

The Millennium Development Goals and Gender Issues in Assam and India

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ABSTRACT

Equality through well-developed education system needs to occupy the centre place in the development process of every society. Gender inequality in India has narrowed down over the past few years in primary and secondary education levels but regarding tertiary education, it is still prevalent across India. The enrolment level has become favourable to female with GPI at 1.03 and 1.02 respectively in 2015-16 in primary and secondary education. Sharp progress in the recent years headed the GPI very close to the target for tertiary level. GPI of enrolment being at perfect parity level in Assam indicating attainment of gender equality targeted by MDGs. Further the literacy gender parity index for the age group 15-24 has shown an upward trend at all India level including states like Assam.

KEYWORDS: MDGs, Gender inequality, India, Assam

INTRODUCTION

Universal access to quality knowledge and skills ensures that everybody has an equal opportunity to play a full part in the work and society (Biswal, 2011). In this context, equality through well-developed education system needs to occupy the centre place in the development process of every society. Education is the single most important factor which paves way to development process in all spheres of life which in turn leads to gender equality and women empowerment (Paul et al, 2015). Gender inequality is the persistent discriminations of one group of people based on gender which hampers the overall wellbeing and has adverse impact on the development goals. India has witnessed gender inequality from its early history due to socio-economic and religious practices resulting wide gap in the position of men and women in the society (Das et al, 2016). There are proliferating gender variations in the country in terms of education, employment and health care and so on. In case of gender inequality index, India is placed 129 position out of 189 countries for the year 2019 (HDR, 2019). Education play a key role in transforming patriarchal societies with gender based violence into ones that value inclusion, equality and justice. Education will lead to empowerment securing the means of creating a social environment in which one can make decisions for social and individual transformation (Banerjee, 2011). Though education is recognized as a strong indicator for the differential levels of socio-economic development of nation, however, in the low income countries the reform could realized with some international commitments- Education for All (EFA) in the early 1990s and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the dawn of 21st century. To embark this journey of equity through educational attainment, United Nations Organization developed MDGs in 2000, in line to this government of India launched SarvaSikshaAbhiyan

(SSA) in 2001-02. MDGs have been considered as the benchmark to the right to development, peace, security, gender equality and to the overall sustainable development. The challenges and targets of the Millennium Declaration are mainly to provide children with access to primary education, to reduce differences in enrolment and mainstream a gender perspective in the development process. Gender equality will be achieved when women and men get equal opportunities and rights in all domains of life. India follows the MDGs framework accepted by the Government of India which is on the basis of 2003 UNDG (United Nations Development Group) guidelines. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) tracks the eighteen targets under MDGs framework of 8 goals on the basis of data-sets generated by the Ministries/Departments. The targets of MDG have set a deadline by the year 2015 for reducing gender disparity and women empowerment in all levels of education. In India, considerable progress has been made in the field of gender equality in education resulting primary and secondary level of education gender parity has crossed the level of 1 and shows a better picture of women and girls getting educational opportunities in the school education level.

There is a general belief that women in the north eastern region including Assam are more liberal as they are free from various social evils like dowry, sati pratha system compared to the other states in the country. Besides child selective abortion is still in practice in all parts of the state. As a result there is a massive decline in the child sex ratio in Assam, 965 as per 2001 census, had declined to 957 in 2011. One can say that there is a vast disparity in all spheres of socio-economic growth and development although many policies and programmes are implemented from time to time to empower women (Mahanta & Nayak, 2013). It is contrary to the general perception that, in some aspects, position of women in Assam is inferior to the other states in the country. According to the Assam Human Development Report (2014), the overall human development in the state is about halfway of the desired level, with education being at two third followed by health and income. The gender gap in literacy in Assam continues to be wide with 11.5 percent as per 2011 census against 8.8 percent of previous census, than the other north eastern states except Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. In Assam, the wide gender gap in literacy and schooling enrolment in higher education still considered to be a major hindrance over time. In line to this, this paper analyses the attainment of education by women and focuses on the gender parity in terms of various socio-economic and political indicators such as enrolment in all levels of education and literacy rate in the state of Assam. An attempt has been made to analyze the way of illustrating the state of and trends in gender inequality by looking at the gender parity index in enrolment and literacy following the MDGs framework.

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

In the UN millennium summit in September 2000, 189 UN member countries including 147 countries adopted the Millennium Declaration. This declaration has been considered as barometer in the progress of a country's development. The main aim of this summit was to achieve gender equality, poverty reduction, women empowerment and sustainable development. It has set eight development goals and eighteen time bound targets by the year 2015. The eight MDGs are:

eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal basic education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability, develop a global partnership for development.

The MDG3 called for the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and all levels of education no later than 2015. This target was achieved through the ratio of girls to boys' enrolment in primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. This ratio of males to females can be achieved through gender parity index (GPI). It refers to the gross enrolment ratio (GER) of girls to boys of the relevant age group in primary, secondary and tertiary education level. GPI of GER is the ratio of GER of the girls to that of boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education. Thus, the GPI (GER), which is free from the effects of the population structure of the appropriate age groups, for each level of education, is taken as the appropriate indicator to monitor the gender equality in education. A GPI of 1 indicates parity between the sexes or no gender disparity. A GPI that varies between 0 and 1 typically means a disparity in favour of males whereas a GPI greater than 1 indicates a disparity in favour of females. Target 4 is intended to achieve GPI of 1 by 2005 for primary enrolment and by 2015 for all levels of education.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The study is entirely based on secondary data. The data on enrolment in various levels of education are collected from the Ministry of Human Resources and Development (2001-02 to 2015-16). The data regarding the literacy rate of 15-24 age group are taken with the help of secondary data from MDGs Country Report (2015). To compute the gender parity index derived from the analysis, an attempt has been made to measure the parity in Assam and India using MDGs indicators towards gender equality and women empowerment. The study has been observed two indicators of MDGs Target 4 'to eliminate gender disparity in primary, secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education, no later than 2015' - ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education and ratio of literate women to men, 15-24 years old. To analyze the gender equality, Gender Parity Index in enrolment in primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education and youth literacy is calculated as,

$$GPI = \frac{\text{Value for females}}{\text{Value for males}}$$

Where in case of education indicators, GPI of the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for each level of education is used. Ratio of female literacy rate to male literacy rate of 15-24 years has been used to calculate GPI for literacy rate. The reference period was conducted from 2001-02 to 2015-16 targeted by MDGs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Indicator 1: Ratio of Girls to Boys in Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Education

Education is the most important factor in ensuring gender equality and empowerment. In Table 1, GPI is calculated as the ratio of the number of female students to male students enrolled at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. Increased enrolment rate of girls in each level of education leads to achieve gender parity in education.

Table 1 shows substantial progress towards gender parity in all levels of education by GPI in Assam and India during 2001-02 to 2015-16.

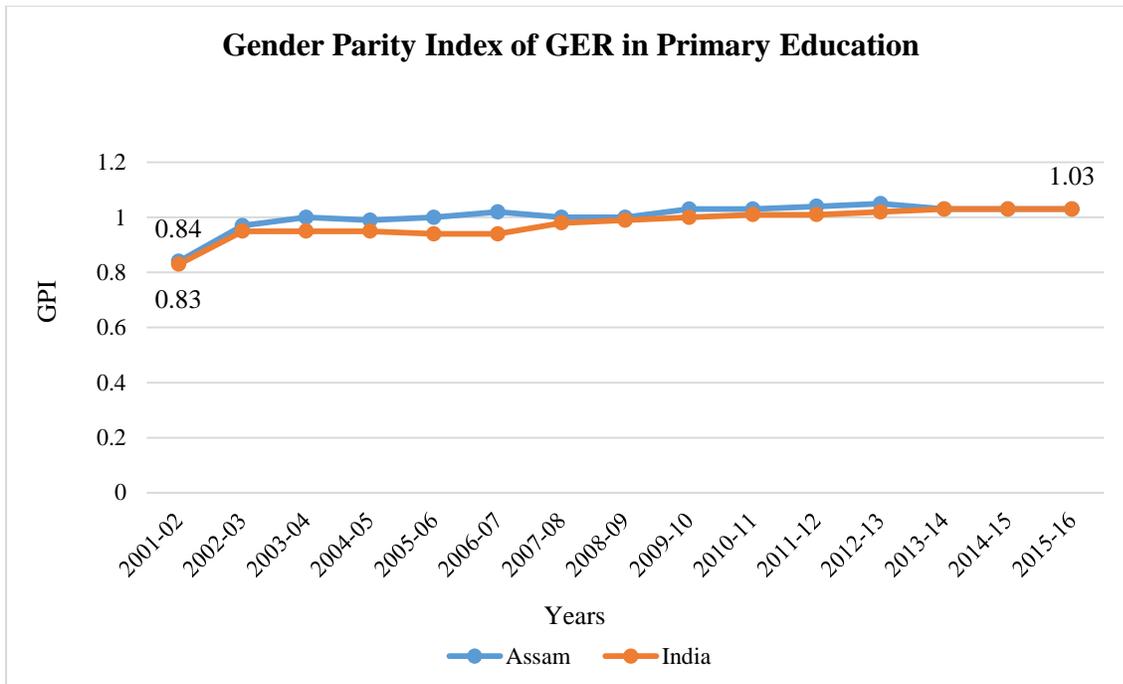
Table 1: Gender Parity Index of GER in Assam and India (2001-02 to 2015-16)

| Years | Assam | | | India | | |
|---------|---------|-----------|----------|---------|-----------|----------|
| | Primary | Secondary | Tertiary | Primary | Secondary | Tertiary |
| 2001-02 | 0.84 | 0.74 | 0.58 | 0.83 | 0.73 | 0.72 |
| 2002-03 | 0.97 | 0.93 | 0.69 | 0.95 | 0.80 | 0.73 |
| 2003-04 | 1.00 | 0.78 | 0.53 | 0.95 | 0.80 | 0.72 |
| 2004-05 | 0.99 | 0.79 | 0.70 | 0.95 | 0.79 | 0.71 |
| 2005-06 | 1.00 | 0.79 | 0.51 | 0.94 | 0.80 | 0.69 |
| 2006-07 | 1.02 | 0.79 | 0.49 | 0.94 | 0.82 | 0.69 |
| 2007-08 | 1.00 | 0.88 | 0.51 | 0.98 | 0.85 | 0.70 |
| 2008-09 | 1.00 | 0.85 | 0.53 | 0.99 | 0.85 | 0.70 |
| 2009-10 | 1.03 | 0.91 | 0.54 | 1.00 | 0.88 | 0.74 |
| 2010-11 | 1.03 | 0.88 | 1.01 | 1.01 | 0.87 | 0.86 |
| 2011-12 | 1.04 | 1.19 | 1.01 | 1.01 | 0.93 | 0.88 |
| 2012-13 | 1.05 | 1.14 | 0.98 | 1.02 | 0.99 | 0.89 |
| 2013-14 | 1.03 | 1.18 | 0.92 | 1.03 | 1.00 | 0.92 |
| 2014-15 | 1.03 | 1.16 | 0.93 | 1.03 | 1.01 | 0.92 |
| 2015-16 | 1.03 | 1.15 | 0.91 | 1.03 | 1.02 | 0.92 |
| CAGR | 1.37 | 2.98 | 3.05 | 1.45 | 2.26 | 1.65 |

Source: Ministry of Human Resources Development

In primary education, the target for eliminating gender disparity by 2005 has not been achieved at the national level as per the available data, where GPI ratio in primary enrolment reached 0.95 in 2005-06. The disparity situation in Assam was achieved perfect parity level in primary education by 2003-04 i.e. 1.00 against as a whole disparity situation of the country. This implies that in primary enrolment, gender parity has already been achieved in Assam before 2005. The trend of primary level GPI shows a shift from disparity to parity in favour of girls for the country by 2009-10. In case of Assam, the graph of year to year fluctuations about the value of GPI is considered as continuation of the parity situation. During the period 2001-02 to 2015-16, the GPI in primary education enrolment has been improving steadily in both Assam and the national level. It is clear from the table that values of GPI signify Assam and India's progress to achieve gender parity in primary enrolment by 2015, earlier in case of Assam (2003-04)

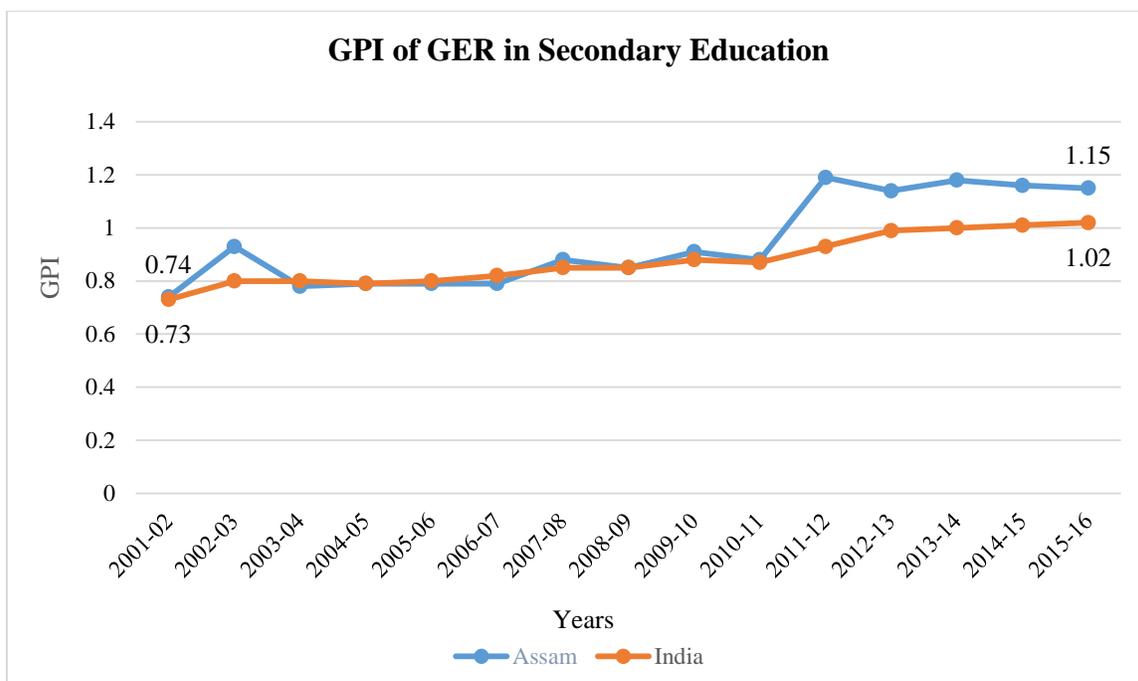
Fig 1: GPI of GER in Primary Education in Assam and India in 2001-02 to 2015-16



Source: Table 1

In the secondary level, the GPI enrolment over the period 2001-02 to 2015-16 displays that in the national level, the GPI has improved from 0.73 to 1.03. During that period, Assam exhibited a continuous progress in the GPI with a trend from 0.74 to 1.15, though the value revealed marginal shortfall from the exact parity upto 2012-13. India has achieved perfect parity 1.00 in 2013-14, for Assam, GPI reached the level of parity in 2011-12 (1.19). It is evident from the table that GPI at the secondary level reflects equitable participation of girls in the country. In India, the gender parity in school education have been achieved through various interventions under SamagraSiksha, RashtriyaMadhyamikSikshaAbhiyan recognizing compulsory and free education to all children a fundamental right.

Fig 2: GPI of GER in Secondary Education in Assam and India (2001-02 to 2015-16)

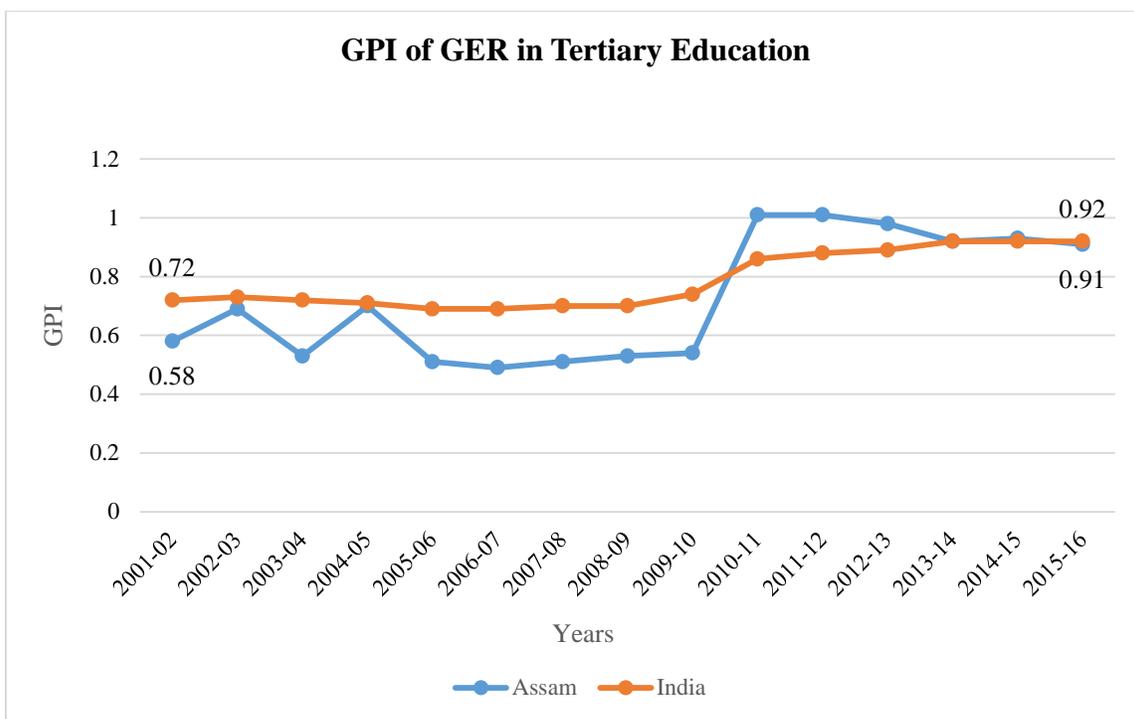


Source: Table 1

The GPI has been increasing over the years 2001-02 (0.72) to 2015-16 (0.92) in the tertiary enrolment. In comparison to the national level, the value has attained perfect parity level in Assam in between 2010-12, remained less than the perfect level in the successive years as per the GPI values of 2012-2015. Overall in the tertiary level, GPI has been in the neighborhood of exact parity, 0.91 in case of Assam and 0.92 in the national level by the stipulated year 2015. Table 1 indicates that there has been continuous improvement in the GPI value which is inspiring to see the society are realizing the value of higher education for females. The indicator of GPI makes it evident that the women are attaining the path of higher education but the rate is not robust enough to cover the gender disparity in the targeted year 2015.

In primary education, the CAGR of GPI is 1.37 and 1.45 percent; in secondary education, the CAGR is recorded as 2.98 and 2.26 percent and 3.05 and 1.65 percent in tertiary education for Assam and India respectively. This indicates that there is significant increase in GPI in all levels of education resulting a decline in the gender gap in Assam and India during the period of consideration.

Fig 3: GPI of GER in Tertiary Education in Assam and India (2001-02 to 2015-16)



Source: Table 1

Indicator 2: Ratio of Literate Women to Men, 15-24 years old

Literacy is an essential condition for development of an economy. Apart from its paramount importance in education, literacy can pave the way in achieving gender parity. One of the important indicators in MDGs framework to monitor the women empowerment is the ratio of literate women to men in the age group of 15-24. It is the ratio of the female literacy rate to the male literacy rate for 15-24 year old.

Table 2: Ratio of female literacy rate to male literacy rate (15-24 years), 1991 to 2011

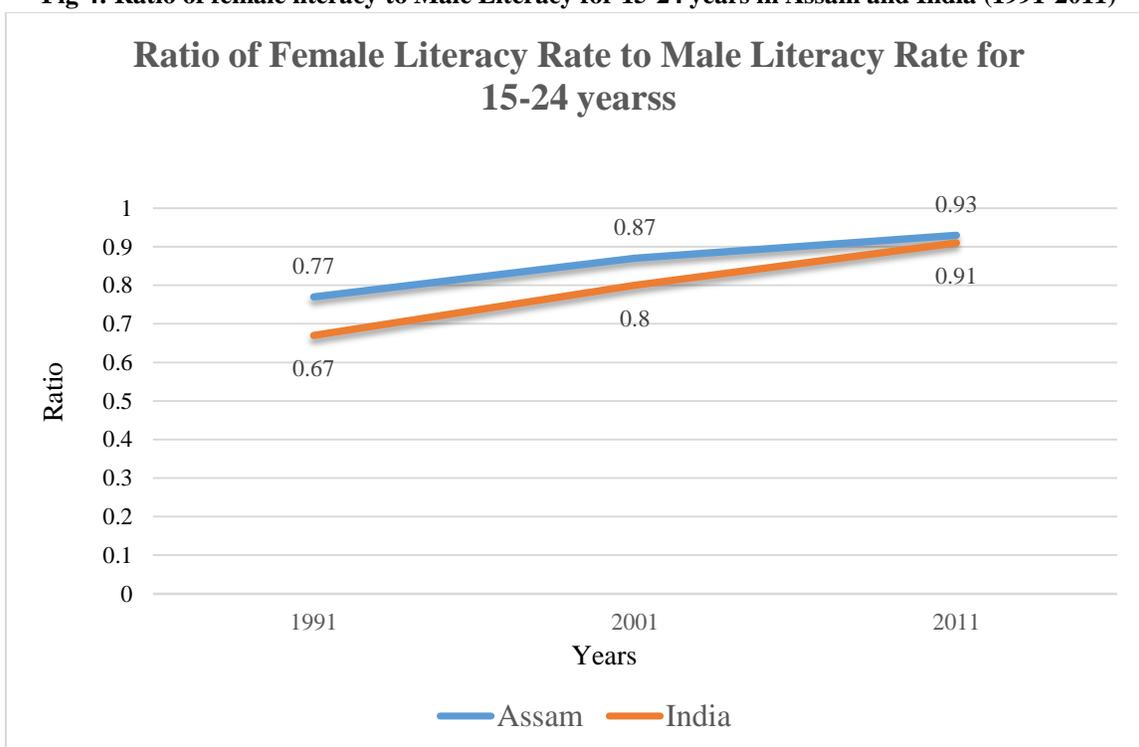
| Years | Assam | | | | India | | | |
|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|
| | Male | Female | Total | Ratio | Male | Female | Total | Ratio |
| 1991 | 69.0 | 52.9 | 61.0 | 0.77 | 73.5 | 49.3 | 61.9 | 0.67 |
| 2001 | 78.7 | 68.1 | 73.5 | 0.87 | 84.2 | 67.7 | 76.4 | 0.80 |
| 2011 | 85.2 | 79.6 | 82.4 | 0.93 | 90.0 | 81.9 | 86.1 | 0.91 |

Source: MDGs India Country Report, 2015

The literacy rate in this specific age group illustrated satisfactory trend both in Assam and India for females as well as males. At the national level, the 15-24 age literacy rate has increased from 61.9 to 86.1 during 1991-2011. This considering period saw a significant increase in literacy rate for female youths than male youths. According to the trend exhibited in Assam during 1991-2011, youth literacy increased from 61.0 to 82.4 between 1991 and 2011.

The youth literacy among males was 85.2 against 79.6 for females in 2011 census. This improvement is the result of increasing enrolment in primary, secondary and tertiary education among younger generations. It is seen from the Table 2 that compared to male youth literacy, female literacy tends to move faster. During 1991-2011, the gap between female and male youth literacy rate has been reduced considerably. The gender parity index of literacy was recorded as 0.67 in 1991 at the national level and has increased to 0.80 in 2001 and 0.91 in 2011 indicating a decline in the gender gap. The bright line is that gender parity index in Assam was recorded as 0.77, 0.87 and 0.93 in 1991, 2001 and 2011 census respectively showing that the gender gap is declining and the rate is more than the national level. This is indicative of the probable progress made in the state in terms of the overall enrolment scenario in the recent past.

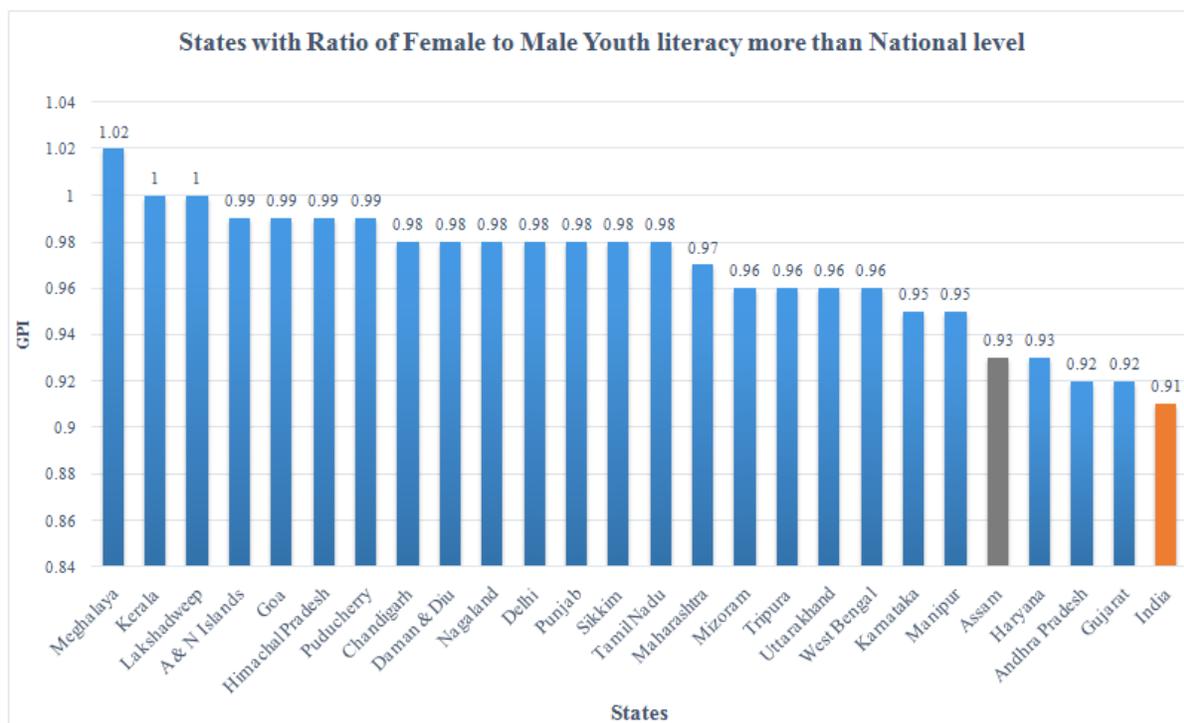
Fig 4: Ratio of female literacy to Male Literacy for 15-24 years in Assam and India (1991-2011)



Source: Table 2

Over the past two decades, states/UTs have also experienced a large increase in youth literacy. As per the 2011 census, among the states/UTs, Meghalaya, Kerala and Lakshadweep have achieved the gender Parity. Assam with 27 other states have more than national level value of the ratio of female youth literacy to male youth literacy (0.91). The high level of the value of ratio is due to the result of reduced gap in male female literacy (15-24 years) in the states. Among the high GPI states, the states which reported youth literacy rate less than Assam (0.93) are Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat with 0.92.

Fig 5: States with ratio of female to male youth literacy more than national level as per 2011 census



Source: MDGs India Country Report, 2015

CONCLUSION

The gender parity in enrolment and literacy clearly indicates that improvement happened over the years considering education as an important part of ‘women development’. It is concluded from the analysis that primary education is a powerful driver for the realization of MDGs in achieving gender equality in the post independent India. The MDGs reflect an unprecedented commitment by the world’s leader to release the billion plus people who currently live in extreme poverty, gender inequality, illiteracy and ill health. Indicators like gross enrolment ratio and youth literacy ratio make it clear that though women are moving on the path of attaining higher education, still the rate of happening is not robust to reduce gender disparity and lead the nation towards sustainable development. Enrolment in higher education is a prerequisite for socio-economic development and empowerment of women as well as nation at large. The goal of Millennium Development would remain an illusion in the regions where stereotype social norms of caste and patriarchy and poor governance are rampant. Ensuring girl’s education requires not only changes in the education system, but also in the societal beliefs and attitudes. This is to say that India will become a developed country by 2020 supported by ensuring gender free nation through MDGs, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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