

Education And Women In Arunachal Pradesh: Past And Present

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ABSTRACT

Education throughout the past has emancipated minds, brought reforms, eliminated injustice and social hierarchies. "Educate, Agitate, Organise" a slogan by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar orchestrates how crucial education is for empowerment, fostering unity and equality. The age long struggles of reformers are rooted to the opportunity of education that made them aware and conscious of the possible positive changes. Education in the early times was a luxury the common man could not afford, today, education is considered a basic human right, yet the gender biasness in educational opportunities is still prevalent particularly for areas geographically isolated. Although initiatives have been taken to promote female education, often the absence of the means to access education becomes a problem such is the problem persisting in the state of Arunachal Pradesh particularly in the remote areas, which has been often ignored and less documented. Therefore, this paper attempts to bring into study the state of Arunachal Pradesh by providing a brief description of the history of education in the state, bringing into discussion some insights which will help understand and navigate the conditions and challenges faced by women in attaining education throughout the past.

Education in Arunachal Pradesh: A GLIMPSE

Education worldwide has existed in different forms and means, varying from cultures, identities and communities, which has shaped the society we share today. In the context of pre-colonial India, the absence of a formal education system similar to the history of every country does not represent the absence of education itself. Education in India has existed through Gurukulas, temples, monasteries, village pathshalas, which has moulded individuals and communities. Defining education for pre-modern times in a modern period often sparks a debate as to what attributes to a holistic education. It is through the constant curiosities that we exist in a more civilized society. In India, formal educational institutes were established to serve the imperial rule aimed at producing literate work force among the natives. Primarily formal education was a tool of expansion at the hands of the colonial rule which later transformed into a force of individual, social and national awakening. In north- East India, formal education began with the state of Assam under the colonial rule and subsequently to other states of the region in which Arunachal Pradesh will be discussed in this part of the paper.

Arunachal Pradesh also called the "land of the rising sun" is a state in the North-Eastern region of India. The state of Arunachal Pradesh till 1972 is also known as the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) during the British rule. From becoming a full-fledged state in the year 1987, the state experienced the establishment of educational institutions very late compared to the rest of the region. Prior to the introduction of formal education, the various tribal communities practiced traditional forms of education pertaining to the needs of the community, which included learning skills like farming, hunting, weaving etc, cultural knowledge passed on commonly from elders also as families and monastery training institutes.¹ During the British rule, there was less initiation to promote a formal education system, it was only in the mid-19th century, Christian missionaries made attempts to proselytize, however monastic education were predominant in Tawang and West Kameng.² Under NEFA the literacy rate of the state was 11.30%. The first primary school was established in 1918 at Pasighat, the medium of instruction was Assamese. At Dambuk, in 1922 another school

was established, further the state witnessed growth in educational institutions, twelve primary schools were established by 1947 in Ningro (1934), Boleng (1940), Riga (1940), Balek (1946), Yomcha (1947), Along (1947), Pasighat (1947), Pangin (1947), Ledums (1947) and Dirang (1947). In Arunachal the Monpas and Sherdukpen communities experienced education earlier than the other tribal communities largely influenced by Buddhism and its educational institutions. The other areas received education nearing the independence period as mentioned above. For a state like Arunachal Pradesh where education came in late, illiteracy hindered political and social consciousness. Due to which the value of education and emphasis on promoting educational institutions was realized very late affecting the enrolment in schools. Although there was gradual improvement in the number of schools, the state adapted to quality education in contexts of appointing qualified teachers only by the end of the 20th century.

Coming to the post-independence period India experienced a change in its political, social and cultural conditions. After Independence, the state established the department of education and established secondary schools and higher secondary schools, as in the pre-colonial period schools focused mainly on primary education.

However, in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, despite the initiatives of the Indian government to integrate a national education system, the geographical location and lack of infrastructure kept the state aloof from the growth of a formal education system. The initial attempts of the Indian government could reach the urban areas such as Itanagar, Ziro and Pasighat but due to the lack of connectivity the rural areas were left inaccessible. The importance and focus on

the promotion of female education in this first phase of educational growth was still under the surface.³ The first college, Jawaharlal Nehru College was established in Pasighat in 1964, with an enrolment of 42 students. The period between 1970s-1990s saw an expansion of the educational infrastructure. Primary schools and secondary schools increased to 500, which also included some remote areas, the establishment of educational institutes in remote areas were met with challenges. The government also introduced teacher's training centers and

model schools. The North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology (NERIST) was proposed in 1979, it gained deemed university in 2005. In 1984 the first university in the state, Arunachal University (now Rajiv Gandhi University) was formally established in

Doimukh. In 1986, the National Education Policy aided in the improvement of educational institutions. One of the major improvements is seen in the enrolment of students in schools with annual enrolment growth rates above 6% in the state. The Non- Formal Education (NFE) introduced by the NEP resulted positively for marginalized groups, where education was made accessible to remote areas in the absence of proper schools. Between 1986-1997, a number of colleges were launched, such as the Indira Gandhi Government College (1986) in Tezu, Government College (1988) in Bomdila, Rang-Frah Govt College (1996) in Changlang, Donyi polo Government College, Aalo and Wangcha Rajkumar Government College, (1996- 97) in Deomali. In 1996, the Directorate of Higher and Technical Education was formed. The Bifurcation of school education directorates into the Directorate of Elementary Education, and Directorate of Secondary Education took place in 2010. The State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) was established in Itanagar in 2011 and in 2012, a private

university the Arunachal University of Studies was founded. The development of education in Arunachal Pradesh improved with the technological advancements, political and infrastructural developments though education in the state remained at a low rug in its initial years, in a short period the state made systematic progress. The history of education in the state reflects the shift from a traditional mode of education to modern education.

Education and Women

India today has adapted to several policies to promote girl child education, the famous slogan *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* stands exemplary in understanding the progressive measures taken to improve the status of women in the country. Breaking the gendered social stereotypical

role of women which was once perceived and limited to household chores. Women today are not just receiving education but leading the nation acquiring equitable professions to men in socio-economic and political domains. However, for a developing country with a dense and diverse population, like India it is still a goal and taking initiatives to meet a nation-wide equal opportunity to education for both males and females is still progressing.

In North-East India, women's education evolved under the missionary influence, socially marginalised Assamese women were the first to introduce formal schooling with the initiatives of the Christian missionaries. In 1935, Lady Keane College in Shillong became the first women's general degree college followed by Women's College in Shillong itself and the gender-focused academia, Women's Studies Research Centre at Guwahati University fueled educational engagement and laid the groundwork for women's education in the region.

To look into the past women in Arunachal Pradesh have played significant roles in agriculture, household management, weaving, taking care of the children, collecting firewood, washing, preparing rice beer contributing to the welfare of the society. Historically the tribal society in Arunachal Pradesh is patriarchal in nature, the roles of men and women have often restricted the mobility of women.

Due to the late introduction of education in the state, the focus on promoting and prioritizing women education remained an afterthought. In a book *Education in Arunachal Pradesh since 1947: Constraints, Opportunities, Initiatives, and Needs* by Joram Begi talks about the

Buddhist tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, where boys received scriptural and monastic education, with nunnery (Ani-Gompa) for girls existed, yet girls were expected to learn and to be taught domestic roles and skills by mothers as compared to boys.⁴ The first phase of educational development was primarily focused on establishing educational institutions in urban and rural areas, women's education remained secondary in the beginning. The first instance of women entering the political domain took place in 1980, when Nyari Welly

became the first elected MLA.⁵ The consciousness on women's education started with a social activist Binny Yanga, who advocated girl education, and stood against social evils like child marriage, dowry and the stereotypes associated with the role of women. It is also from the end of the 20th century women organizations and local NGOs like the OJU Welfare Association began to work on girl's education. The National Adult Education Programme

(NAEP) which evolved into the National Literacy Mission (NLM), introduced campaigns like the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC), Post-Literacy Programme, and Continuing Education

contributed in impacting women between the age groups 15-35. The literacy rate rose from 7.13% in 1961 to 69.95% in 2011. The adult literacy centers also helped in changing the

traditional mindsets around early marriage, mobility and education in women. Colleges like Saint Clare College established in 2003 supported education for tribal students, particularly to women from rural areas. Initiatives were taken to balance the male and female ratios in enrolment in higher educational institutes. The Arunachal Pradesh Women's Welfare Society (APWWS) also initiated learning programmes which not just included basic reading and arithmetic but also digital financial literacy.

There are remarkable scholarly works that explore that condition of women's education in north-east India, focusing on Arunachal Pradesh particularly. S. N. Tripathy's in his book *Tribal Women in India: Issues and Perspectives*, provides a detailed study on the role of

women in India with a special focus on the northeastern states including Arunachal Pradesh talking about the traditional gendered roles and the problems faced by women in accessing education.⁶ A research article "Educational Status of Women in Arunachal Pradesh: A Study" points out the rise in literacy rates whereby a rise in education among girls in urban areas is observed compared to the rural areas where the gap is still vivid. It also discusses the

problems in the tribal customs and rural isolation that has limited opportunities for women's education. Government reports and publications, a report submitted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) shows gradual growth in female literacy in the urban

areas, it also reflects on the low rates of female literacy in rural areas. "Gender Sensitization and Women's Empowerment in Arunachal Pradesh" an article published in the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, brings emphasis on the improvement on female education in the state, it also sheds light on the educational schemes such as the mid-day meal programs, free textbooks, scholarships for girl child, and the establishment of schools in rural and tribal areas. Apart from the scholarly and academic works designed to create consciousness on female education, there are NGOs and media such as newspapers have also communicated the importance of educating girl child, such as the *Arunachal Times*, *The Sentinel Assam*. From the above mentioned works it is clear that women go through a lot of challenges to receive education, strained with the dictated gender roles. It also highlights the need and importance of continued efforts in empowering women. The government educational schemes in the early 2000s aimed at increasing female literacy rates and enrolment, despite the improvements girls enrolled in the rural schools often dropped out due to early marriages and household responsibilities. In 2015, schemes like the *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* fostered and strengthened female education in India as well as to a great extent in the state.⁷

There are several problems still persisting hindering women from receiving formal education, particularly in connectivity, and financial support. However, the journey of educational development in Arunachal Pradesh not only brought changes to the traditional forms of education but also shaped and created consciousness on the importance of education in liberating particularly women, as often women find it difficult to comprehend and break

through the circumstances of their environment which shapes their mindset and goals in life.

Although education was introduced late in Arunachal Pradesh, the state has made a significant progress in a short period.

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