

SCENARIO OF POVERTY IN ASSAM- WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO RURAL WOMEN IN ASSAM

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Abstract:

India's economy has been growing for the past few decades, which has led to general reductions in poverty; yet, poverty continues to be a significant problem. Being in a state of poverty means that a person does not have sufficient income or material things to meet their fundamental need. It's possible that social, economic, and political factors all play a role in poverty. There is a well-established connection between poverty and the underrepresentation of women in society. Within the scope of this study, the researcher concentrated on the general situation of poverty in the state of Assam, with a particular emphasis on the situation of rural women in the region. Assam economic surveys, human development reports, periodic labor force surveys, and a variety of credible papers and websites are the primary sources that were utilized for the current study. The findings of the research indicate that Not only is poverty pervasive in the districts of Assam, but it is also prevalent in both the rural and urban sections of the state. Women in rural areas are more susceptible to the effects of gender inequality than women in urban areas, despite the fact that gender inequality is ubiquitous in society in both urban and rural areas.

Key words: *Poverty, inequality, women, Assam*

INTRODUCTION

India's diverse economy encompasses traditional village farming, modern agriculture, handicrafts, a wide array of contemporary industries, and a multitude of services. Services constitute more than two-thirds of India's production and employ less than one-third of its labor force. Despite accounting for slightly less than half of the country's employment, services play a crucial role in driving economic development. The Indian economy's long-term economic prognosis remains positive due to factors such as its youthful population, low dependence ratio, strong savings and investment rates, increasing globalization, and integration into the global economy. India's economy has transitioned from a mixed planned economy to a mixed middle-income emergent social market economy, characterized by substantial governmental intervention in key industries. In terms of nominal GDP, it ranks as the fifth-largest economy globally, while in terms of purchasing power parity, it ranks as the third-largest. According to the International Monetary Fund (PPP), India is ranked 125th in terms of nominal GDP and 142nd in terms of per capita income.

India is a developing nation. Despite the growth of its economy, poverty remains a substantial issue. However, poverty in India is decreasing. In India, the incidence of severe poverty, as defined by the World Bank as having an annual income of US\$1.9 or less in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP), decreased to as low as 0.8% in 2019. Remarkably, despite the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, the country managed to sustain this level of poverty in 2020. The World Bank reports a decline in extreme poverty of 12.3% from 2011 to 2019, with the rate dropping from 22.5% to 10.2%. According to a 2020 study conducted by the World Economic Forum, over 220 million individuals in India are living below the poverty line for rural areas, which is defined as earning less than Rs 32 per day. These estimates are based on the latest poverty data available in India from 2013. The report submitted by the Suresh Tendulkar Committee, tasked with examining the population in India living below the poverty line, was delivered in November 2009. It provided a novel method for calculating the poverty threshold by using the average amount of money spent per person on a monthly or daily basis. The cost was Rs 816 per month, equivalent to Rs 27 per day for rural areas. The cost was Rs 1000 per month or Rs 33 per day for metropolitan areas. Based on this methodology, the number of individuals living below the poverty threshold in 2011-2012 was 269 million, which is a decrease from 354 million (29.6% of the total population) in 2009-2010.

OVERVIEW OF ASSAM

Assam, located in the northeastern area of India, serves as the main entry point to the region and is the largest and most dynamic of the eight states in the Northeast. It shares borders with seven states: Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and West Bengal, as well as two countries: Bhutan and Bangladesh. The physical asymmetry of the area is emphasized by the presence of the Brail hill range, which is situated between two valleys—the Brahmaputra and the Barak, named after the two main rivers. Assam encompasses a total surface area of 78,438 square kilometers, which accounts for 2.4% of India's entire landmass. Additionally, it is home to 2.6% of India's population. Assam is a state characterized by a diverse and varied population, including different social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. Based on the Census of India in 2011, the population of Assam is 312.05 lakh, with 159.39 lakh being male and 152.66 lakh being female. Of the entire population, 86% reside in rural regions and 14% reside in urban regions of the state. Additionally, the proportion of rural people in the state is greater than the national average of 69%. Based on preliminary calculations for 2021-22, the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) of Assam, measured in current prices, has reached 433925.44 crore, compared to 381003.97 crore in 2020-21, indicating a growth rate of 13.89 percent. The Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) at constant (2011-12) prices is projected to be Rs. 273,836.71 crore for the fiscal year 2021-22, compared to Rs. 250,922.83 crore for the previous fiscal year 2020-21, indicating a growth rate of 9.13 percent. (The Assam economic survey for the year 2021-22)

TABLE-1: STATE DOMESTIC PRODUCT OF ASSAM (*Rs in corer*)

YEAR	GSDP	
	CURRENT PRICES	CONSTANT PRICES[2011-12]
2011-12	143174.91	143174.91
2012-13	156864.24	147342.38
2013-14	177745.22	154525.4
2014-15	195723.15	165212.3
2015-16	227958.83	191109
2016-17	254382.36	202080.85
2017-18	283164.9	219919.38
2018-19	309336.32	231039.56
2019-20 P.E.	377404.81	252923.5
2020-21 1st P.E.	381003.97	250922.83
2021-22 Q.E.	433925.44	273836.71

Source: Assam Economic Survey 2021-22

The table above illustrates a positive growth in the state's domestic product. The Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) experiences a consistent growth rate of 7% from 2011-12 to 2014-15, followed by a 9% increase from 2015-16 to 2016-17, a 10% rise from 2017-18 to 2018-19, an 11% surge from 2019-20 to 2020-21, and a 12% expansion in 2021-22. An upward trend in state domestic product (SDP) illustrates the proportional contribution of various sectors to the economy during a specific timeframe. This not only reveals the actual shifts in the economy's structure but also aids in the creation of diverse strategies and initiatives for the comprehensive economic advancement of the state.

Undoubtedly, the Assam economy has experienced excellent progress. However, it is important to note that a significant portion of the population still resides below the poverty line. As per the Economic Survey 2017-18, around 31.98 percent of the population resides below the poverty threshold, as determined by the Tendulkar technique. Above the mean, a total of 33.89 percent of individuals who are below the poverty threshold live in rural regions. Conversely, the poverty rate in metropolitan areas is 20.49 percent. Haughton & Khandker (2009) state that the World Bank's definition of poverty is a "significant lack in overall well-being". The definition of well-being can vary, either being specific or general, depending on how it is defined. The capacity of families or individuals to fulfill their needs is a fundamental element in numerous restricted definitions of well-being. Within this framework, poverty is commonly linked to household income or the expenditure of money (Haughton & Khandker, 2009). The phrase "well-being" encompasses various aspects, such as physical and mental health, intimate relationships, agency and involvement, social connections, competence and self-worth, and values and purpose (Wellbeing & Poverty Pathways, 2013). Geographical isolation, customary social traditions, economic fluctuations, and political instability are the several factors accountable for the prevalence of poverty and inequality in Assam. Furthermore, the exponential increase in population exacerbates the

issue of unemployment in Assam. The primary causes of poverty in Assam include the underperformance of the agriculture sector, limited alternative employment opportunities, sluggish growth of the MSME sector, inadequate infrastructure and insufficient investment in manufacturing, lack of industrialization, and inadequate education.

Below is a comprehensive overview of poverty in Assam, organized by district.

TABLE 2: DISTRICT WISE POVERTY RATIO IN ASSAM

DISTRICT	Rural	Urban	Total
Baksha	41.5	19.5	41
Barpeta	41	17.5	39
Bongaigaon	36	8	31.5
Cachar	35.5	15	31.5
Chirang	42	34.5	41.5
Darang	47	26.5	45.5
Dhemaji	37.5	26	36.5
Dhuburi	43.5	24	41.5
Dribugarh	34	20	31.5
Dima hasao	44.5	32	41
Goalpara	42	30.5	40.5
Golaghat	46	20.5	43.5
Hailakandi	35	13.5	33.5
Jorhat	38.5	15	34
Kamrup	39.5	25	38.5
Kamrup(M)	36.5	3.5	9.5
Karbi Along	45	28.5	42.5
Karimganj	38	28	37
Kokrajhar	39	29	38
Lakhimpur	38	29	37
Marigaon	45.5	36	44.5
Nagaon	41.5	21.5	39
Nalbari	35	17.5	33
Sibsagar	34	13.5	32
Sonitpur	43	14.5	40.5
Tinsukia	41.5	14	36
Udalguri	43.5	40.5	43
Assam	40.5	17	37

Source: Assam Human Development Report 2014

The districts in Assam display a wide variation of poverty levels. The poverty ratio in Assam is 37.0, with the majority of districts exhibiting a higher average poverty rate. Districts like as Bongaigaon, Cachar, Dhemaji, Dribugarh, Hailakandi, Jorhat, Kamrup (M), Nalbari, Sibsagarh, and Tinsukia exhibit an above-average poverty ratio. Apologies, but I'm unable to provide a straightforward and precise rewrite of the given text as it is incomplete and does not convey any clear meaning.

Furthermore, there is a significant disparity in the poverty rate between the urban and rural regions of Assam. This indicates disparities in the allocation of resources between rural and urban regions. The poverty ratio in rural parts of Assam is 40.5 percent, however in urban areas it is just 17 percent [Table No. 2]. This percentage is considerably lower than both the poverty rate in rural areas and the overall poverty rate of the state. Therefore, we assert that the sustenance of rural regions is more arduous compared to that of urban places. The majorities of individuals residing in the rural regions of Assam are involved in agricultural pursuits and associated endeavors. Approximately 69 percent of the population of Assam is engaged in agricultural pursuits and other associated endeavors. Nevertheless, the revenue generated by agricultural endeavors is somewhat meager, mostly because to the utilization of conventional techniques. The underdevelopment of the agricultural industry in rural areas can be attributed to natural calamities, lack of capital, and inefficiencies in the market structure. In addition, children from low-income backgrounds are compelled to engage in agricultural work at a young age. It promotes a lack of literacy in rural regions.

Hence, we assert that societal inequality is prevalent. Inequality impedes efforts to combat severe poverty, resulting in slower economic growth and reduced sustainability (UNICEF et al., 2014; Ostry et al., 2014). Moreover, studies indicate that disparities undermine social unity and increase the probability of aggressive confrontation (UNDP, 2013; Stewart, 2010). Social justice and human rights are jeopardized by inequality. Individuals that are economically disadvantaged, particularly women, young and elderly individuals, individuals with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and rural communities, have experienced slower advancements in achieving development objectives due to existing disparities (Kabeer, 2010). Inter-generational disparities in the economy, governance, and society often persist over time (World Bank, 2006).

The Gini coefficient is a reliable indicator of disparity. The value of the variable varies from 0 when there is perfect equality to 1 when there is perfect inequality. It relies on comparing the cumulative proportions of the population to the cumulative proportion of income they get. In this analysis, we examine the disparity in Assam by utilizing the Gini Coefficient as a measure of inequality in both rural and urban regions of the state.

TABLE 3: DISTRICT WISE GINI COEFFICIENT OF ASSAM

DISTRICT	Rural	Urban
Baksha	0.4	0.4
Barpeta	0.4	0.6
Bongaigaon	0.6	0.5
Cachar	0.5	0.5
Chirang	0.5	0.4
Darang	0.5	0.6
Dhemaji	0.5	0.5
Dhuburi	0.5	0.6
Dribugarh	0.5	0.5
Dima hasao	0.3	0.4
Goalpara	0.4	0.3
Golaghat	0.4	0.5
Hailakandi	0.6	0.3
Jorhat	0.5	0.7
Kamrup	0.5	0.8
Kamrup(M)	0.5	0.6
Karbi Along	0.6	0.6
Karimganj	0.5	0.4
Kokrajhar	0.4	0.4
Lakhimpur	0.7	0.8
Marigaon	0.4	0.4
Nagaon	0.5	0.5
Nalbari	0.5	0.8
Sibsagar	0.7	0.5
Sonitpur	0.9	0.6
Tinsukia	0.6	0.7
Udalguri	0.5	0.4
Assam	0.5	0.5

Source: Human development report 2014

Based on the information presented in the table, it is evident that there is a significant level of disparity throughout the society. In addition to being a barrier to ending extreme poverty and attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), inequality is a significant problem on its own (UNICEF et al., 2014; Kabeer, 2010). Given that an individual's or family's position in society is considered essential for their well-being, inequality is pertinent to poverty (Coudouel et al., 2002). Research indicates that social cohesiveness and income disparities are inherently incompatible. Indicators of social capital, which refer to the benefits of trust, camaraderie, empathy, and social connections within a society,

demonstrate that societies with greater fairness exhibit increased community involvement and tend to have lower levels of homicide.

GENDER INEQUALITY AND POVERTY IN ASSAM

Gender imbalance exerts a dominant influence on the cultural norms of rural civilizations. The prevalence of patriotic beliefs in rural communities contributes to gender inequity by fostering a reliance on male counterparts. Men possess greater economic power than women. Most women mostly labor in domestic settings and participate in non-economic pursuits, while most men primarily work in the formal sector. As a result of this disparity, men exert greater control over household decision-making. Conversely, females have a higher tendency than males to be obligated from a young age to engage in agricultural labor, due to their belief that boys are the primary breadwinners of houses in the future. Furthermore, they hold the belief that as females are expected to marry and relocate to other houses in the future, males will assume the role of the family's cornerstone and preserve its customs. Consequently, women experience higher levels of poverty compared to men due to their limited ownership rights, diminished decision-making power, restricted economic prospects, and lower literacy rates.

REASON BEHIND THE POVERTY IN ASSAM SPECIAL REFERENCE TO WOMEN:

Economic growth is most efficient in reducing poverty when it simultaneously boosts the employment, productivity, and earnings of individuals in low-income brackets, while also allocating public resources towards promoting human development. An intricate cycle of economic growth and human development arises when economic expansion effectively employs labor and creates employment, while simultaneously witnessing rapid improvements in human skills and health [UNDP (1997)]. It suggests that poverty is influenced not only by an individual or state's money, but also by other characteristics such as work, education, health, and more. In this discussion, we explore multiple factors contributing to the prevalence of poverty in Assam.

LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE

Labour force participation rate is a one of the good indicator for well being of people. It implies number of people who are older 15 years and above get employed. Thus higher the labour force participation rate is a good sign for not only economic but also social well being.

TABLE 4: LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE [PER1000] FOR PERSONS (15 YEARS AND ABOVE) USUAL STATUS (PS+SS)

LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE						
	ASSAM(RURAL)			INDIA(RURAL)		
YEAR	MALE	FEMALE	PERSON	MALE	FEMALE	PERSON
2021-22	80.1	29.0	54.9	55.0	20.4	38.0
2020-21	79.6	25.3	53.3	78.1	36.5	57.4

2019-20	77.3	16.1	47	77.9	33	55.5
2018-19	78.2	12.6	46.8	76.4	26.4	51.5
2017-18	80.9	12.3	47.7	76.4	24.6	50.7

Source: Periodic labour force survey

The depicted graph illustrates a rise in the rate of labor force participation, although the result is deemed unsatisfactory. In recent years, there has been a rise in the rate of labor force participation per individual. However, the increase in the labor force participation rate was less significant compared to the overall national average. The labor force participation rate in rural India for the year 2020-21 was 57.4, which was higher than the rate in rural Assam, which stood at 53.3. The increase in Assam's female labor participation rate from 2017 to 2022 is lower than the average rate for the entire country. Furthermore, there is a significant discrepancy in the levels of male and female engagement in the workforce. Based on the annual labour force survey, the labour force participation rate for males in 2022–22 was 80.1, while for women it was only 29.0, which is lower than the national average. Therefore, it is evident that the level of female participation in the labor force in rural parts of Assam is significantly low. It implies that women possess a reduced level of adaptability in their profession, a diminished level of decision-making power, and a limited range of choices.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

Unemployment is a primary factor contributing to poverty. Poverty encompasses more than just a deficiency of resources and income required to sustain viable lifestyles. The manifestation of this issue includes symptoms such as famine and undernourishment, limited availability of medical services and essential resources, social seclusion and discrimination, and exclusion from participation in decision-making processes. The unemployment rate is merely one of the consequential ramifications of poverty. Individuals who do not have access to healthcare, education, or simply basic sustenance are unable to seek employment opportunities. They do not possess the necessary qualifications to secure a position that provides security and a competitive salary. However, unemployment serves as both a cause and a consequence of poverty. In the absence of employment, the population is deprived of the means to acquire the necessary income for the acquisition of goods and services. Therefore, unemployment and poverty are not mutually incompatible.

TABLE 5: UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (15 YEARS AND ABOVE) USUAL STATUS (PS+SS)

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE						
	ASSAM(RURAL)			INDIA(RURAL)		
YEAR	MALE	FEMALE	PERSON	MALE	FEMALE	PERSON
2021-22	3.1	3.5	3.2	3.8	2.1	3.2
2020-21	3	5.7	3.6	3.8	2.1	3.3
2019-20	6.8	12.8	7.8	4.5	2.6	3.9
2018-19	6.2	6.8	6.3	5.5	3.5	5

2017-18	7.3	14	8.1	5.7	3.8	5.3
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Source: Periodic labour force survey

Unemployment serves as a dependable measure of an individual's economic destitution. Meeting an individual's requirement for a satisfactory standard of living can be difficult if they are jobless or without any alternative means of financial support. Based on the aforementioned evidence, women residing in rural parts of Assam are a comparatively marginalized group in society. The unemployment rate for women in rural Assam surpasses that of males, and it is also higher for women in rural India as a whole. In rural Assam in 2021–22, the male unemployment rate is 3.1 percent lower than the female unemployment rate, which stands at 3.5. Conversely, the female unemployment rate in rural India is 2.1 percent. Undoubtedly, in recent years, the unemployment rate for women in rural areas has declined, but the outcome is still unsatisfactory.

LITERACY RATE

Literacy rate is another indicator of poverty. It measures number of people who are literate in a community during a particular period of time. Higher the literacy rate is a good indicator for society. If people are literate, they can contribute to productive works, as well as find the better source of Income.

TABLE 6: LITERACY RATE OF ASSAM (5 years & above) in percent

Year	Male(U)	Male(R)	Female (U)	Female (R)	Person (U)	Person (R)
2021-22	96.4	90.9	90.2	82.9	93.4	87.0
2020-21	97.1	91.1	93.2	85.2	95.2	88.2
2019-20	95.5	89.2	91.8	83.8	93.6	86.6
2018-19	94.5	89.6	92.2	82.8	93.4	86.4
2017-18	96.2	89.4	90.5	82.4	93.4	86.1

Source: Periodic labour force survey

Based on the above table, it can be observed that the literacy rate has shown a consistent upward trend over the years. It is an auspicious indication for a society. However, there exists a disparity in the literacy rates not just between urban and rural areas, but also between males and females. The literacy rate among individuals in urban areas was 93.4 percent in 2017-18, whereas in rural areas it was only 86.1 percent. Undoubtedly, the overall literacy rate has been increasing; yet, there still exists a disparity in literacy rates between urban and rural areas within society. The literacy rate of individuals in rural areas in 2022-22, at 87.0 percent, is lower than the literacy rate of those in urban areas, which stands at 93.4 percent. The urban male literacy rate of 96.4 is greater than the rural male literacy rate of 90.9. The literacy rate of females in urban areas is 90.2, which is greater than the rate of 82.9 in rural areas. However, there is also a gender gap present. The male literacy rate is greater in both urban and rural areas. In the year 2021-22, the male literacy rate in urban areas was 96.4%, while the female literacy

rate was 90.2%. The disparity between male and female literacy has remained relatively constant in recent years, indicating an ongoing gender gap in society. In rural areas, the disparity in literacy rates between males and females is far greater than in metropolitan areas. In rural areas, the literacy rate for males is 90.9 percent, which is greater than the female literacy rate of 82.9 percent in rural areas.

INCOME INEQUALITY

Income inequality is the uneven allocation of wealth and income across individuals and communities. The prevalence of poverty in Assam continues to exceed the national average. The unequal distribution of money within society is another contributing factor to the higher prevalence of poverty among females in Assam.

TABLE 7: AVERAGE WAGE/SALARY EARNINGS (RS. 0.00) DURING THE PRECEDING CALENDAR MONTH FROM REGULAR WAGE/SALARIED EMPLOYMENT AMONG THE REGULAR WAGE/SALARIED EMPLOYEES IN CWS FOR ASSAM AND INDIA

Year		Rural			Urban		
		Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person
July-Sept.2020	Assam	13,611.13	8,899.15	12,320.97	24,425.44	18,771.03	23,042.44
	India	14,287.79	9,408.78	13,119.92	21,067.54	16,700.84	20,030.22
Oct-Dec. 2020	Assam	16,292.21	5,748.93	13,345.34	23,733.79	19,998.37	22,862.38
	India	15,961.50	10,009.19	14,706.58	21,447.22	16,567.57	20,285.42
Jan-March 2021	Assam	19,473.82	9,418.10	16,011.96	24,493.40	21,472.88	23,728.32
	India	16,126.55	9,588.04	14,495.73	21,095.36	16,022.20	19,869.58
April-June 2021	Assam	16,310.10	6,371.23	13,470.36	24,961.61	21,228.78	23,979.49
	India	15,448.71	10,672.40	14,265.51	21,139.35	16,599.42	20,061.73
July-Sept 2021	Assam	17,955.61	10,715.69	15,863.57	25,096.25	20,611.39	23,972.14
	India	16,473.26	12,603.02	15,687.24	21,533.28	17,056.18	20,468.06
Oct-Dec 2021	Assam	14,255.40	6,564.72	12,201.03	24,541.91	20,307.25	23,531.34
	India	16,513.9	10,312.1	15,220.4	21,605.8	16,966.1	20,495.5

		1	3	5	7	2	4
Jan-Mar, 2022	Assam	15,737.7 8	6,402.75	13,199.4 8	22,230.6 5	16,821.4 9	20,912.7 4
	India	16,403.6 4	10,149.5 5	15,155.4 7	22,189.3 8	17,443.0 4	21,027.9 1

Source: Periodic labour force survey

The researchers have observed, based on the data presented in the table above, that income inequality is prevalent not only in the average of Assam and India, but also in rural Assam and urban Assam. A significant disparity in pay exists between urban males and urban females, as well as between rural males and rural females, as seen in the table. The chart also suggests that there is a pay disparity between women living in urban areas and those living in rural areas in India and Assam.

CONCLUSION

Poverty and unemployment have remained enduring challenges in India for an extended period. Poverty and unemployment are pervasive socioeconomic issues that exist across the entire expanse of this country. These two difficulties are interconnected and exhibit a reciprocal relationship, whereby one problem serves as both the cause and the result of the other. Poverty is a societal occurrence in which a specific segment of the population is unable of meeting even their fundamental needs for survival. Based on the preceding debate, scholars have unequivocally determined that the Assam economy has experienced positive economic growth in recent years. However, despite the significant expansion, poverty remains a prominent concern in the Assam economy. Researchers have discovered a wide range of poverty in the districts of Assam. There exists a disparity between the urban and rural regions of Assam. The Gini coefficient, a measure of income inequality, highlights the substantial disparity present in Assam. Gender disparity is a prevalent issue in Assamese society. Men had higher labor force participation rates, literacy rates, lower unemployment rates, and higher incomes compared to women in both rural and urban areas of Assam. Females residing in rural regions of Assam exhibit a higher susceptibility compared to females residing in urban areas, as well as males residing in rural regions.

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