

Problems Of Rural Gorkha Women And Unpaid Care Work: A Case Study Of Bihpuria Constituency In Lakhimpur District, Assam

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Abstract:

The most pressing problem in India today is that of improving the socio-economic condition of the vast number of people in rural areas, particularly the female population who live below the poverty line. Therefore, various Rural Development Programs (RDPs) have been launched by the Govt. of India. Despite various government development programs, the female population lags behind in all respects. The present work attempts to examine the socio-economic conditions of rural women from the Gorkha Community of Assam, who have been inhabitants of the state since time immemorial. We are very anxious to study the educational scenario, marital status, age structure, standard of living, etc., of the women in the community. Since Gorkhas are inhabitants of rural areas and the main occupation is agriculture. Due to a low literacy rate and poor socio-economic conditions, they are unaware of current developments in science and technology. So, it is a very sensitive, time-bound issue to study the women of the particular community. We selected the Bihpuria Constituency in the Lakhimpur District of Assam for our study and visited door-to-door to collect primary data. After randomly collecting the required data, we tried to analyze it to determine the actual picture of the research area. Multidimensional problems are prevalent amongst Gorkha women that directly affect their livelihoods. The present paper makes an attempt to outline practical measures improving the socio-economic conditions of Gorkha women. A lack of sufficient educational institutions, poor transportation and communication, insufficient infrastructure, early marriage, a high fertility rate, and pathetic socio-economic conditions are identified as the major problems of the community.

Keywords: *Patriarchal, custom, domestic violence, unemployment, fertility, village heads, etc.*

Introduction:

The Gorkhas are among the ancient inhabitants of India. After the Sugauli Treaty of 1815, the British recruited Gorkhas into the Assam Infantry and settled them in the Northeast. According to the 2011 Census, 2,926,168 people in India spoke Nepali as their mother tongue, accounting for 0.24% of India's total population. The decadal percentage increase is 38.29% (2001-2011). At present, there are approximately 40,00,000 Indian Gorkhas whose mother tongue is Nepali. According to the 2011 census of India, there were 596,210 Nepali speakers in Assam. Based on the 2011 census, the sex ratio of Nepali speakers in Assam was 927 females against 1000 males. Nepali women in Assam face interconnected challenges, notably educational disparity, economic dependency, domestic violence, political disparity, etc. Gender inequality in India manifests through deep-rooted patriarchal norms, leading to disparities in economic participation, education, healthcare, and political representation. While the Gorkha community in Assam faces collective marginalization, Gorkha women experience layered vulnerabilities due to the intersection of ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status.

Need of the Study:

Bihpuria is a general-category legislative assembly constituency located in Lakhimpur district of Assam, India. Forming a crucial segment of the Tezpur Lok Sabha constituency, the region blends a diverse agrarian and

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semi-urban landscape with deep indigenous and cultural roots. While Assamese and Mising remain the dominant linguistic groups, Nepali-speaking populations maintain a notable presence across Lakhimpur district and the Bihpuria constituency. The community resides in concentrated pockets across rural and forest-adjacent areas within the sub-district. Villages such as *Kalabil Mornoi Nepali*, *Dongibil*, *Samaguri*, *Simaluguri*, *Durpang*, and *Pithaguri Nepali Gaon* serve as prime examples of these historical, community-centric settlements. According to census data, Nepali is spoken as a first language by approximately 2.35% of the wider district's population. Despite being a linguistic minority, the community has integrated deeply into the socio-cultural fabric, engaging predominantly in agriculture, trade, and allied rural professions.

Poverty, unemployment, education disparity, and domestic violence are the primary problems of Gorkha women. Hence, the present paper attempts to study the major problems of rural Gorkha women within Bihpuria Constituency in Assam.

Objectives of the Study:

The present study intends to pursue the following objectives:

- i) To study systematically the problems faced by Gorkha women.
- ii) To analyse the educational progress of Gorkha women.
- iii) To consider the marital status of Gorkha women.

Methodology of the Study:

As the care workers, who are not paid primarily are not conversant with social science investigations, an interview schedule was administered as a primary tool for collecting data from them. The interview schedule was designed as per the outlined objectives and parameters.

Sample Size:

50 Gorkha women have been selected random wise from the Constituency for the present study. The study emphasizes to incorporate samples from diverse parts of Bihpuria Constituency, namely *Kalabil Mornoi Nepali*, *Dongibil*, *Samaguri*, *Simaluguri*, *Durpang*, *Pithaguri Nepali Gaon*, and other important localities.

Table 1.1 Age-wise Classification

Sl No.	Age in years	No. of women	Percentage
1	Below 20	15	30
2	20-40	25	50
3	40-60	08	16
4	Above 60	02	04
Total		50	100

Source: Primary data

Table 1.1 shows that 30 percent of females are below 20, indicating a high birth rate in the Gorkha community. A high birth rate indicates rapid population growth and a population explosion. Majority of the women come under the age group 20-24. Almost 66 percent of women have been found in the age group of 20 to 60. This group is economically active. This group is an independent group and doesn't depend on the earnings of others. But due to a lack of sufficient amenities for education, employment, etc., they lag behind in achieving economic independence and accessing higher education.

Table 1.2: Education-wise classification

SI No.	Education Level	No. of women	Percentage
1	Illiterate	02	04
2	Below H.S.L.C.	28	56
3	H.S.L.C.	12	24
4	Higher Secondary	06	12
5	Graduate	2	4
Total		50	100

Source: Primary data

Table 1.2 shows that a major part of Gorkha women have an education level below H.S.L.C. Gorkha women passing Higher Secondary is 12 percent, and only 4 percent attain graduation. The main reasons why Gorkha women lag behind in higher education are discussed in Table 1.3 below.

Table 1.3: Reasons for low attainment of higher education

SI No.	Reasons	No. of women	Percentage
1	Economic reason	22	44
2	Early marriage	15	30
3	Customs	05	10
4	Lack of Awareness	03	06
5	Lack of nearby educational institution	05	10
Total		50	100

Source: Primary data

Table 1.3 clearly reflects that 44 percent of Gorkha women are not able to get higher education due to economic reasons. Most of the Gorkha population of the constituency is economically backward. Due to limited access to higher education, government employment in the community is very low. So, the community's main occupation is agriculture, and their economic condition is very poor, which directly affects the higher education attainment of the women in the community. The second main reason for less higher education is early marriage. Since the population of the community is economically poor, the guardians of girls prefer to engage them in marriage rather than higher education. Similarly, customs of the community, lack of social awareness, and lack of sufficient educational institutions within a limited distance are the notable reasons responsible for the low attainment of higher education among Gorkha women.

Table 1.4: Marital status of Gorkha women

Sl.No	Age group of married women	No. of married women	Percentage
1	Below 18	29	58
2	18-25	15	30
3	25-35	5	10
4	35 and above	1	02
Total		50	100

Source: Primary data

Table 1.4 shows that the highest percentage of Gorkha women marry before age 18. The problem of early marriage is the root cause as to why they fail to attain higher education, and it affects their employment opportunities. Only 30 percent of women get married between the ages of 18 and 25. Out of 50 nos. of sample, only 5 married women under age group 25 to 35, comprising only 10 percent of total women. It reflects a very miserable scenario of women's empowerment.

Findings

The present study reveals that the socio-economic conditions of Gorkha women are too low in spite of various women empowerment programs launched by the Govt. of India since independence. The main points of the findings are highlighted as below:

1. The study reveals that majority of Gorkha women are in the age bracket of 20 to 40 years.
2. It is found that 56 percent of women belong to the education level of below H.S.L.C.
3. The study reveals that four percent of women are illiterate.
4. It is found that 44 percent of women have not taken up higher education because of economic reasons.
5. Because of early marriage, 30 percent of women are debarred from higher study.
6. The study shows that 58 percent of women are compelled to marry below the age of 18.
7. The study also shows that there are only 10 percent of women get married in the age bracket of 25 and 35.

Suggestions:

The following suggestions may be implemented by the government, village heads, NGOs, etc., to overcome the lacuna identified in the study.

1. Encourage girls to have education by providing scholarships, mentorship, and safe transportation to schools.
2. Govt. should take keen initiatives to establish quality educational institutions covering remote areas.
3. A good amount of funds should be allocated by the Govt. in its budget and provide free education up to higher levels.
4. The government should conduct workshops to educate women on their legal rights, property ownership, and protection against domestic violence.
5. Social awareness camps should be organized amongst women by NGO's, volunteers regarding participation of women in political involvement.
6. Village heads, religious figures, and elders should lead to challenge traditional norms that encourage early marriage.

Conclusion

Our country has celebrated 79 years of independence, yet we have not found that Gorkha women are enabled to enjoy the fruits of independence though some women-centric measures have been adopted. The contributions of women cannot be ignored, as they are a major part of society's overall development. Therefore, the intervention of the government, village heads, and social workers is necessary to improve their socio-economic conditions and maintain social justice in the country.

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