quantitative Data

The quantitative data was collected from the Out Patient Department (OPD) of LGBRIMH, Tezpur for one of the objectives of the study. In order to find the total number of female and male patients in the OPD and Indoor wards of the organization for the last 10 years from 2011 to 2021 as part of the study.

Audio recorder was used for the study as the importance of recording in-depth interviews is well established (Longhurst, 2003; Valentine, 1997). It was ensured that permission was granted by the interviewee for the same. The interviews conducted other than English, were translated simultaneously while preparing the transcripts.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee, Gauhati University GUIEC/2019/017 and from Institutional Ethics Committee IEC No: 378 of Lokopriya Gopinath Bordoloi Regional Institute of Mental Health (LGBRIMH). All the participants were informed about the purpose of the study, measures were taken to ensure confidentiality and that their participation was voluntary, they would withdraw at any time. Informed written and verbal consent was provided by all participants.

Feminist Perspective

There is an overwhelming recognition that the feminist approach has brought substantial gains to the development of social research through the positive and creative production of knowledge and should not be undermined (Ramazanoglu, 1992).

Feminist practices favour qualitative techniques because they reflect on the complexity of women's lives. Qualitative techniques allow the researcher to investigate the feelings, knowledge and understandings of the participants through in-depth interviews, focus groups and participant observation in order to gain an intense and deep understanding of the processes shaping the social world (Dwyer & Limb, 2001).

There are different opinions from feminists which vary with respect to epistemology and research methodology, a strong consensus exists that feminist research should

be largely qualitative, action-oriented and alert to women's experiences. Therefore, this study looking into the gender perspectives of the social attitudes and stigmas associated with mental health inherently benefits from feminist research approaches.

Grounded Theory

For this study, grounded theory was used as it begins with the area of study rather than beginning with a theory and later on probing it. Grounded theory can be described as a general and systematic research method usually associated with qualitative methodology. Originally formulated by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, this method aims at a generation of a general theory (Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Strauss and Corbin, 1994; Strauss and Corbin, 1997).

The main objective of this method is –

“To build a theory which is faithful and illuminates the area under study but data collection, analysis and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with a theory, and then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge.” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 23, 24)

Grounded theory begins with a research situation and follows an inductive approach that acknowledges the researcher's role developing and provisionally verifying a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data (Martin and Turner, 1986).

Through Grounded Theory the researcher, tried to explain how mental illness was stigmatized by the social relationships and social behaviours of the care providers with women with mental illness. The study went deeper to relate these behaviours with gender and understand them from feminist perspectives.

Universe of the Study

Universe of the study consists of all the women from the age group of 18 years and above who are residing or associated with the two institutes taken for the study.

The institutions selected were:

- - Lokopriya Gopinath Bordoloi Regional Institute of Mental Health, Tezpur, Assam and
- - Ashadeep, which is a Mental Health Society at Bamunigaon, Kamrup (Rural), Assam.

The former is the Government Mental Health Institute in the entire North East India that cater to the needs of the people of entire north eastern part of India at an affordable

price and the latter is the only non-government sector dedicatedly working for the causes of mental health in the state of Assam.

Findings

From the in-depth interviews with the participants viz. sampled patients, their caregivers and the stakeholders (service providers) along with the researcher's observations were used as a tool for the study. From the transcriptions of the interviews that were audio-tapped with the consent of the participants by the researcher and later on, after the transcriptions the analysis of the data collected was formed into sub themes for the study. The sub- themes found in the analysis were gender gap in treatment seeking behaviour of the patients, economic position an issue of concern for mental illness and marriage as a concern for mental illness.

Gender gap in treatment seeking behaviour can be seen - in respect of total number of male and patients in the OPD and Indoor wards. The number of male patients was higher than the female patients in last 10 years from 2011 to 2021. Another major finding that emerged from the narratives of the participants was the economic position of the male member in the family that affects their medical treatments during mental illness. The narratives revealed that the specific roles that are assigned to men in agrarian based activities in rural area affect their institutional treatment during mental illness. It was - found that women requiring more supportive care in institutional treatment acted as deterrent in their treatment process.

The economic position of women also determined the support received for their mental illness treatment and therefore travelling long distance acted as barrier to seeking mental health treatment. The gendered socialization process affects the treatment of the women as the importance is given to the treatment of men not only in case of mental illness but also in case of other physical illnesses. Another aspect is that marriages of women with mental illness are more complex than men and often people live with the false assumption that marriage can heal mental illness.

Disparity in Treatment Seeking Behaviour of the Patients on the Basis of the Gender

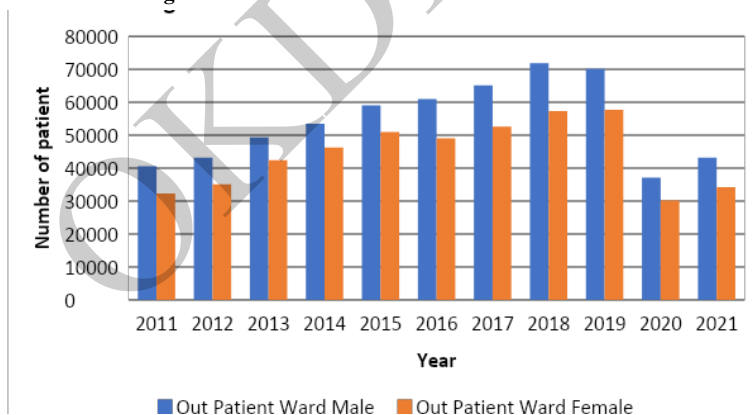
To have an insight about the pattern of treatment received by the patient with mental illness, in both Outdoor Patient Department (OPD) and Indoor Patient Department (OPD) at Lokopriya Gopinath Bordoloi Regional Institute of Mental Health (LGBRIMH), Tezpur were collected. While collecting the data from the records of the institute from 2011 to 2021, effort was made to segregate the data on the basis of gender. Data of male and female patients were only found in the records. It was observed that there were no mechanisms in the data record system of the institute to collect information of the queer gender. Thereby the data does not provide any information of the queer gender.

Trend and Pattern of Outdoor Patient Department (OPD) Seeking Treatment on the Basis of Gender

The total number of patients seeking treatment in Outdoor Patient Department (OPD) in Lokopriya Gopinath Bordoloi Regional Institute of Mental Health (LGBRIMH), during the study period was 1082244 of which 593936 were male and 488281 females, accounting to 54.88% and 45.11% respectively.

Fig 1 provides the trend of male and female patients seeking treatment as outdoor patients. It is very clear from Figure 1 that the proportion of male patients seeking treatment was always higher than the female patients during the entire study period. There was a constant rise in the proportion of patients seeking treatment, both male and female, from the year 2011 to 2019. There is a sudden fall from 70160 in 2019 to 37093 in 2020 of the number of male patients and 57721 in 2019 to 30166 of female patients (refer Table 1). It again shows a gradual increase in 2021. This can be attributed to the impacts of COVID 19 pandemic and a series of lockdowns. However, it is interesting to note that the proportion of male seeking treatment were - higher than female patients even during the Covid 19 period. This shows that there is no change in attitude towards treatment seeking behaviour among males and females even when pandemic situation hit the country and reported cases of mental illness among men and women also escalated.

Figure 1: Outdoor Patients on the basis of Gender



Source: Data collected from the field by the researcher

Table 1 illustrates the total number of female and male patients enrolled in the outdoor wards of the hospital, at Lokopriya Gopinath Bordoloi Regional Institute of Mental Health (LGBRIMH), Tezpur as shown in the Table 6.1 below, highlights the gap in mental treatment seeking between men and women.

Table 1- Total Number of Male and Female Patients in the Outdoor Patient Department (OPD) from 2011 to 2021.

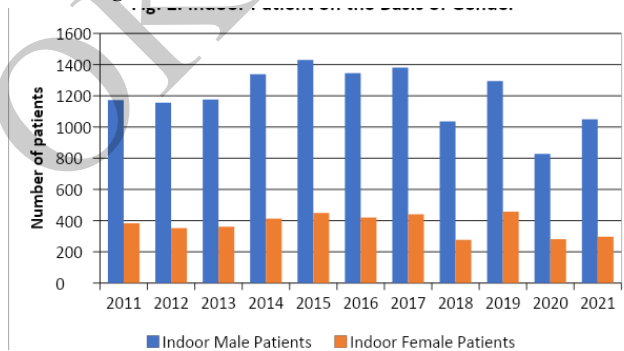
Year	Outdoor Patient Ward Male	Outdoor Patient Ward Female	Total	Male %	Female %
2011	40545	32288	72833	55.7	44.3
2012	43148	35147	78322	55.1	44.9
2013	49300	42443	91743	53.7	46.3
2014	53457	46250	99707	53.6	46.4
2015	59070	51017	110087	53.7	46.3
2016	61013	49090	110103	55.4	44.6
2017	65127	52578	117705	55.3	44.7
2018	71817	57345	129162	55.6	44.4
2019	70160	57721	127881	54.9	45.1
2020	37093	30166	67259	55.1	44.9
2021	43206	34236	77442	55.8	44.2

Source: Data collected from the field by the researcher

6.1.2: Trend and Pattern of Indoor Patient Admitted on the Basis of Gender:

An interesting pattern emerges when we analyse the data of indoor patients on the basis of gender. It clearly illustrates that the gender gaps are substantially high among indoor patients, male patient being on the higher side than female patients throughout the study period.

Figure 2: Indoor Patient on the Basis of Gender



Source: Data collected from the field by the researcher

Table 2-Total Number of Male and Female Patients in the Indoor Wards, 2011 - 2021.

Year	Indoor Male Patients	Indoor Female Patients	Total	Male%	Female%	Variation (Male & female) (%)
2011	1172	383	1555	75.4	24.6	50.8
2012	1156	352	1508	76.7	23.3	53.4
2013	1176	361	1537	76.5	23.5	53
2014	1338	413	1751	76.4	23.6	52.8
2015	1430	449	1879	76.1	23.9	52.2
2016	1345	420	1765	76.2	23.8	52.4
2017	1381	440	1821	75.8	24.2	51.6
2018	1036	277	1313	78.9	21.1	57.8
2019	1294	457	1751	73.9	26.1	47.8
2020	827	281	1108	74.6	25.4	49.2
2021	1049	297	1346	77.9	22.1	55.8

Source: Data collected from the field by the researcher

Total number of patients admitted during the study period was 17,334 of which 13204 were male and 4130 were female accounting to 76.17 % and 23.82 % respectively. The trend of admitted patients is undulated and not uniform. The disparity of patients admitted on the basis of gender was always above 50%, which is an issue of concern. It was only during the Covid 19 period, that number of female patients admitted in inpatient department increased marginally.. One of the reasons for this was the non availability of paid care givers for home seated mental patients and also difficulty in during the Covid 19 period which left families with no other options than hospitalization.

Socio-Cultural and Economic Factors Associated with Gender and Mental Health

The above analysis clearly illustrated that gender disparities exist in seeking or receiving medical treatment in respect of patients with mental illness. The study also sought to probe the reasons for such divides. To probe deeper into this matter the narratives of the interviews which were taken were explored through gender lenses and thermalized accordingly.

Economic Position of the Male Member in the Family Affects Their Treatments During Mental Illness

One of the major findings that emerged from the narratives of the participants was the dependence of the family members on the adult male members of the family, especially when he is the main income earner of the family. The position of the male member in the family as the main or at times the sole economic earner of the family affected immensely the type and quality of medical treatment he received during his

mental illness. When the main earner of the family falls sick or is suffering from any kind of physical illness or mental illness; his treatment assumes priority and medical treatment is sought or provided. There are urgencies among the family members to get him cured as soon as possible. The family members are eager to look after that person and take care of him; as they are dependent upon him for their basic sustenance.

'The priority is the man as he is the breadwinner of the family. They are the farmers. If they do not cultivate what will their families eat for survival? Male being active is very important in an agrarian society.'

(Stakeholder – Professor, and Head of the Department of Psychiatric Social Work, 57 years, Female, LGBRIMH, Tezpur)

Another male Clinical Psychologist from LGBRIMH, narrated.

'Male being the only bread earner of the family is the primary reason for getting more importance than a female...'

(Stakeholder – Clinical Psychologist, 31 years, male, LGBRIMH, Tezpur)

The family members have a different perception when women and men suffer from mental illness. Because of the economic position of the men within the family their attitude towards mental illness is also gendered.

'I think when a woman is sick the preoccupation with the sickness is not much. But when a man is sick the whole house is sick; I think there is a different perception that people have.'

(Stakeholder – Senior Faculty of the Department, Psychiatric Social Work, 57 years, female, LGBRIMH, Tezpur)

Specific Role Assigned to Men and Women in Agrarian Based Activities in Rural Area Affects Their Institutional Treatment During Mental Illness

Not just being the major earner in the family affects the treatment received by male but also the type of socio-economic activities assigned according to the gender has an impact on the treatment received. It is observed that there exists gender division of labour in paddy cultivation in Assam and there are different taboos associated with it. It is considered inauspicious for a woman to plough the field or even touch it. Again, transplanting of paddy is done mostly by women, but if required men also take part. This gender division of labour and the taboo attached makes women more vulnerable as a patient of mental illness.

This is clearly pointed out by a female Professor working in LGBRIMH, Tezpur.

'...if a woman is sick somehow the system works, I think even at home...'

Again, Professor and Head of the Department, Psychiatric Social Work stated that,

'If the man is not there to plough in the fields along with the bullocks it is not possible to do the farming.'

(Stakeholder- Senior Faculty of the Department, Psychiatric Social Work, 57 years, LGBRIMH, Tezpur)

Women Requiring More Supportive Care in Institutional Treatment Acts as Deterrent in Her Treatment Process

Mental illness treatment requires the support and care from the family and relatives. In case of men, with mental illness, more so if he is the primary earner, this support and care is readily available from the family that is dependent on him. But, in case of women who are dependent, such care requirements may become a liability and therefore, a deterrent to her treatment. She might instead be taught to cope and adjust. One of the stakeholders narrates that:

'Again, management is different between males and females. Females require more supportive care even after they go back to that environment (Home). When we treat them here, we follow up everything.'

(Stakeholder- Senior Resident in the Department of Psychiatry, 29 years, Female, LGBRIMH, Tezpur)

'We have to make sure that she is comfortable in that environment and that her stress factors have been identified and dealt with.'

(Stakeholder- Senior Resident in the Department of Psychiatry, 29 years, Female, LGBRIMH, Tezpur)

'Even if the male is not well for two to three days, they will bring them here immediately. But the women are often subdued.'

(Stakeholder- Senior Resident in the Department of Psychiatry, 29 years, Female, LGBRIMH, Tezpur)

Women's Economic Position Determines the Support for Her Mental Illness Treatment

During the study it was observed that, if the women suffering from mental illness were earning an income, the attitude of the family changed towards her and her treatment was received a priority. One of the stakeholders pointed out that it is not the gender

but the earning ability that matters.

“I think it is all about money. It depends on the source of income. Generally, the male is the breadwinner and the woman is always considered to be the homemaker. I think once a woman starts earning, she is doing both housework as well as earning, then the family attitude changes. This I can say as I have come across such cases. When the matter of income source comes in the family, concern for the patient is also seen.”

(Stakeholder – Occupational Therapist, 36 years, Female LGBRIMH, Tezpur)

Gendered Socialization Process Affects the Treatment of the Women

A senior physician of the Department of Psychiatric Social Work, Lokopriya Gopinath Bordoloi Regional Institute of Mental Health (LGBRIMH), Tezpur, describes that the problem lies in the patriarchal mindset or attitude towards women and the treatment during mental illness. Importance is given to the treatment of men not only in case of mental illness but also in case of other physical illnesses.

“Men are given more importance in the family... If a woman complains and says, ‘I am not feeling well’, ‘I am having cramps in the body’ – then the response is generally – ‘It’s okay, you will feel better, take some rest’. But for men it is different. It is the problem of the mindset.”

(Stakeholder – Senior Faculty of the Department of Psychiatric Social Work, 41 years, Male, LGBRIMH, Tezpur)

“Sometimes in case of depression and neurotic illness, the patient suffers, but family members are not bothered because she is doing her work. In that way neurotic cases come very late...”

Marriage as a Cause of Concern for Women with Mental Illness

Marriage as a social institution is important across human society. In India, it is generally believed that women married to men with mental illness are more likely to suffer rather than men who are married to mentally ill women (Srivastava, 2013). Furthermore, married women who are mentally ill often get abandoned by their husband and his family and are compelled to return to their parents’ home. This further complicates their mental health situation due to facing stigma and ridicule (Nambi 2005; Sharma et al, 2013). On the contrary, women married to mentally ill men often remain trapped with their husbands as they lack support from their own families and face difficulties due to economic dependency, financial, personal and social security and most importantly, for the wellbeing of their children (Srivastava, 2013).

Marriages of Women with Mental Illness is More Stigmatised than Men

The participants have especially mentioned about the relation of marriages and mental illness. There are different issues associated with marriage which are gendered. Women with mental illness face more discrimination in comparison to men. This can be understood by the narrative of the care- givers of the women suffering from mental illness and the stakeholders who are the service providers

'If a male is psychotic, he can definitely marry but if a female is psychotic then there will definitely be issues in marriage.'

'Due to the stigmas attached with mental illness many unmarried girls are treated in private hospitals.'

'Marriage is an important issue for women. Families are more concerned about unmarried women than married women. When a female patient comes for treatment along with her father, the common question that we are asked, – “Can my daughter get married?”’

'For men it is not a big issue. He can have an affair. Even if he is undergoing treatment, he can get married.'

(Stakeholder – Senior Faculty of the Department of Psychiatric Social Work, 41 years, Male, LGBRIMH, Tezpur)

Parents are stigmatised for disclosing about the mental illness of the daughter to her in-laws fearing the breaking of the engagement. It was observed that the parents were more concerned about the daughter's marriage than the daughter herself.

People Live With False Assumption that Marriage Can Heal Mental Illness

The study observed that a common belief upheld among the families of the patients is that marriage can be a solution to mental illness. As stated by a Psychiatrist, LGBRIMH, Tezpur, most guardians of female patients believe that if their daughters get married, they will become well. In fact, when they come for consultation, their primary concern is whether their daughters could get married.

'We have come across many female patients who have not come for treatment although they were suffering from mental illness for many years. Their guardians think that once they get married, they will recover from the illness.'

(Stakeholder – Psychiatrist, 32 years, Female, LGBRIMH, Tezpur)

Similarly, it was also evident that some people believed that late marriage could result

in mental illness among unmarried women and marriage could heal her.

“We stay in a village and here people are not educated to understand the causes of her illness. Even my aunt once told me to get my daughter married. She was misbehaving at home (because of her mental illness). My aunty felt that it was because her peers were already married.”

(Caregiver – Mother of female patient, 34 years, LGBRIMH, Tezpur)

Few of the female participants who have recovered mentioned that they were sent back to their maternal homes when they were suffering from mental illness. A few of these women stated that their husbands did not take much care of them during their illness. On the other hand, during the interview with the care providers, family members (in-laws) of the married women stated that they would file divorce once discharged from the hospital. They are not willing to take care and responsibilities of women suffering from mental illness.

Discussion

This study focused on understanding the gender disparities in social stigma and attitude associated with mental illness in Assam. As patients from all over the North East come for treatment in these institutions taken for the study, it provided an opportunity to understand the status of mental health illness and treatment seeking behaviour. Gender variations are further reflected in their symptoms, treatment and outcomes (WHO, 2001; Kornstein & Clayton, 2002), particularly in the case of treatment seeking behaviour and support mechanisms available from the patient’s family and society.

In a patriarchal society, more emphasis is placed on the treatment of men than on the treatment of women’s mental illnesses, as man is considered the bread earner of the family. This resonates with the patriarchal notions of gender roles prevalent in society which depict men as the independent and dominant and women as dependent and submissive. Our study shows that the number of women admitted to psychiatric hospitals is significantly lower than that of men (Table 1 and Table 2). The percentage of males admitted in both out patient department (OPD) and indoor ward are significantly higher than the number of females admitted, despite the fact that the treatment in these institutes is free of cost. Thus, gender disparity is observed in mental health treatment seeking behaviour. Women in general, are seen to delay treatment or forgo full treatments depending on their economic standing in the family.

The study revealed how socioeconomic factors such as the economic position of a person, be it man or women, affects their treatment of mental illness. It has been observed that families may not agree to spend unnecessarily on a woman’s treatment. Furthermore, sending the women to a far-off place for treatment may also be a cause of concern as it will also require the guardian or caregiver to travel along. This affects

the economic and financial health of the family. This is truer for married women with mental illness whose husband and marital family may not want to invest their time, energy and finances. Such a woman becomes a liability and may also be divorced or abandoned (Nambi 2005; Sharma et al, 2013).

The woman's treatment is given importance only if her economic position in her family is strong and sound. If a woman is an earner in the family, there is a difference in the attitude of the family towards her. Her treatment is given a priority. Gender seems to become relevant with the economic position of an individual. In this context, stigma towards mental health seems to be a myth rather than reality. Stigma is overruled by socioeconomic position of those with mental illness which is why male patients get more preference due to their stronger economic background.

Gendered socialization processes also affect the treatment of women. After all, it depends on how families and communities perceive, interpret and control gender roles. This study shows that the stigma attached to women and the importance given to men affects the treatment of not only mental illness but also any illness. This also affects the marital status of women with mental illness.

The acceptance a married woman with mental illness in a patriarchal society is very different from that of a married man with a mental illness. A woman suffering from mental illness is often abandoned by her husband and family and are compelled to return to their parents' home. In contrast, women married to men with mental illness are often compelled to spend their lives with their husbands due to lack of support from their parental families and face myriads of challenges in respect of financial and economic security, personal and social safety and, most importantly, the well-being of their children (Srivastava, 2013).

The present study also revealed that there are many misconceptions about marriage and the cure of mental illness. Many assume that marriage can heal mental illness. Through the interactions with the participants, it was evident that many families trivialize mental illness as misbehaviour or as an upbringing issue and suggest marriage as a solution. Even when they seek treatment, they emphasize on whether their daughters could be married or not. On the contrary, certain families would avoid bringing their female members to psychiatric facilities for fear of stigma and discrimination attached to mental illness, which might create impediments in getting married. Many a times women with mental illness prefer not to get married but society ostracizes them as 'not normal'. This might have adverse effects on their illness and lead to an obsession with marriage. This view might also be related to the patriarchal gender norms which asserts that women's primary role is that of a good wife and mother..

Conclusion

Social attitudes and stigma are indeed associated with mental illness of women and it is influenced by prevalent patriarchal notions. However, the socioeconomic background of the mentally ill and their earning capacity plays an important role in how they are treated. Often it is the socioeconomic position which has a determining role in stigmatising a person with mental illness. Even within socioeconomic position, there is a subtle gendered division where males with higher standing stand to be more privileged in getting treatment for their mental illness vis-a-vis women who have similar or lower socioeconomic standing. Mental health is an important social issue which therefore requires greater emphasis on understanding with a gender lens. The differential experiences by men and women is visible in their symptoms, treatment, outcomes as well as associated stigma and discrimination. This further impacts the overcoming of the illness among the patients. In the case of women, mental health is interrelated to various social factors as well as clinical factors. Their economic dependence or independence, their marital status, their identities within their families and communities, their socialization and upbringing all factor into their mental health and wellbeing.

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Between Need and Lifestyle: Understanding the Significance of Domestic Workers in Middle-class Households of Guwahati

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Abstract

Framed within a discourse of traditional understanding of middle-class Indian domesticity, this paper looks at contemporary domestic practices of middle-class households in Guwahati. Drawing on fieldwork with Assamese middle-class women who recruited domestic workers, the paper analyses the significance of domestic workers in their day-to-day lives. The analysis focuses on three different, yet partly interrelated factors - practical gains, status reproduction, and showcasing act of benevolence - that influence the recruitment of domestic workers amongst the women employers in Guwahati. The findings reveal that, the recruitment of domestic workers in middle-class households is shaped by a combination of emotional and consumerist aspirations of the women employers, as much as their domestic responsibilities, which in turn, crucially entailed to their reproduction of class and gender identities in the realm of everyday lives.

Introduction

From 1990 onwards, with the initiation of economic liberalization policies, urban India has witnessed an exponential growth of workers performing part-time domestic work (Fernandes, 2006; Neetha, 2009). These workers typically comprise of those who live in their own houses and perform specific tasks for multiple employers either once or twice a day (Raghuram, 2001; Neetha, 2009). Ray & Qayum has referred to these workers as 'freelancers', since they exercise greater flexibility and autonomy in choosing their employers (Ray & Qayum, 2010, p. 67). Nevertheless, while, this period marked a significant growth of part-time domestic workers, it was primarily the emerging group of new middle-class who were recruiting them, marking domestic workers as a 'middle-class and upper middle-class phenomenon' (Neetha, 2004).

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Like elsewhere in India, the present study reveals that in Guwahati too, part-time domestic workers are increasingly being recruited by middle-class households. Although, there are no official records accounting to their exact number in context of Guwahati, the finding and observation is supported by various micro level studies that indicate the popularity of part-time domestic work being the most common domestic arrangement in urban middle-class households in India (Dickey, 2000; Raghuram, 2001; Ray & Qayum, 2010; Mattila, 2011; Sen & Sengupta, 2016).

While, existing scholarship has attributed varied specificities in the increasing recruitment of domestic workers in urban middle-class households in India, this paper primarily builds on how the notions of traditional conceptions of middle-class domesticity are shaping the contemporary recruitment practices of domestic workers in Guwahati. The paper focuses on three different, yet partly interrelated factors - practical gains, status reproduction, and showcasing acts of benevolence - in analysing the significance of domestic workers in the lives of middle-class women employers and argues that domestic workers entailed women employers in fulfilling not only their domestic responsibilities, but, also their emotional and consumerist aspirations, which crucially reproduced their gender and class identities in the realm of everyday lives.

Mapping Middle-Class Domesticity in India

It was in mid-nineteenth century colonial India when the idea of middle-class domesticity began holding its grip in Indian society. This was particularly with the emergence of a newly educated middle-class or *Bhadralok*³, in the urban social milieu of colonial Bengal⁴. As by-projects of colonial projects, and influenced by modernity, this class held a strong desire to reform Indian society (Ray & Qayum, 2010). However, this reformation was to be achieved without jeopardizing the age-old Indian traditions. It was in this context, Indian society came to be defined by a powerful dichotomy between 'outer' (*bahir*) and 'inner' (*ghar*), in line with a nationalist fervor, and dialectic between tradition and modernity (Chatterjee, 1989). This also marked the gendered division of society, in which, the 'inner' representing the 'home' was typically an arena associated with woman (ibid).

By late nineteenth century, 'home' was accorded the status of a private space, thereby, marking it as an intrinsic part for maintaining public identity of the middle-class (Fernandes, 2006; Matilla, 2011). In this, the middle-class woman i.e. the *bhadramahila*

³ In Bengal, *bhadralok* means gentleman, and is defined as a social group which is heterogeneous in origin, marked by an ideology of respectability (Ray & Qayum, 2010). The membership of the group was not ascribed and therefore, had to be achieved (Mukherjee, 1977 cited in Ray & Qayum, 2010).

⁴ As Calcutta was the imperial capital of colonial India until 1911, most of the accounts of colonial history are centered in West Bengal. Moreover, it was in Calcutta where the 'woman's question' first emerged in nineteenth century India, and soon spread out to the rest of the sub-continent, wherein the changing condition of women and the attendant ideas of domesticity was an all India phenomenon, in terms of caste, class and religious identities (Banerjee, 2010).

(counterparts of *bhadralok*) was assigned crucial roles for conserving integral essence of the 'home' from any Western influences (Chatterjee, 1989). This led to the creation of an ideal middle-class domesticity, in which woman was central in communicating an image of middle-class 'respectability'.

However, the institution of 'home' and middle-class domesticity trembled when middle-class women started imitating the European women (Chatterjee, 1989, Sen, 1999). This converged with the time when issues surrounding women's education under colonial rule were highly debated by the middle-class Indian reformers. For them, moral degeneracy seemed inevitable as they believed women's education would corrupt the 'pure tradition' and 'true womanhood' of Indian women, thereby, debarring from their primary roles as wives and mothers (Sen, 1999). However, prolonged debate and discussion led to a consensus on the attainment of cultural refinements by Indian women through modern education, without jeopardizing her position at 'home' (Chatterjee, 1989).

Yet, soon the educated housewives came under criticism when it became almost certain that all middle-class homes hired servants (Ray & Qayum, 2010). This led to the emergence of domestic manuals, particularly addressed to the young and educated brides to teach them the basic essence of domesticity (Banerjee, 2010). Through the manuals they were given necessary advice for upholding their colonized counterpart's status (Sen, 1999; Banerjee, 2010), and on proper management of servants (Ray & Qayum, 2010).

In the early twentieth century as movement for India's independence gained momentum, position of respectable middle-class woman was further refined. She was entrusted with cultural responsibility for building the inner life of her home, and embodied the virtues of a chaste, self-sacrificing traditional Hindu woman by distinguishing herself from both European women and women of lower socio-economic strata (Chatterjee, 1989; Banerjee, 2010). Consequently, this period experienced a steady increase in employment of servants from lower classes, as it became a crucial marker of status for the emerging new middle-class families (Banerjee, 2004).

Following independence, interestingly not much has radically altered in terms of power paradigms in middle-class families where the position of 'woman' is concerned (Chaudhuri, 2014). Yet, a considerable transformation has taken place in composition of the middle-class, and their domestic arrangements. This further proliferated with the initiation of economic liberalization policies in 1990s, which led to a notable growth of a new middle-class⁵ (Fernandes, 2006). Unlike the colonial era, this class in the

⁵ Fernandes argues that, this post-liberalization middle-class is not "new" in terms of its structural or social composition, but rather their newness refers to a process, in which they assert a middle-class identity by laying claims to benefits of liberalization (Fernandes, 2006, p. xviii). Moreover, the construction of this social group is not a homogeneous category, as other middle-class or upwardly mobile working class too, has the capacity to be a part of it (ibid).

post-colonial India built itself as agents of modernity, primarily deriving its power from the market forces, rather than the state (Ray & Qayum, 2010; Barua, et al., 2017). The women of this class increasingly attained higher levels of education, which contributed in their steady rise into paid employment outside the home (Neetha, 2004; Ghotoskar, 2013). This mostly resulted in the growth of dual careers as a new family norm in urban areas (Neetha, 2004). However, the traditional ideal of domesticity and associated femininity continued to influence contemporary relationships in these families (Donner, 2011). A natural outcome to this was the sudden increase in demand of paid domestic workers, as employing of domestic workers in contemporary times is 'largely a middle-class and upper middle-class phenomenon' (Neetha, 2004, p. 1682). The paid domestic workers, thus, enabled the middle-class women to fulfil their varied domestic roles, without interrupting the traditional patriarchal set-up of these families. Furthermore, the increasing recruitment of domestic workers in urban areas is also attributed to the decline of extended and joint family system, which earlier served as a source of helping hand in smooth functioning of middle-class households (Ray & Qayum, 2010; Barua, et.al, 2017).

Recent scholarship has shown part-time domestic work being the most common form of contemporary domestic arrangement in urban middle-class households in India, shouldered particularly by the female workforce (Dickey, 2000; Raghuram, 2001; Neetha, 2004; 2009; Ray & Qayum, 2010; Sen & Sengupta, 2016). With this arrangement, domestic tasks are categorically divided into sweeping and mopping, cooking, washing dishes, washing clothes, child care and elderly care. Employers, in return, are empowered to choose specialized domestic workers based on their respective needs. Furthermore, it is pertinent to note that, this arrangement of domestic work continues to prevail with traditional full-time domestic work, specifically recruited by families which have both the means and space to accommodate full-timers (Ray & Qayum, 2010; Barua, et.al, 2017).

Methodology

The paper is based on fieldwork conducted in Guwahati, the capital of Assam. Guwahati, popularly known as 'Gateway to North-East India' came to prominence as a city in 1972, with reorganization of the state capital from Shillong. It was only after attainment of the status of state capital, the city witnessed rapid urban development, which has left its impact on social, economic and political life of the residents. In the contemporary times, the city is accredited as one of the fastest-growing urban centers of India and is recognized as the largest metropolis of north-east region and a major regional hub for commercial and educational activities. These developments make Guwahati an interesting area of study, as there is sizeable concentration of middle-class population in the city.

The data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with thirty-five caste Hindu Assamese women⁶. The women are between the age group of thirty-four to seventy-five years. They were interviewed in their respective homes, with each interview lasting between one to two hours. Interviews conducted at their home helped in understanding of the class positions and daily domestic managements by these women better. The sampled women were married, with five being widowed, two being separated from their husbands, and one living separately owing to work-related reasons⁷. Initial contact with a few of these women was established through a network of the first researcher's family. Subsequently, the interviewed women helped in further establishing contact within their circle of friends. The households of these interviewed women represented a wide spectrum of middle-class lifestyle, wherein they shared certain common attributes. Although, in contemporary times, the middle-class as a conceptual category cannot be reduced to any single-entity, this study locates the middle-class households in Guwahati through the classificatory practices of: educational and occupational aspects, symbolic aspects like their practices of consumption and lifestyle, embodied cultural practices of traditional values of domesticity and morality⁸. The interviewed women had access to higher education, and are mostly college graduates, with five being university graduates, and one holding a PhD degree. Of them, twelve are employed in various sectors like school, college, non-governmental organization, and in government jobs, while seventeen of them are home-makers, five are retired professionals, and one has her own business on apparels (mekhela sador)⁹. Moreover, the husbands of these women are mostly college graduates, and are all working professionals, either in private or government sectors. The women are residents of the Uzanbazar locality of Guwahati¹⁰. Most of these women lived in single-pattern houses; while eight of them lived in apartment buildings owning a flat of two to three BHK, and two of them are tenants renting a floor in large houses. The ideal living arrangement for the women

⁶ The study restricts to the category of caste Hindu Assamese women because it tries to understand the significance of domestic workers for this category vis-a-vis the notion of domesticity evolving in the middle-class caste Hindu Assamese society since the pre-independence days. By Assamese, the scholars here refer to the indigenous non-tribal people, united by a common linguistic identity, i.e. Assamese.

⁷ As this paper tries to understand the significance of domestic workers in the lives of married women considering the expectations of the ideology of feminine domesticity in a married woman's life, the dimension of the dependency of unmarried women on domestic workers is not taken into account.

⁸ During the colonial period, the middle-class as a social group was recognized more or less as homogeneous through their engagement in reform movements and institutions like school, legal system, state-run offices and urban infrastructure (Donner & Neve, 2011). Middle-class during this period overwhelmingly represented the Hindu middle-class culture comprising mainly of the upper-caste norms (Chatterjee, 1989).

⁹ Ethnic Assamese outfit.

¹⁰ Uzanbazar is selected as the field site because it is one of the oldest residential areas of the city. Moreover, the significance of the area is also related to its historical specificities, wherein it served as one of the quintessential part of the colonial period with government offices and quarters set by the river side. In present times, the significance of the area continues to persist with institutions of prominence like Raj Bhawan, Gauhati High Court, Cotton University, located in the vicinity. This significantly indicates the value of immovable assets in the Uzanbazar area, thereby, marking the relative weight of 'economic and symbolic capital' (Bourdieu, 1984) possessed by the women of the study

are a nuclear family set-up, however, ten households are seen accommodating an extended family member of one or two generations. In addition, the existing scholarship on domestic work in India has highlighted that hiring of paid domestic workers also serves as an essential parameter for classifying the 'middle-class', whether it is lower, upper or wealthiest section (Ray & Qayum, 2010; Mattila, 2011). The sampled women in this study had been employing domestic workers for the past five years and more either on full time or part time basis.

Middle-Class Domesticity in the Assam Context

In Assam, the impact of reformist movements considering the 'woman's question' was felt only during the twentieth century, unlike Bengal and other parts of India (Nath, 2011). Nevertheless, ideal of middle-class domesticity in Assam is often believed to echo the Bengal example, as most Assamese middle-class men¹¹ during late nineteenth and early twentieth century were educated in Calcutta, and brought these ideas home (Chaudhuri, 2014).

Emulating the Bengal model (as discussed above), ideologies of domesticity and domestic world emerged as certain central themes in the local Assamese journals like *Orunodoi*, *Asam Bandhu*, *Jonaki* and *Mau* (Nath, 2011; Konwar, 2017). Mostly written by Assamese middle-class men belonging to caste-Hindu, these journals reflected the contradictions between the ideals of tradition and modernity in determining the position of women (Sen, 2012; Konwar, 2017). Like the Bengali *bhadralok*, they too, feared that under the spell of Western influence, there would emerge a class of Assamese *bowari*¹² whose minds would be contaminated by idleness, thus, deeming them unfit for domestic tasks, thereby, making demands of domestic servants beyond the means of most middle-class *babus* (Nath, 2011). This led to re-imagination of the ideology of domesticity, wherein the 'innocence' and 'femininity' of Assamese middle-class women could be protected from any foreign contamination- European as well as Bengal influences (ibid). In this context, like elsewhere in colonial India, female education in Assam was supported only in cultivating the virtues of a good housewife, an enlightened mother and spawning of able sons for the advancement of the country, and not for women's self-sufficiency or economic-sufficiency (Sen, 2012; Konwar, 2017). As Aparna Mahanta noted, the idea of an Assamese middle-class Hindu woman during the period was mostly conceptualized by Assamese reformers

¹¹ Unlike other colonial regions, in Assam the growth of Assamese middle-class took several years, wherein the connotation of the term frequently kept changing (Kalita, 2011). Their growth was not a result of single historical event, but had passed through four stages of development: first, the period of gestation from late 18th century to about 1820; second, the rise and growth from 1820 to 1850; third, further growth and development from 1850 to 1880; and fourth, growth and expansion from 1880 to 1947 (ibid). It is nevertheless significant, that the Assamese caste-Hindu men were among the first to partake colonial educational project (Gohain, 1973). Armed with western education, the members of caste-Hindus like Brahmins, Kayasthas, Kalitas were quick to take up government jobs that subsequently played a major role in their emergence as middle-class in Assam (ibid).

¹² A married woman is referred to as a *bowari* in Assamese.

like Ratneswar Mahanta as a 'hardworking, self-sacrificing, obedient woman untainted by education' (Mahanta, 2008, p. 64).

In the process, women were defined by their cultivated presence in the 'home' by engaging in activities like spinning, weaving, embroidery, child-rearing, grooming of men and housekeeping (Nath, 2011; Konwar, 2017). She was trained to be silent and have *laaj* (shame), who would speak to male family members and servants only when required (Konwar, 2017). And, when in public places, she was to distinguish herself from 'common woman' by observing *purdah* in the form of *odhoni* (a long veil covering from head to face), or was obliged to cover her face with a *barjapi* (a large umbrella made out of bamboo) (Nath, 2011)¹³. Arguably, the Assamese middle-class men actively created a world for their counterparts, by relegating them to domestic sphere- materially and ritually- with the responsibility of managing household duties while deferring to the male patriarch (Ray & Qayum, 2010). This led to the construction of a domestic ideology whereby, 'a woman's life revolved around the concept of *saubhagya* or marital blessedness' (Nath 2011, p. 820).

Nevertheless, although, historically women in Assam were subdued under a patriarchal tradition, they held a higher status than women in other parts of India (Konwar, 2017). Even in post-colonial Assam, Assamese women are generally believed to enjoy greater freedom in their day-to-day lives, when compared to position of women in Pan-India level (Bhattacharyya, 2018). The freedom of these women is largely associated with its geographical location of being a neighbour of the matrilineal society¹⁴ and for the Assamese sub-culture¹⁵ (Bhattacharyya, 2009; 2018). However, this does not entail one to believe about a prevailing egalitarian society in contemporary Assam. On the contrary, unequal gender relations in Assamese society are reproduced and sustained in different spaces, in context of the present study; it is the domestic space i.e. the 'inside' or 'private' space called 'home'.

The normative conceptions of domesticity which involves a woman to prioritize her family through caring and socialising roles (Dickey, 2000; Neetha, 2004; Mattila, 2011; Hussein, 2017); continue to shape the everyday articulations of women's position in the Assamese society. And, these gendered constructs of women's roles are irrespective of whether they seek a paid employment outside home or not.

Scholars argue that, it is in this context, the traditional perceptions of gender roles help in developing an idea of gender complementarities, whereby, men are continued

¹³ The 'common woman' comprised of those who were not from caste Hindus, and actively participated in the production process of society (Nath, 2011).

¹⁴ A society which traces its ancestral descent from the female side of the family rather than through paternal lines <https://www.britannica.com/topic/matrilineal-society>, retrieved on 1.09.2022.

¹⁵ Historically, Assam as a society has been free from practices like dowry, sati and other rituals embedded in patriarchal values like *Karwa chauth* and *Raksha Bandhan* to name a few (Bhattacharyya, 2018).

to be seen as primary breadwinners and women as bearers of family-oriented roles such as, wife, mother, homemaker, and nurturers (Mattila, 2011; Bhattacharyya, 2018). Raju and Lahiri (2011) categorically argue that such gendered behavioural roles of Indian women are encoded via process of socialisation (cited in Bhattacharyya, 2018, p. 4-5). Radhakrishnan (2009) noted that amongst the Indian women working in IT sectors in large cities like Mumbai and Bangalore, women mostly resorted to leaving their jobs after childbirth, or declined opportunities for promotion, in order to perform their family-oriented roles sacrificing their jobs at the expense of their families was. Similarly, in Assam, gender role orientation was found to be deeply ingrained, wherein women engaged in highly paid employment viewed themselves primarily as homemakers, thus, bearing the prime responsibility of domestic work and childcare (Bhattacharyya, 2009).

In the present study also it was observed that the middle-class employers – working women¹⁶ and housewives - also emphasised upon their primary responsibility of domestic work. They strongly upheld the normative construction of ‘women’s innate ability for domestic chores and men’s constitution for the marketplace’ (Romero, 1992, p. 52). An employer in her mid-thirties proudly said: ‘We women are anyway better in the household work. You give the responsibility of the home to your husband, even for a single day, they will turn it into a mess’. Similar sentiments of acknowledgement of doing domestic chores better than their male counterparts are echoed by all the middle-class women in the study. The male members of these households mostly engage themselves in doing grocery shopping, paying bills and cooking of particular dishes, occasionally in order to exhibit their culinary skills. The traditional understanding of masculinity appeared to be deeply ingrained in these households, which is also endorsed by the women, as it entailed to their middle-class femininity.

Considering the labour intensive and largely manual nature of domestic work, the middle-class women actively engaged in outsourcing this ‘labour’ to women from lower-economic class. This new standard of home maintenance has been observed by Ralph Waldo Emerson as:

A house kept to the end of display is impossible to all but a few women, and their success is dearly bought. (Emerson cited in Romero, 1992, p. 53)

With outsourcing labour of the poor domestic workers, these women actively contribute to a continuous process of middle-class making of their respective households (Mattila, 2011; Waldrop, 2011). For instance, on one hand, the domestic workers enabled them to retain their class standing amongst their class peers, by maintaining a clean and ordered home, on the other, domestic workers facilitated their participation in job market and other related status producing activities (Dickey, 2000). Notably, as the increasing

¹⁶ By the term ‘working women’ the paper implies those middle-class women who are engaged in a paid employment outside their home. However, the term does not intend to vilify the work – physical and emotional-performed by the housewives towards their family as ‘non-work’.

participation of women in job market has not been accompanied by a simultaneous participation of men in sharing the daily domestic chores at home, these women are typically strained with what Hochschild and Machung (2012) calls as ‘second shift’ of work¹⁷. It is in such situations, the pressures of domestic labour in these households is intertwined with their class positions, which entails these women the privilege of outsourcing the labour for domestic tasks in their daily lives. Moreover, it also entailed to the maintenance of traditional conception of middle-class respectable femininity¹⁸, wherein the middle-class women in the present study are seen assigning only those tasks to domestic workers which did not compromise their feminine ‘selves’.

It is from vantage of such a perspective, the researchers view the recruitment of domestic workers in middle-class households of the present study. The following section therefore, discusses the three main factors related to recruitment of domestic workers, which appeared to be significant for Assamese middle-class women employers, for crucially reproducing their gendered and class positions.

Practical Gains: Working Women and Housewives

Engaging domestic workers in general appeared to be an ideal domestic arrangement for the middle-class employers – working women and housewives - as it facilitated sharing of domestic responsibilities, which in turn, aided to easing their work load as primary nurturers of the family.

Juggling between work and home, the working women in the present study particularly emphasised on domestic workers being a ‘necessity’ for continuing their daily lives: ‘It is next to impossible to manage the domestic chores for working people like us. A maid is a necessity for us to manage the house smoothly’. Significantly, although over the years, positive changes have taken place in terms of familial relationships, where a large number of women are seen shouldering economic responsibility together with men, the enduring gendered expectations from these women continue to persist as a norm, for suitable ‘femininity’. Arguably, these expectations are reflections of patriarchal practices deeply ingrained in Assamese society since the colonial period, which accompanies a married woman at every stage of her life (Bhattacharyya, 2009). This naturally entails women to excel in homemaking roles irrespective of their work status outside home.

Besides, the inclination of women towards excelling in homemaking roles, in part can also be inferred in relation to the socialisation of a girl child from childhood.

¹⁷ The term was first coined by Hochschild (2012) to describe the household arrangement in families, where both husband and wife are engaged in paid employment outside the household, but, at home the woman continues to perform the major share of domestic work by dedicating much of her time to it, thus, making it her second shift of work.

¹⁸ Respectable femininity implies particular types of femininity, which manifests as behavioural expectations at workplaces, streets and homes; through which woman add value to their lives (Hussein, 2017).

The deliberate distinction at household level between feminine work and masculine work comes early in childhood and becomes sharper as the child grows up (Dube, 1988, p. 17). While, it is certain that a single pattern of gender based division of work is difficult to pin down, as such divisions are varied across regions and social groups, nevertheless, reproductive tasks related to preparing meals, menial cleaning work, child care, elderly care, maintaining of familial and social ties are in general constructed as 'feminine' across cultures in India (Dube, 1988; Dickey, 2000). In this, the young girls are consciously socialised into an environment, without generating a sense of discrimination in them by signifying such reproductive labour as 'natural', and an essential quality of service (*sewa*) towards their family (Dube, 1988). Such gendered construction of reproductive labour deeply ingrained in women from a young age, inevitably privileges the men, as they are entitled not only to the free labour of women, but it also releases them from establishing their relationship with reproductive tasks at home. Considering such normative rule of patriarchal ideologies of associating reproductive labour with women, it is, therefore, not surprising when the working women in this study expressed their concerns of fulfilling their daily gendered expectations of domestic duties. However, in this, they do not challenge such gendered division of labour, although, their participation in paid employment intensifies their struggles to reproduce much of their daily domestic chores. Rather, such contradictions are resolved by organising the reproductive labour at the household level through hiring of domestic workers. The labour of domestic workers, in significant ways assisted these women to reproduce their gendered expectations of femininity in the realm of everyday lives, without disrupting the traditional patriarchal set-up.

While, it is perceptible that all working women are largely dependent on domestic workers by emphasising the utilitarian gains, the sample group of housewives under study are equally dependent on an external help for sustaining their daily chores. This can be best elucidated from the testimony of Radha¹⁹, living with her father-in-law, husband and a ten-year-old daughter. Currently, employing one part-time worker who works at her place from 9:00 am in the morning to 3:00 pm in the afternoon, she speaks at length about her dependency on domestic workers since the time of her marriage. While, she has been married for the past fourteen years, in the initial years of her marriage, it was her mother-in-law who managed the domestic workers. But, ever since her death, the reigns of domestic responsibilities has been managed by Radha single-handedly, for the last six years. She explains it as:

In my mother's place, we always had servants to work for us. But, here, after my marriage, though we had servants, I had to equally work with them. The whole situation was very annoying when my mother-in-law was alive. My entire day used to pass by doing household chores. There was no time for myself. My mother-in-law's treatment towards these people was not good. No one used to work at our place for long, and in their absence the burden of housework was all

¹⁹ Pseudonyms have been used for all the respondents.

on me. Gradually, I started interfering in her domestic practices, as my interest was involved in it, and the servants continued working under me, for many years. The present maid has been with me for the last five years. She does sweeping, mopping, washing, dusting and all other duties of the house.

Radha's testimony reflects the traditional expectation from a daughter-in-law (*bowari*) in middle-class Assamese households, where they are required to shoulder domestic responsibilities. However, her testimony at the same time reflects the power relations and status amongst the women members in an intergenerational household, which crucially determined the gendered division of labour within such households. As a daughter-in-law, the women are relegated to a subordinate position in relation to their mother-in-law, who in turn exercised the ultimate control in allocating the domestic responsibilities of a household. Notably, such an understanding of domestic arrangement is found to be deeply entrenched since generations amongst most families in the study, which appears to reconfigure with each passing generation, and, thereby, delineate the lives of the women. In this, the reproductive labour of the daughter-in-law as a wife and a mother is commonly perceived as 'a source of private welfare and comfort' (Papanek, 1979, p. 781) for the family members, where she is expected to undertake the drudgery of daily domestic chores with devotion. Moreover, the involvement of women as mothers, wives or daughter-in-law in reproductive tasks of the household, in part also significantly contributed in 'status production' (Papanek, 1979)²⁰ of the family in social circles. This in turn justified the enduring gendered expectations of domesticity, which defined the home as a space where women's household work becomes essential marker for construction of middle-class identities. Taken together, much like the working women, such virtues of feminine domesticity deeply impact the lives of housewives, and they are seen juggling between multiple domestic responsibilities throughout the day. This suggests the practicality of housewives in hiring a domestic worker. While, in this sense, Radha's testimony holds weight when she portrayed herself as being totally dependent on her domestic worker, nevertheless, her comments concomitantly take us to several other dominant reasons for hiring a domestic worker in middle-class households. Being socialised into a domestic world, where domestic workers are an integral part in household maintenance reflects her internalised dependency, absorbed in a reproduction of class: 'In my mother's place, we always had servants to work for us'. However, the alternative domestic arrangement in the house of her in-law's placed her in a chaotic situation, which required her to equally labour with domestic workers. This being in negation to her class status compelled her to intervene in the domestic affairs of her mother-in-law,

²⁰ Papanek (1979) enumerates three types of status production work performed by women in middle-class households: Firstly, they function as support workers for the income earning family members by attending to their daily needs, which significantly contributes towards their efficient contribution in productive work determining the family's class; Secondly, it relates to the training of children as mothers in status appropriate language, behavior, physical and intellectual skills, health, hygiene and presentation of self, which signifies the family's present status as well as their future status aspirations; Thirdly, status is produced through activities like maintenance of social ties with kin, neighbours, peers and also within the family, which essentially required a woman's time, energy and organizational skills.

thereby, bringing necessary changes to domestic arrangement of the household. Thus, taking a morally superior stance by explicitly contrasting her domestic arrangement with that of her mother-in-law, she is seen reclaiming her class position by recruiting a worker, who performed the menial and 'xyz duties' of the house.

However, although it appeared that for working women practical gains are central, and for most of the housewives the reasons are sometimes masked with symbolic gains, the study reveals that, both groups are united by the fact that all of them hired domestic workers for doing their menial domestic tasks. The women employers mostly considered themselves as capable of doing particular tasks like cooking, and, repeatedly emphasising their dependence on workers for a range of 'demeaning tasks' (Romero, 1992, p. 100)²¹. Even the working women, for instance, who portrayed themselves as being totally dependent on domestic workers, are actively involved in meal preparation for their respective families, as they proudly declared during the interviews: 'Cooking is my department'. Although, cooking constituted one of the most time-consuming domestic tasks (as depicted by the women themselves) amongst these women from Assamese middle-class families, since it involved preparing two to three dishes in each meal, yet labour for the particular task is not outsourced. The preferences of all the women under study – working and housewives - in preparing meals for family is primarily reasoned on two grounds: first, in terms of taste and nutritional requirement of each family member which is best known to them; second, most women perceived the task as an 'art', which they believed domestic workers seldom excelled in. Moreover, in India food is ubiquitously significant (Saunders, 2007 cited in Mattila, 2011, p. 115), wherein the women mostly emphasised 'food' cooked at home as a prime component which binds the entire family together. One woman under study puts it as:

I have grown up seeing my mother preparing meals and feeding the family. This is something which has always remained within me. There is warmth when we cook and feed our family, especially the children. We do it with all our love. This love binds the family together. But, the same cannot be expected from a servant. They will do the task as a part of their duty. And, they might also cook with bad intentions in their minds which can be harmful for the family's well-being. So, I have always kept cooking as a task for myself.

Such sentiments are shared by majority of sample urban middle class women in the study, and this in a way reflects the contemporary domestic practice of inculcating traditionalism by preserving the task of cooking as the 'ultimate labour of love' (Donner, 2011). It reflects the attitude in which Assamese middle-class women sought to redefine their gendered selves embodying respectability. As Donner observes

²¹ In Romero's study in U.S.A, the domestics' routine comprised of performing demeaning tasks like vacuuming behind sofas, washing and waxing floors, scrubbing ovens, sinks, tubs and toilet, picking up of toys, papers and clothes (Romero 1992, p.130).

amongst Bengali middle-class families in Kolkata that, married women as guardians of tradition are expected to embody certain familial values which communicated an image of respectable femininity in public (Donner, 2011, p. 65)²². Nevertheless, the middle-class women in this study actively sought help from their domestic workers for certain menial tasks associated with cooking, like chopping of vegetables, grinding spices, washing rice and pulses.

Thus, working women and housewives from middle class families predominantly hired domestic workers to alleviate themselves from certain domestic responsibilities involving the menial tasks. In this, in addition to creating an image of their gendered selves, they actively cultivated a practice of status reproduction.

Reproduction of Status

You can do the domestic chores for maximum of two days, but, when you need to follow the same routine on a regular basis, it really gets into your nerves. And, if you can afford maids, there is no harm in hiring them.

While, it is generally inferred that the participation of middle-class women in the labour market contributed towards an increasing recruitment of domestic workers, more specifically part-timers in contemporary India (Neetha, 2004; 2009), however engagement of domestic workers in middle-class households is not limited only to working women as observed in the study findings. By outsourcing the reproductive labour of poor domestic workers, both working women and housewives in middle class families contributed towards the over-all well-being of their families, without compromising on their gendered expectations of 'respectable' femininity. However, given the monotonous nature of domestic tasks, hiring of domestic workers not only helped in practical gains of redefining their feminine 'selves', but also relieved the middle-class women from performing the menial domestic tasks, thus, affirming their status. While, this has been significantly highlighted in the above comment by one middle class woman under study, it echoes the sentiments of several other women under study, which attenuate the symbolic gains of middle-class women from hiring the services of domestic workers.

Hiring of domestic workers has long served as a status indicator, and this has been extensively discussed in the scholarship on domestic work (Rollins, 1985; Romero, 1992; Shah, 2000; Mattila, 2011). Rollins in her analysis on the relationship between middle-class employers and their domestics of colour in the United States of America observes that, hiring of domestic workers 'affords the employers a self-enhancing satisfaction that emanate from having the presence of an inferior and validating the

²² In Bangladesh, Hussein (2017) observes that, working women negotiated their respectable femininity by actively performing domestic task of cooking during familial social gatherings, widely visible to public, albeit seeking help from domestic servants in their everyday food preparation.

employer's lifestyle, ideology, and social world, from their familial interrelations to the economically and racially stratified system in which they live' (Rollins, 1985, p. 156). This dovetails with domestic practices in the present study, where it is not uncommon to observe middle class women as 'employers' deriving a sense of status superiority by hiring domestic workers.

It is interesting to note that middle class women 'employers' of domestic workers depend on these workers for tasks which they could otherwise easily perform themselves. While, such dependency is a common sight in households which hired live-in workers, it is at the same time, familiar amongst those hiring part-time workers too. Some tasks such as bringing the employer's or their family members shoes from the shoe rack; carrying their bag till the car parked a few steps from the main entrance of the house; opening the gate when employers are home; serving employers with a glass of water immediately on their arrival are part of the daily tasks of the live-in workers, which vividly reiterated the status distinction ingrained in the work. Arguably, the performance of such tasks by an inferior 'other', only contributed towards reflecting superior status of these middle class women employers. One woman from the study succinctly remarked about her live-in worker as: 'Mostly the back breaking tasks like sweeping and mopping are performed by the part-time worker. Her (the live-in worker) presence in the house acts as a kind of satisfaction that there is always someone, at my call'.

The part-time domestic workers perform tasks such as dusting and polishing as part of their regular routine work which otherwise does not add much value in upkeep of the family but enhances the perceived lifestyle status of these women. Certain tasks performed by these domestic workers also have a class division. For instance, it is a common practice for the domestic workers in most of these houses, to take washed clothes out of the washing machine and hang them for drying, but, the same worker is not allowed to operate the machine, as she is perceived to be incompetent to operate such household appliances by her employer. As Trigg notes, 'status derives from the judgments that other members of society make of an individual's position in society, and for this position to be established there must be a display of wealth' (Trigg, 2001, p. 100). This display of wealth essentially gets reflected through procurement of certain consumer goods. And, in situations when an individual fail to deploy the consumer goods which symbolises a certain class, it makes the individual pitiable and socially invisible (Dickey, 2016). In the context of paid domestic work, the domestic workers by providing their range of services essentially served as consumer goods in middle-class households. By purchasing their services, the middle-class women employers not only reproduced their everyday class positions by keeping up clean and ordered homes at public display, but, also indulged in domestic practices like hiring domestic workers for insignificant domestic tasks which communicated an image of their status to the public. The public, here, includes not only their neighbours, but also their extended family members and class peers.

Act of Benevolence and Feelings of Gratification

Another dominant aspect of hiring domestic workers is that it offers an opportunity for middle-class employers to exhibit their acts of benevolence within the domestic sphere. These acts of benevolence are commonly consolidated through the practice of giving gifts to their domestic workers. In domestic service, the practice of gift-giving to domestic workers is a universal phenomenon which has been extensively dealt in the existing scholarship (Rollins, 1985; Romero, 1992; Ray & Qayum, 2010; Mattila, 2011, Barua, et.al, 2017). Unlike the practice of gift-giving which occurs between 'equals', governed by a norm of mutual reciprocity, the specificity of gift-giving in domestic service is marked by an absence of reciprocity (Rollins, 1985). Here, the gifts given mostly comprises of new and old clothes, food and all other items which are generally out-of-use at the house where the domestic worker is employed. At times such acts of benevolence also extend in the form of financial help provided in times of crises or by supporting certain educational needs of the children. Such support create a perception about domestic workers as someone who is needy, unable to provide for herself and is ever willing to accept any kind of help either in kind or cash thereby, reiterating the class distinctions ingrained in the work (Rollins, 1985; Romero, 1992).

It was observed that these acts of benevolence often contributed in amplifying emotional gratification of the middle-class female employers in the present study. During festivals like Bihu²³ and Durga Puja, the domestic workers were given new clothes. Most of the females who had engaged domestic helps recollected with satisfaction the support extended throughout the year either in cash and kind to their domestic workers, rather than the new gifts given during festivals. One of the reasons could be the minimal cost involved in such gifts provided during festivals. On the other hand, the used goods (though worn out), given away by the female employers were narrated with emphasis as many a times as used 'branded' goods which otherwise would be beyond the reach of the concerned domestic worker. Statements like 'I gave her my branded shoes'; 'the clothes given were very costly'; 'she could open a shop out of the things that I gave her' were often reiterated by the female employers of the domestic helps. This naturally contributed in buttressing the employers' self-portrayal as 'kind and generous' (Romero, 1992), thus, fulfilling their emotional gratification. It is pertinent to note that, such sentiment of emotional gratification derived from so-called acts of generosity was observed among most of the females interviewed under the study. One employer exemplified her generosity of giving used items to her domestic help by attributing it as her 'act of charity':

I provide for my maid round the year. Recently, when I got a new gas burner for myself, I gave away the old burner to my maid. This is just one case; there are

²³ There are three types of Bihu celebrated in Assam, namely Magh Bihu, Bohag Bihu and Kati Bihu. It is during Bohag Bihu which marks the celebration of Assamese New Year and beginning of spring, people exchange new clothes as gifts with much avidity. But, in the context of domestic work, it is only the employer who gives new clothes to their domestics, while the domestics are not expected to reciprocate this.

other uncountable stuffs which I give her from time to time. Whom else will I give? I have only her (domestic help) whom I can give. There is no use keeping old stuffs in the house, when it can be of use to someone needy. I believe such gestures of charity should begin at home. You do not need to hunt down on people to showcase such kind gestures. It gives you a satisfaction, which is hard to put in words. To be honest, I am someone who cannot see such people in pain. And, most importantly, my help is someone who is forever grateful for all that I have done for her.

By redefining the meaning of ‘gifts’ which could have easily gone to the trash (Romero, 1992), she fulfilled her psychological aspirations of carrying out ‘acts of charity’: ‘I am someone who cannot see such people in pain’. The presence of the domestic worker helped her in attaining this within the sphere of her home, which otherwise, would have been inconceivable to her. Moreover, the domestic worker’s acknowledgement towards her so-called ‘charity’ further contributed in validating her psychological aspirations, as it perpetuated a sense of dependency in the domestic worker.

Furthermore, the employer narratives of ‘acts of benevolence’ often show that this in large part is associated with their consumption patterns, which has been widely prevalent amongst the Indian middle-class since the post-liberalization period (Fernandes, 2006; Donner, 2011; Waldrop, 2011). In this new India, products which were once considered as luxury became necessities of the emerging middle-class throughout the country (Fernandes, 2006). In the context of domestic work, by transferring old out-of-fashion clothes and other material possessions to domestic workers, the urban middle class household engaged in a practice of making room for bringing new possessions. This in part is largely motivated by their being ‘up-to-date’ with ongoing consumption trend in market, as the cultural markers defining middle-class position of an individual in contemporary India are in a constant evolution, wherein it creates a sense of competition amongst class peers (Waldrop, 2011). As noted by Trigg, ‘search for status through consumption is never ending...People must always try to acquire new consumption goods in order to distinguish themselves from others’ (Trigg, 2001, p. 101). In this sense, the presence of domestic workers within the employer’s home naturally provided an easy ground to hand over their clutter of old and outdated goods, masking it as ‘acts of benevolence or charity’. An employer puts it as: ‘I love staying in trend. Any clothes or designs which are in trend, I buy immediately, and the old clothes, I give it to my maid. She too accepts it happily, as the clothes given to her are always in good condition. They appear to be new only, as it is hardly worn once or twice’.

Conclusion

Framed within a discourse of middle-class domesticity in India, the paper discusses the significance of domestic workers, specifically part-timers in Assamese middle-class households in Guwahati. It was from 1990 onwards, middle-class families in urban

India witnessed drastic transformation in the demand of domestic workers. While, this was partly influenced by the increasing number of educated women seeking wage employment, partly it was due to the growing number of nuclear families (Neetha, 2004). This was primarily because middle-class homes continued to persist as the prime responsibility of married women. With homemaking being socially perceived as woman's primary careers, their status largely revolved around successful maintenance of their homes (Mattila, 2011), with their identities typically constructed around their roles as a wife, mother or a daughter-in-law. Such gendered construction of domesticity significantly entailed the women to perform not only the manual labour of their household, but also emotional labour embedded in caring and nurturing for their families, wherein the participation of men appears to be miniscule. Interestingly, by all accounts the middle-class women did not challenge such gendered expectation of domesticity. On the contrary, they negotiated the inequitable gendered division of labour by seeking substitute in the form of outsourcing labour of poor women in need of work.

It is worth mentioning that, the middle-class women in the present study primarily outsourced labour of domestic workers to undertake their menial domestic tasks. The domestic tasks involving emotional labour like cooking and nurturing are performed by the women themselves. That is, by transferring the menial burden of domestic work to domestic workers, these urban middle-class women concentrated on the domestic tasks like cooking which is perceived as a matter of motherly and wifely devotion to emotionally bind the family together. The menial nature of domestic work which is usually outsourced not only weighs down on women who are engaged in paid employment outside home, but is also weighing for housewives. This indicates the perceived gains from hiring a domestic worker in middle-class households. However, given the gendered expectations of domesticity in these households, the hiring of domestic workers did not ease their burden of gendered roles in domestic sphere. Conversely, the middle-class women are entrusted with the 'overall household responsibility' (Agarwal, 2000 cited in Mattila, 2011) to ensure the timely completion of daily menial domestic tasks and emphasized upon their supervisory roles. In this regard, the deliberate distinction amongst the domestic tasks performed by females of the middle-class household and those performed by their domestic helps, accentuated the subordinate status of the workers on a daily basis, thereby, creating a polarized version of femininity surrounding the middle-class and lower-class women. Arguably, such distinction is important for the middle-class women because it helps them to redefine their gendered selves embodying respectability. Their domestic involvement and commitment towards their family placed them in a position which vividly constructed them as contrast figures in relation to the lower-class domestic workers at their homes, who could not afford similar involvement with their respective families.

Furthermore, in addition to the practical gains, a closer observation in these Assamese middle-class households in Guwahati reveals that, hiring of domestic workers appeared to be guided by a complex set of needs, wherein the practical gains are further

interrelated with symbolic gains in the form of status reproduction and emotional gains through showcasing act of benevolence. Interestingly, the pattern in which domestic work is organized highlight the significance of ‘status enhancement’ (Romero, 1992) amongst all the middle-class employers. More than just a clean and ordered house, the presence of domestic workers contributed in amplifying the well-being of these urban middle-class women engaging the domestic helps.

Moving beyond the practical and symbolic gains, emotional gains is most commonly achieved by the employers through ‘showcasing an act of benevolence’ in the form of help in cash or kind (old and out-of-fashion material possessions) to their domestic workers, which the employers commonly marked as their ‘act of charity’. Such a relationship essentially portrayed the domestic workers as ‘needy’, wherein employers strategize to manipulate the feelings of their workers, by perpetuating a sense of deference and dependency in them. Notably, considering the intimacy of the space where the work is performed, this sense of dependency amongst the domestic workers not only accentuated the class positions of the women in the urban middle-class families, but, also brought emotional gratification portraying themselves as a ‘kind’, ‘generous’ and ‘benevolent’ employer.

Significantly, the study reflects that, the recruitment of domestic workers in Guwahati is a complex interplay of practical, symbolic and emotional gains for women in the urban middle-class households. The three aspects enumerated as discussed in the foregoing sections are however, not ranked in any hierarchical importance from the perspectives of the women engaging the domestic helps. Instead, while, symbolic gains in the form of status reproduction is a crucial element attached to engaging domestic workers since colonial times, practical and emotional gains in contemporary times, satiated certain moral and consumerist aspirations of middle-class employers, thereby, reproducing their gender and class identities in the realm of everyday lives.

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Book Review

Community and Nation

KL Tuteja, Religion, Community and Nation: Hindu Consciousness and Nationalism in Colonial Punjab, Primus Books, New Delhi, 2021, pp: 1-367

Ruchira Das¹ and Vikas Pathak²

Abstract

KL Tuteja's book Religion, Community and Nation: Hindu Consciousness and Nationalism in Colonial Punjab (2021), published by Primus Books, is a valuable addition to historiography on Punjab in particular and Indian nationalism in general in as much as it offers a most insightful account of the politics of Lajpat Rai and does justice to his contribution, thus nuancing 'secularist' historiography on Indian nationalism.

Writings on Indian nationalism have begun to acquire a new complexity in recent decades. A significant contribution to historiography on Indian nationalism is KL Tuteja's book *Religion, Community and Nation: Hindu Consciousness and Nationalism in Colonial Punjab* published by Primus Books.

In many ways, the region rather than the national space provides a tighter context for understanding the histories of ideas and movements. Punjab, the region that Tuteja has chosen as the spatial context of his study, is historically crucial, as Hindu consciousness here grew in acute awareness of a Muslim majority. Punjab had more than 50-percent Muslims, and Hindus numbered between 40-percent and 36-percent in the first five colonial censuses, with the Sikhs making up between 8-percent and 12-percent of the population.

The Hindu minority in Punjab was, however, the leader in terms of education and industry – particularly when we consider the commercial castes of Khatri, Aroras and Suds. Muslims, and to a lesser extent Sikhs, dominated the agrarian world. Being educated but not being in a position of high social influence despite dominating the jobs that colonialism had introduced often made Punjabi Hindus wary of Islam. They were also gripped by a deep census mentality because Hindu numbers were going down in each colonial census. At the same time, Muslims were uneasy with Hindu

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dominance in colonial jobs and sought greater representation. This unique context made Punjab one of the early crucibles of an organized Hindu consciousness that was at times deeply wary of Islam. The acceptance of the Arya Samaj – which called the Vedas the supreme knowledge – was in part an answer to the Punjabi Hindu’s alienation vis-à-vis the white man and the Muslim majority. In turn, exposure to the Arya Samaj deepened the fault lines in Punjab.

Tuteja’s book traces this Hindu consciousness -- which emerged as a concrete entity in a state where religious identities had historically been fuzzy and fluid -- and seeks to explore its negotiations with an emerging Indian nationalism. In doing so, the author’s deft and authoritative handling of the subject has offered an insightful and scholarly work to those interested in the history of modern Punjab as also the history of Indian nationalism.

The most powerful strand of historiography in India, a strand that remained the hegemonic one at least till the late 1990s, saw Indian nationalism as secular and anti-imperialist. It saw ‘communalism’, or a politics that was centered on the religious community, as the other of Indian nationalism. The most powerful voices of this framework to understand Indian nationalism were Bipan Chandra, Beni Prasad and Tara Chand. Writings of the likes of Christophe Jaffrelot, John Zavos, Peter Van der Veer, Thomas Blom Hansen and BD Graham sought to explore Hindu nationalism as a kind of nationalism rather than as communalism, though sometimes in critical ways.

However, one strand remained largely neglected. This was the question of how to make sense of people who straddled the Indian National Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha, the former being seen as a largely secular organization and the latter being seen as a ‘communal’ organization. The two most important figures who represented this overlap were Madan Mohan Malaviya and Lajpat Rai. This grey area was never fully accounted for by the likes of Bipan Chandra, except for labeling it liberal communalism or semi-communalism, something that sat uneasily with the secular-communal dichotomy. Tuteja’s book fills this gap by providing these leaders their place under the sun as bonafide nationalists.

Tuteja’s book deals at length with Lajpat Rai and nuances the secular-communal dichotomy that the likes of Bipan Chandra constructed by introducing the category of ‘nationalist communitarians’. Tuteja argues that this group of nationalists (and he refers specifically to Lajpat Rai here), were people who believed that serving the religious community and the nation was simultaneously possible. They did not intend to construct a Hindu Rashtra but did feel strongly that the Hindu community needed a voice of its own when it came to settling disputes with other communities within the Indian nation.

Tuteja’s contribution lies in reviving interest in Lajpat Rai as a ‘nationalist communitarian’ rather than a ‘communalist’ and in nuancing the secular-communal binary to accommodate people who believed in representing their community as well

as forging a cross-community, inclusive, Indian nation. However, one shortcoming of Tuteja's work is that despite nuancing the secular-communal dichotomy, he chooses not to break away with it conceptually decades after many works have accorded Hindu and Muslim versions of nationalism in the subcontinent a legitimacy of their own even if they disagreed with them.

Tuteja makes interesting observations regarding the fuzziness of community identity in Punjab in the 19th century, something that reminds one of Harjot Oberoi's works on the construction of religious boundaries in the province. As religious boundaries became sharper in the 20th century, Tuteja shows his willingness to accommodate the likes of those whose thoughts centered round 'Hindus' but believed in a united Indian nation as nationalists of a communitarian kind. Tuteja at the same time dismisses those who sought to construct a nation based on religion as communalists rather than nationalists.

In this sense, Tuteja's work marks a partial movement of conventional secularist scholarship towards accepting the moderate Hindu leadership that straddled the Congress and Hindu Mahasabha as nationalist. However, he does not regard the Hindu Mahasabha-centric politics that is antagonistic to the Congress – meaning the likes of Bhai Parmanand and Savarkar – as nationalists despite the fact that they considered themselves so. In reality, the binary was perhaps not what it was made out to be. Even a fiercely secular nationalist like Bhagat Singh had been a student of Bhai Parmanand, a Hindu nationalist, at Lahore National College, where Parmanand taught the history of European revolutionary movements without getting any remuneration and inspired students to become revolutionaries, as the memoirs of Bhagat Singh's comrade Ram Chandra note. Thus, while there were ideological disagreements, the nationalist-communalist binary is largely an over-reading, as reality --as shown above -- was far more complex.

Tuteja's efforts to trace out the rise of Hindu consciousness in Punjab is commendable. If the work of Kenneth Jones was a classic when it came to tracing the emergence of Arya and Hindu consciousness at the social level in Punjab, Tuteja adds voluminous detail to the political side of the development of this consciousness. For this reason alone, the book is a very useful addition to Punjab studies and a must-read for scholars of modern Punjab.

The book may not be a biography, but in effect doubles up as one. Although there are a few biographies on Lala Lajpat Rai, yet none of these sketch out the politics of the Punjab stalwart in as nuanced a manner as Tuteja does, compellingly demolishing the charge that Lajpat Rai was a 'communalist', notwithstanding his association with the Hindu Mahasabha. In doing so, he adds a layer of nuance to the Mahasabha.

Overall, the book presents an interesting and detailed take on the subject of enquiry and is a valuable addition to works on the history of Punjab in particular and Indian nationalism in general.

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