

Analysis of Female Enrolment in Higher Educational Programme of Open University in Btad: A Study with Special Reference to Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University

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Abstract:

Gender equity in education has been an issue of concern both in India and internationally. Although tremendous success has been achieved in attaining Education for All (EFA) in India, gender disparity in access and retention still exists in many of its states. Assam, being among the Indian states that have recorded reduced gender gaps in primary and secondary education, but the aforementioned disparities still exists in higher education. One of the major challenges faced in Assam, in regard to access to higher education, is a few numbers of colleges that are available, especially in rural setup, where girls and boys have to travel long distances to access education. This has affected girls more than boys with most parents preferring to keep their girls at home (Phukan, 1997). Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) is a region of Assam which was carved out from eight districts of Assam. Educationally, BTAD is a backward region. According to the Census Report 2011, the female literacy rate of Assam is 67.27 percent and female literacy rate of BTAD is 59.70 percent. This paper advocates the use of ODL to ensure equity in higher education. The paper firstly analyzed the trend and pattern of female enrolment in BA and MA programme in Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU) operating in BTAD between 2012 and 2017. Secondly the paper also analyzed the participation of females from different communities in higher educational programme offered through ODL. The analysis revealed that ODL has been bringing tremendous hope for the female aspirants from backward communities, in the age group 20 to 30, of higher education. (KEY WORDS: Female enrolment, Open University, BTAD).

1. INTRODUCTION

Education generally encompasses teaching and learning skills. The fundamental goals of education are more profound like the imparting of knowledge, good judgment, wisdom and also imparting of culture from one generation to the other. In a developing society, education is accepted as a source of social mobility, equality and empowerment. Gender equity in education has been an issue of concern both in India and internationally.

When India attained independence some 70 years ago, it was a formidable challenge that the new government had to face. The national female literacy rate was an alarming low 8.9 percent; Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for girls was 24.8 percent at primary level and 4.6 percent at the upper primary level (in the 11-14 years age group) (Rani, 2013). Keeping in view of this, there has been a thrust on education of girls since independence in order to bridge the gender gap in education in India. Although tremendous success has been achieved in attaining Education For All (EFA) in India, gender disparity in access and retention still exists in many of its states.

Assam is one of the eight states of North East India. With a geographical area of 78,438 sq kms, Assam provides shelter to 2.6 percent population of the country (Statistical Hand Book of Assam 2016). Most of the state's population lives in the lush and verdant valleys of its two major river systems in the twenty four districts of the Brahmaputra valley and the three districts of the Barak valley. Regarding the condition of higher education, that in the Indian context, an average 28 colleges are there per lakh population in the age group 18-23 years, but for Assam, it is only 15 (Source: Annual Report of All India Survey on Higher Education for the year 2016-17). So compared to the other states, there is a scarcity of colleges in Assam. The education attainment of women of Assam can be analyzed through female literacy rate and female enrolment rate at different stages of education. According to Census report 2011, female literacy rate in the state of Assam is 67.27% (Male literacy rate is 78.81%). The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education, in India, measures the access level of higher education in the age group between 18-23 years. GER for female in Assam is 16.6% whereas GER for female in India is 24.5%. (Source: Annual Report of All India Survey on Higher Education for the year 2016-17). Thus, GER for a female in Assam is far below than the average female GER of the country. So Assam, being among the Indian states that have recorded reduced gender gaps in primary and secondary education, but the aforementioned disparities still exists in higher education. There may be many reasons for these differences. For example unawareness of the people about the importance of female education, inequality of the status of male and female in the society and outlook of parents towards female education, non-availability of higher education institutions for female, low economic status of parents, burden of house hold responsibilities etc (Phukan, 1997). One of the major challenges faced in Assam, in regard to access to higher education, is a few numbers of colleges that are available (AISHE, 2016-17), especially in rural setup, where girls and boys have to travel long distances to access education. This has affected girls more than boys with most parents preferring to keep their girls at home.

Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) was created on 10th February, 2003 as result of an agreement between the Government of India, Government of Assam and the leaders of the Bodo movement. The region was carved out of eight districts of Assam namely Kokrajhar, Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Borpheta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonitpur. The total land area of BTAD is 8821.68 square kilometers which constitute 11.25 percent of the total land area of Assam. Out of its total territory, 8792.54 square kilometers constituting 99.7 percent in rural area, whereas only 29.14 square kilometer (0.33 percent) is under urban settlement (GOI Census Report).

BTAD is a backward region of Assam. It has been experiencing insurgency and ethnic strife for the last three decades because of which educational and economic development of this region has been declined. The worst victims in this process are the women. According to the Census Report 2011, the female literacy rate of Assam is 67.27, percent and female literacy rate of BTAD is 59.70 percent (Statistical Hand Book of BTC 2016).

Distance Education is an important milestone in the development of higher education and has great potential to equalize opportunities and take higher education to the door steps of women. . In recent years, Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, the only State Open University of the North East, has provided educational opportunities to the learners in a successful rate. KKHSOU has rendered great services to mass. Keeping in view that all the four districts of BTAD have KKHSOU study centers, it was thought to undertake an in-depth study on the rate of participation of women in B.A. and M.A. programme offered by KKHSOU in BTAD area.

Table-1

Literacy Rate of four districts of BTAD by gender (2011 census)

Literacy Rate	BAKSA	KOKRAJHAR	UDALGURI	HIRANG	ASSAM
Total Literacy Rate	69.25	65.42	65.22	63.55	73.18
Male Literacy rate	77.03	71.89	72.58	70.24	78.81
Female Literacy rate	61.27	58.27	58.05	56.65	67.27

Source: Statistical Handbook of Assam 2016

From the table 1, it can be seen that Female Literacy Rate of each district of BTAD area is alarmingly low as compared to the average Female Literacy Rate of Assam.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The present study was designed to realize the following objectives:

- a. To analyse the trend of female enrollment in KKHSOU in BA and MA programme in BTAD.

- b. To analyse the trend of caste wise women enrollment in KKHSOU in B.A. and M.A. programme in BTAD.

3. RESEARCH QUESTION

The following research questions are formulated for the present study:

- a. What is the trend of female enrolment in BA and MA programme of KKHSOU in BTAD?
- b. What is the trend of cast wise female enrolment in BA and MA programme of KKHSOU in BTAD?

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

The study is descriptive in nature. It is mostly a quantitative study though qualitative in some aspects. Distance Education envisages at reaching out to those learners who have limited accessibility to higher education because of unfavorable socio-economic conditions and inconvenience in reaching the educational institutions.

The study is based mainly on secondary data obtained from University Head office. Secondly, interview data have been collected through a pre-determined questionnaire from a sample size of hundred and eight (108) female learners of B.A. and M.A. programme from the five study centers of four districts of BTAD mainly to know the age group of the female learners and the distance travelled by them to reach the study centers. Thus, a demographic profile of the sample e.g., age group, distance are also formed. Efforts were made to make the study comprehensive and accurate. The study is delimited to female learners of B.A. and M.A. programme of KKHSOU only.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The collected data are analyzed in the following tables:

Demographic profile of the sample

Table – 2
Age in years

Age group of the female respondent	Total number of respondent	Percentage
14-19	3	2.7%
20-29	63	58.3%
30-39	29	26.8%
40-49	13	12%
50 and above	0	0%
Total	108	100%

Source: Field Study

From the table, it can be observed that 58.3% of the female aspirants of higher education in ODL mode are of age group 20 – 29. Generally, in regular mode also, the students participating in higher education are in the age group 18 – 25. Thus the young women of BTAD area are also taking the opportunity of Distance Education to fulfill their dream of higher education.

Table - 3
Distance from the Study Center

Distance from the Study Center	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 20 km	35	32.4%
20-40 km	44	40.7%
40-60 km	25	23.1%
More than 60 km	4	3.7%
Total	108	100%

Source: Field Study

The data, from this table-3, reveal that a large number (23.1%) of female learners come from a distance range of 40 – 60 km. The learners of Distance Education generally left their studies in Regular Mode for different reasons and joined in ODL mode. The data from the table reveal the fact that the female learners of higher education have strong desire and need to continue their studies and also maximum learners do not have study centers near home.

Objective 1. To analyse the trend of women enrollment in KKHSOU in B.A. and M.A. programme in BTAD.

Table-4
Year wise women enrolment in B.A. programme in BTAD area during 2012-17

Area	Year wise women enrolment				
	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
BTAD	766	789	831	528	665

Table shows that the women enrolment in B.A. programme is increasing steadily during the period 2012 to 2017. There must be some reason as to why the female enrolment has declined in the year 2015-16. However the table-4 depicts the trend of female enrolment in B.A. programme. Average 716 female learners per year are perusing their graduation in KKHSOU in BTAD area.

Table-5**Year wise women enrolment in M.A. programme in BTAD area during 2012-17**

Area	Year wise women enrolment				
BTAD	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
	54	33	47	48	45

Except for the year 2013-14, female enrolment in M.A. is in between 45 to 55 numbers per year. It was more than 50 in the academic year 2012-13. Though the enrolment is not very high in M.A. in KKHSOU, but an average of 45 female per year in BTAD, are taking advantage of KKHSOU in continuing their Master Degree through distance education..

Table-6**Percent of women enrolment to total enrolment in B.A. programme in BTAD under KKHSOU during 2012-17.**

Year of enrolment	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Female enrolment	766	789	831	512	665
Total enrolment	1655	2080	1987	1317	1650
% of women enrolment to total enrolment	46.3%	37.9%	41.8%	38.9%	40.2%

The table 6 the rate of Female Participation in B.A. programme in BTAD area during 2012-17. Though the percentage of female enrolment per year is below 50%, the enrolment percent is between 35 to 46 percent. The average female enrolment per year during this period is 41.02%. . Thus a gender gap in enrolment can be seen from the table.

Table-7**Percent of women enrolment to total enrolment in M.A. programme in BTAD under KKHSOU during 2012-17**

Year of enrolment	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Female enrolment	54	33	47	48	45
Total enrolment	105	90	125	115	128
% of women enrolment to total enrolment	51.4%	36.7%	37.6%	41.7%	35.1%

Percent of female enrolment to total enrolment is in between 35.1 percent to 51.4 percent. So, the average percent of female enrolment per year in M.A. programme in BTAD area during the period 2012-17 is 40.5 percent. Thus a gender gap in enrolment can be seen from the table.

Objective 2. To analyse the trend of caste wise women enrollment in KKHSOU in B.A. and M.A. programme in BTAD.

Table-8

Caste wise and year wise women enrolment in BA programme in BTAD under KKHSOU during 2012-2017

Area	Year of Enrolment	Caste wise number of women learners in BA				
		OBC/MOBC	STP	SC	GEN	TOTAL
BTAD	2012-13	152	500	29	85	766
	2013-14	179	441	36	129	785
	2014-15	201	435	44	141	821
	2015-16	142	274	28	83	527
	2016-17	188	350	48	124	710
	TOTAL	862	2000	185	562	3609

Graphical representation of table 8

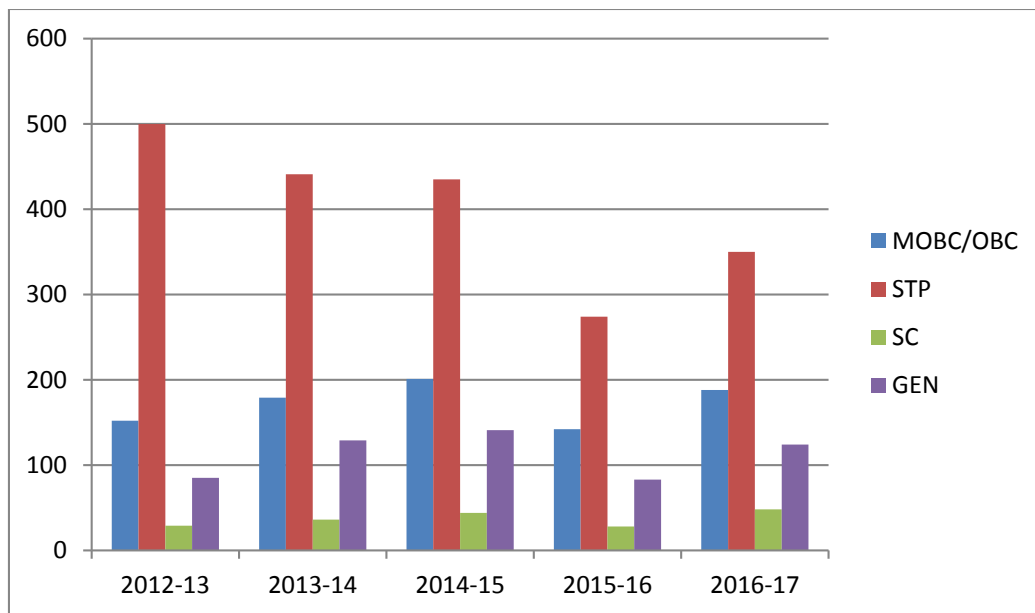


Figure - 1

From the data in the table 8 and from the figure 1, it can be seen that highest number of female enrolled in B.A. programme under KKHSOU are from STP (Schedule Tribe of Plain), the second highest number of females enrolled are from OBC (Other Backward Classes), and MOBC (More Other Backward Classes). The number of females enrolled from General and SC (Schedule Caste) communities are very less in number. Women of Plain Tribal Communities are thus taking the opportunities of Open and Distance Learning system to up lift their educational status.

Table-9

Caste wise and year wise women enrolment in M.A. programme in BTAD under KKHSOU during 2012-17

Area	Year of Enrolment	Caste wise number of women learners in M.A.				
		OBC/MOBC	STP	SC	GEN	TOTAL
BTAD	2012-13	14	18	2	20	54
	2013-14	11	13	2	11	37
	2014-15	19	19	0	16	54
	2015-16	18	14	3	16	51
	2016-17	14	17	5	9	45
	TOTAL	76	81	12	72	241

Graphical representation of table 9

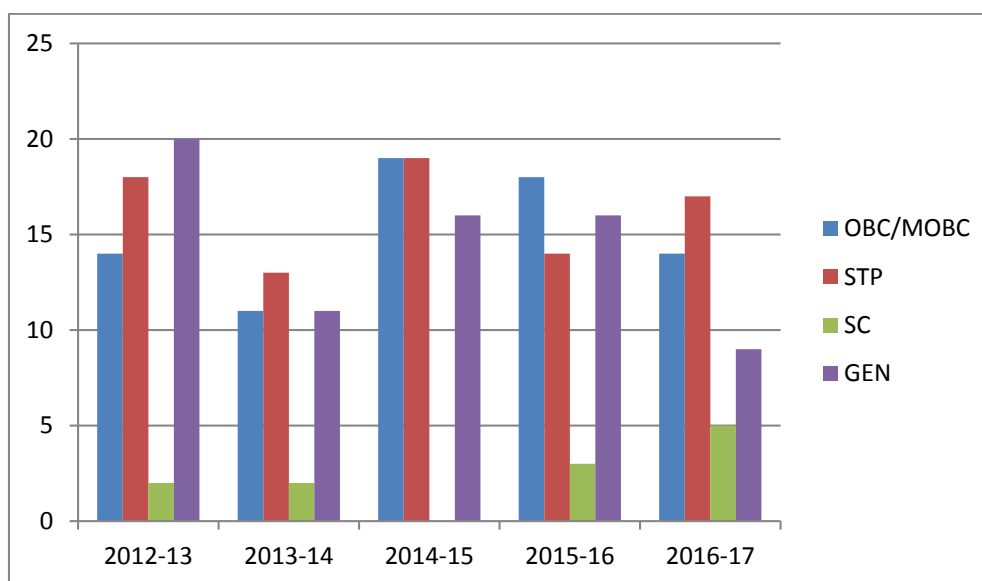


Figure - 2

The table 9 and the figure 2, provide the data which reveal the fact that the scenario of caste wise female enrolment in M.A. programme in BTAD is different from that of B.A. programme. In B.A. programme, highest number of female enrolled were from STP community and very less number of female were enrolled from General Caste. But in M.A., there is not much difference in enrolment of both the communities (GEN & STP). Female enrolment is highest for the OBCs (Other Backward Class) in M.A. programme under KKHSOU.

6. MAJOR FINDINGS

1. The study reveals that except for the academic year 2015-16, the female enrolment in B.A. programme has been steadily increasing in BTAD area.
2. From the analysis it is found that female enrolment has not been in increasing trend in M.A. programme in BTAD during 2012-2017, and has been very less as compared to that of B.A. programme.
3. The study shows that average rate of female participation is less than 50 percent in M.A. programme in BTAD during 2012 to 2017, but this gender gap is less as compared to B.A. programme.
4. From the caste wise analysis of female enrolment, it is found that females of Plain Schedule Tribe community have the highest enrolment in B.A. as well as in MA programme in each of the five academic year from 2012-13 to 2016-17 in BTAD area. Female enrolment of Other Backward Class community has the second position in the enrolment of B.A. programme under KKHSOU. Thus educational status of the females of backward communities has been uplifted through distance education offered by KKHSOU.
5. From the study it is found that majority (58.3%) of the female respondent of the sample were of age group 20-29, which reveals the fact that though the learners are studying in ODL mode, majority of them are at their young age.
6. Regarding the distance travelled by the female learners to reach the study centers, the study reveals that a good number of the female respondents of the sample were coming from a distance of 40 to 60 kilometer.

7. SUGGESTIONS

To remove the gender gap between male enrolment and female enrolment in different educational program in ODL mode under KKHSOU, following suggestions should be taken into consideration:

1. Number of study centers should be increased, so that female learners do not have to travel a long distance to attend the Personal Contact Programs.
2. Facilities of scholarship especially for female learners should be provided, so that females of lower income background can afford to continue their study. Again females are also socially disadvantaged

group. Many guardians of our society do not want to invest their money on their daughters study.

3. There should be baby-care facilities in the study centers, so that the women with small baby can also attend classes and appear in the examinations without disturbing other household members.
4. There should be arrangements of separate toilette facilities for females, as many female travel long distances to attend classes.

8. CONCLUSION

This paper has presented the female enrolment in two higher educational programs offered under KKHSOU in BTAD area as well as the role of the ODL in education. The current gender disparity issues and the role of the ODL could be clearly understood from the analysis. This paper advocates for the increase in the facilities of the ODL system to make it more gender friendly, and by studying the present constraints the women are facing in this system, the paper has successfully expressed certain effective measures to bridge the gender gap in all level of enrolments.

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