



SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONDITIONS OF WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Nayanmoni Khanikor

Master Degree Student
Department of English
Sibsagar University, Joysagar, Sivasagar, Assam, India

Tanita Sonowal

Master Degree Student
Department of English
Sibsagar University, Joysagar, Sivasagar, Assam, India

Neha Parbeen

Master Degree Student
Department of English
Sibsagar University, Joysagar, Sivasagar, Assam, India

Nistha Gogoi

Master Degree Student
Department of English
Sibsagar University, Joysagar, Sivasagar, Assam, India

ABSTRACT

This study examines the social and cultural conditions of women in the prevailing society. Despite significant progress towards gender equality in many parts of the world, women continue to face numerous challenges and obstacles. Among these, gender-based violence remains a critical issue, with many women experiencing domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, and other forms of abuse. Furthermore, access to education and healthcare is still limited for many women, particularly those in developing countries, which often prevents them from securing well-paying jobs and fully participating in their communities. This study highlights the need for continued efforts towards gender equality and the empowerment of women in all aspects of life.

Keywords - Women, The weaker sex, Subjugated, Injustice, Gender inequality, Rape culture

OBJECTIVES

While the specific objectives of a study on the social and cultural conditions of women in the prevailing society may vary depending on the researcher's focus and methodology, the following are some common objectives:

- To examine the experiences of women in different social and cultural contexts, including their roles, expectations, and challenges.
- To identify the various economic, social, and cultural factors that contribute to the marginalization and oppression of women.
- To analyze the impact of gender inequality on women's health, education, employment, and overall wellbeing.

- To explore women's agency and resistance strategies in response to their social and cultural conditions.
- To propose recommendations and policies that address the root causes of gender inequality and promote women's empowerment and equality.
- To examine the conditions of women in India, particularly in Assam.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

The study of the social and cultural conditions of women in the prevailing society has significance in various ways, including:

- Raising awareness: by studying the social and cultural conditions of women, we can raise awareness of the issues they face in society, including discrimination, violence, and oppression. This awareness is essential in creating a society that respects and values women's rights.
- Promoting gender equality: understanding social and cultural conditions of women can help us identify gaps in equality and work towards closing them. By recognizing inequality, we can advocate for policies and actions that promote gender equality and empower women.
- Challenging stereotypes: the study of women's social and cultural conditions also helps challenge stereotypes about women in society. Through this study, we... can break down some of the negative beliefs and attitudes towards women that are perpetuated by society. By exposing the realities of women's daily lives, we can change the perceptions and attitudes towards them, and in turn, promote a more equal and just society.
- Creating positive change: the study of women's social and cultural conditions can enable us to identify areas where changes and reforms are needed. By understanding the root causes of discrimination and oppression, we can work towards creating policies and solutions that address these issues and promote positive change.
- Celebrating women's achievements: studying women's social and cultural conditions helps us recognize and celebrate their achievements, despite the obstacles they face.

INTRODUCTION

The study of the social and cultural conditions of women is a crucial area of research that is focused on understanding the experiences, challenges, and opportunities of women in society. Women societies around the world, and social scientists have been studying the factors that contribute to the persistence of gender-based inequalities.

This field of study examines the cultural norms and values that shape women's lives and their roles in society – including their access to education, employment, political power, reproductive rights, and healthcare. The study of the social and cultural conditions of women seeks to identify and confront the barriers that prevent women from achieving their full potential as equal members of society.

The research in this field also highlights the diversity of women's experiences and recognizes that... women of different social, economic, cultural, and racial backgrounds face unique challenges and opportunities. This includes studying the experiences of women in different parts of the world, as well as the experiences of LGBTQ+ women and women with disabilities.

The social and cultural conditions of women are also closely intertwined with broader social and political systems, such as patriarchy, capitalism, and globalization. Therefore, this field of study also examines how intersecting systems of oppression and privilege shape women's lives and experiences. Research in this field aims to promote gender equality and social justice by challenging the status quo and advocating for policies that enhance women's empowerment and improve their social and economic outcomes. This includes efforts to address gender-based violence, promote women's rights, increase women's representation in... political and leadership roles, and advocate for policies that support women's health, education, and economic opportunities.

Additionally, this field also draws on feminist theories and methodologies to analyze gendered power relations and structures of oppression. Feminist research methods, such as participatory action research, aim to center women's voices and experiences to inform policy and practice.

The study of women's and gender studies is crucial for understanding the diverse and complex experiences of women and promoting social justice for marginalized communities. It encourages critical thinking and challenges traditional power structures to create a more equitable and just society for all.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Women in Victorian era:

Women during the Victorian Era did not have many rights. They were viewed as only supposed to be housewives and mothers to their children. The women during this era were only viewed as people that should only concern themselves with keeping a successful household. However, during this time women were forced into working positions outside of the household.

Women that were forced into working situations outside of their households were viewed negatively by society. Many women needed to have an income to support their families because the men in the household were not making enough money to survive. When the women entered the work places they were not made to feel welcome and were often harassed. These women workers therefore were not welcome in the work place (outside of the household) or in society. From the ancient times the status of men are considered to be superior than that of women because in the society women's status are only viewed as an "unpaid household labour". Still in many areas women remains largely in male domain and the view of women as an unpaid labour is continuously followed by the people. But in most of the developed societies women are viewed as reproductive labourers.

Women in the present time:

At the present time, in each country or in each areas gender equality has become the norm. The standard mood for equality between men and women in the society are set due to the acceptance of the human rights universally. This acceptance not only guarantees equality to both men and women, but also provide the power to take measures of positive discrimination in favor of women in having the equal rights in social, political, and cultural aspects. Women of today can simultaneously handle their duties, household task, built their career brighter outside the home, takes part in politics, social contexts, economic development, technology sectors, and also balance their family lives with their professional life. Moreover, in today's world women have contributed wholly to sports too.

Women in the field of education:

The highly developed system of women's education leads to a number of social benefits, including many related to women's empowerment. Now a days Women's education becomes the most valuable tools behind the rates of social and economic development. The mindset of people is also one of the main reasons. Somewhere the role of women is still considered to be limited to the house and taking care of the family. This mindset is changing slowly, and women are allowed to do things by their own. Now a days most of the women are educated.

There are many reasons behind the importance of women education. Such as:

- I. Women education is important for the development of a country. A country can only develop if its women are educated.
- II. Educated women can play an important role in the development of their families.
- III. Educated women can contribute to the economic development of their countries.
- IV. Women education is necessary for the empowerment of women.
- V. Educated women can raise awareness about various social issues.
- VI. Educated women can act as role models for the younger generation.

Women in employment field:

Now a days, women are equally employed in many "employment market" and even they're capable of giving tough competition to menfolk. Moreover, the government has undertaken various socio-economic legislations in

order to give protection to the economic interests and rights of the womenfolk, which cover areas such as right to property or inheritance, equal wages, working conditions, maternity benefits and job security.

- **Gender Pay Gap:** The gender pay gap continues to be a major issue in many countries. Women are being paid less than men for doing the same job. According to a study by the World Economic Forum, the economic participation and opportunity gap between men and women stands at 58.0% globally.
- **Maternal Mortality:** Maternal mortality is another critical issue that women face globally. According to a report by the World Health Organization, approximately 830 women die every day from preventable pregnancy-related causes. The majority of these deaths occur in developing countries, where access to quality healthcare is limited.
- **Violence Against Women:** Violence against women remains a pervasive issue in many societies. According to a report by the United Nations, one in three women worldwide experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. This violence can take many forms, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and rape.
- **Economic Participation:** Women's economic participation is critical for achieving gender equality and reducing poverty. However, women continue to face significant barriers to entering and advancing in the workforce, particularly in leadership positions. The gender pay gap, in which women earn less than men for equivalent work, is still prevalent in many countries.
- **Political Representation:** Women remain underrepresented in political decision-making positions. According to UN Women, women hold only 25% of parliamentary seats worldwide. This lack of representation can result in policies that do not fully address the needs and perspectives of women.
- **Sexual assault :** Sexual assault can include a diverse range of experiences and, as such, the effects of sexual assault on the victim/survivor and the community at large are also diverse. The effect of sexual assault is not only psychological or emotional but also impacts upon physical, social, interpersonal and financial domains.

Assault can effect heavily in the minds of the individuals which affects someone lifelong.

Based on a true story :

In the year of 2019, dated October 12, an acquaintance of us went through a horrific incident of her life. She was returning from her 9-5 job through a bus and it was getting dark. A group of men were eve teasing her continuously using abusive languages. She was tensed about it and just wanted to get home as soon as possible. As soon as she came down from the bus, the bunch started to follow her and track her steps. She was taken aback and started to run. They followed her quite a while. Finally she reached home safe and sound but the trauma they engraved in her will be there forever. - (Anonymous).

Rape culture is also inimical to men :

Rape culture is so very concerned with suppressing women and constraining their freedom that it puts the sufferings of men in the blind spot of society. Due to the deluding beliefs, we fail to see that rape culture, also highlights the faltering social paradigms created by patriarchal norms which brings perplexing challenges to men. Men have to deal with the odious myth that they can never be prone to assault because they are inherently powerful. This is why when they fall prey to such viciousness they are faced with far greater scepticism than female victims.

Since rape culture is deep-seated in our subconscious habits, drawing attention to one's own possible complicities in perpetuating rape culture would be one of the first steps towards change. We shall educate our young men and women about the importance of consent and the need to be respectful towards each other. We need to teach men that sexual prowess and violence are not manly, and masculinity does not imply limiting their emotional expressions or exploiting women. We shall teach women to fearlessly decry any sexual assault and make them believe that being vulnerable and emotional does not make them weak. Our society needs to be conditioned that people expressing their sexual desires and addressing them horrifying abuses that they have been through are not disgraceful. Along with this, stringent institutional changes and advocacy movements

would certainly help in creating awareness, allow people to unequivocally condemn such acts, and thus, would aid in eradicating this menace.

- Abu Dawood compiled twenty-one books related to Hadith and preferred those Ahadith(plural of "Hadith") which were supported by the example of the companions of Muhammad. Here he wrote an incident during the time of the Islamic prophet Muhammad would form the basis of later jurisprudence of rape: When a woman went out in the time of the Prophet for prayer, a man attacked her and overpowered (raped) her. She shouted and he went off, and when a man came by, she said: That (man) did such and such to me. And when a company of the Emigrants came by, she said: That man did such and such to me. They went and seized the man whom they thought had had intercourse with her and brought him to her. She said: Yes, this is he. Then they brought him to the Messenger of Allah. When he (the Prophet) was about to pass sentence, the man who (actually) had assaulted her stood up and said: Messenger of Allah, I am the man who did it to her. He (the Prophet) said to her: Go away, for Allah has forgiven you. But he told the man some good words (Abu Dawud said: meaning the man who was seized), and of the man who had had intercourse with her, he said: Stone him to death. He also said: He has repented to such an extent that if the people of Medina had repented similarly, it would have been accepted from them.

Status of women from the past to the future :

As International Women's Day is celebrated on 8 March each year, but still now women are not free in the society. The status of women has been a topic of grave discussion, for many years in the past. It encompasses various burning issues of girl and women education, maternal health, economic empowerment of females, and the role of women in family, community, politics, and more. Throughout the world, various social norms, in some form or the other, deny women their right to education, health services, economic opportunities, and political participation. This gender inequality hinders the progress of environmental sustainability, financial stability, global health, and human rights and is the primary cause of hunger and poverty. Men dominated society while women were secondary to them. At the family level, women had very little to no opinion, and the men were the sole in-charge of all decisions. A woman was considered a man's possession. Great heights of academic achievements and formal jobs were for men, while women fulfilled the family responsibilities and bore the burden of house-chores. A patriarchal and oppressed society with an inhumane caste system led to the immense suffering of women in various parts of the world.

Numerous movies vividly express how the shifting from traditional to modern culture has brought about a modification in the issue of gender discrimination. Films demonstrate the fight of the female protagonists, their endurance, and finally, their overcoming of the old culture or religion, which was responsible for restraining their friendship, love, and life. These films make the society aware what do women actually face on the daily basis.

Conditions of women in India, particularly in Assam:

In India, women have long been subjected to discrimination and injustice due to various social and cultural conditions prevailing in the country. Assam, a northeastern state in India, is no exception to this reality. Assam has a diverse ethnic mix of people, with some tribes and communities following traditional patriarchal customs that often limit the freedom and opportunities of women. The social and cultural conditions of women In Assam have improved over the years, with increased literacy rates, access to education and employment opportunities, and a growing awareness of women's rights. However, gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and harassment, remains a significant concern in the state. Women in Assam typically face economic and social marginalization due to various factors such as poverty, illiteracy, early marriage, and lack of access to basic healthcare facilities. The dowry system, which persists in some parts of the state, also contributes to the discrimination and exploitation of women in their families.

While there are a number of laws in place to protect women from these issues, implementation and enforcement of these laws have been a significant challenge in Assam. With limited access to legal support, many women continue to suffer in silence.

However, there have been some positive changes in recent years. To address these issues. The government of Assam has implemented several initiatives to improve the condition of women in the state, including providing financial assistance, education, vocational training, and healthcare services.

Additionally, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Assam are working to empower women and support their rights. These organizations provide counseling, legal aid, and vocational training to help women become financially independent and improve their lives.

The media has also played a significant role in raising awareness about women's rights and highlighting issues such as gender-based violence. This has helped to change social attitudes and encourages people to take action against discrimination and violence against women.

Some prominent women leaders from Assam, including Dr. Rani Gaidinliu, the freedom fighter who fought against the British rule and Hemoprova Saikia, who fought for the rights of tea garden workers in the state, have served as role models and inspirations for young women.

While women in Assam face several challenges and inequalities, there have been positive developments in recent years to address these issues. With continued efforts from government, NGOs, civil society organizations, and individuals, women in Assam can hope for a brighter future with improved access to opportunities, safety, and dignity. It is important to recognize that change will not happen overnight, and there are many obstacles and deep-rooted prejudices that need to be overcome. However, with a sustained effort and a commitment to women's rights and empowerment, progress can be made.

One crucial aspect of this effort is education. Providing girls with access to education is crucial to ensuring their future success and empowerment. Education enables girls to develop critical thinking skills, knowledge, and confidence. It also helps to break down harmful stereotypes and gender norms that perpetuate discrimination and violence against women.

Another important area is healthcare. Ensuring that women have access to quality healthcare is essential to their well-being and empowerment. This includes reproductive health services, as well as access to basic healthcare services such as immunizations, nutrition, and disease prevention.

Finally, addressing gender-based violence is essential. Violence against women is a pervasive problem in India, and Assam is no exception. Efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women must be a priority. This involves educating communities about the effects of violence, providing support services to survivors, and holding perpetrators accountable.

While women in Assam face significant challenges, there are promising signs of progress. Through sustained efforts to provide education, healthcare, and support services and to address gender-based violence, it is possible to empower women and create a more just and equitable society. It is important for both individuals and institutions to recognize the value and potential of women and to work towards creating a society that is inclusive and supportive of their rights and well-being. By taking action and supporting women's empowerment, we can create a better future for everyone in Assam and beyond.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study of conditions of women in the prevailing society has highlighted the stark reality of gender inequality and discrimination that still persists in various spheres of life. Despite significant progress and advancement in many countries, women continue to face social, economic, and political barriers that prevent them from achieving their full potential and accessing equal opportunities. Issues such as unequal pay, lack of access to education and healthcare, limited representation in leadership positions, and violence and harassment against women remain significant challenges that require urgent attention and action. It is crucial for individuals, communities, and governments to work together to address these issues and create a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

Efforts must be made to empower women and that includes creating policies and programs that promote gender equality, providing education, and access to healthcare and reproductive rights. We must also work to change

attitudes and expectations that limit women's choices and opportunities. Ultimately, by recognizing and addressing the systemic barriers of gender inequality, we can create a better world for all.

WORKING BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abd al-Hamid, Muhammad Muhyiddin. *Kitab Al hudud*, vol. 4, Cairo publication, 1935.
- Eagly, Alice H., and Wendy Wood. "Gender Stereotypes Revisited." *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 46, no. 1, 1990, pp. 21-44.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *We Should All Be Feminists*. Anchor Books, 2015.
- Bertrand, Marianne, et al. "Breaking the Glass Ceiling? The Effect of Board Quotas on Female Labor Market Outcomes in Norway." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, vol. 89, no. 2, 2019, pp. 399-432.
- Budig, Michelle J., and Melissa J. Hodges. "The Motherhood Penalty: How Parenthood Affects Women's Careers." *Social Forces*, vol. 89, no. 2, 2010, pp. 545-574.
- Cook, Rebecca J., and Simone Cusack, editors. "Gender Stereotyping" *Transnational Legal Perspectives*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.
- UN Women. "Progress of the World's Women: In Pursuit of Justice." *UN Women*, 2020.
- World Economic Forum. *Global Gender Gap Report*. World Economic Forum, 2023.
- UNESCO. "Gender Stereotypes and Education: A Guide to Good Practice." *UNESCO*, 2017.
- Sztokman, Elana Maryles. *The War on Women in Israel: A Story of Religious Radicalism and the Women Fighting for Freedom*. Sourcebooks, 2015.
- Lombard, Nancy, and Lesley McMillan, editors. *Violence Against Women: Current Theory and Practice in Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence and Exploitation*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2013.
- Amnesty International. "Annual Report on Gender-based Violence." *Amnesty International*, 2023.
- Guttmacher Institute. "State of Women's Health and Reproductive Rights." *Guttmacher Institute*, 2022.
- World Health Organization. "Women's Health: Key Facts." *WHO*, 2023.

