

Chapter 7

Reasons of Gender Disparity in Education and Means to Reduce the Gap in Assam with Special Reference to Baksa and Kokrajhar Districts

7.1 Introduction:

Gender Disparity in Education where females lack behind males was found in all the districts of Assam. In chapter 4, the extent of gender disparity in education in the districts of Assam was shown. Although female Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) in Lower Primary (LP), Upper Primary (UP) and Secondary in the last few years of the period of observation was not worse than male GER, Literacy Rate (LR) of males surpassed LR of females in Assam over the years. As shown in chapter 4, as per 2011 Census Report of India, in Assam, gender disparity in LR was the highest and the fourth highest in Baksa district and Kokrajhar district respectively, based on GPI of LR. In both the districts and in the State as a whole, female illiteracy rate remained higher than male illiteracy rate in all the age groups i.e., 7-14, 15-19, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-59, 60+ and ANS. In both the districts and the State gender disparity in illiteracy rate increased with the higher age groups i.e., from the age group 7-14 up to the age group 60+.

According to the Report to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) upon Education for All Global Monitoring Report in 2006, literacy is a right and it is implicit in the Right to Education and the rationale for recognising literacy as a right is the set of benefits it confers on individuals, families, communities and nation. According to the UNESCO, literacy is inextricably linked to a process of continual education or lifelong learning and since literacy is a key outcome of education, it is difficult to separate the right to literacy from the right to education for the benefits of literacy from those of education. Janine Eldred (2013) in her paper "Literacy and Women's Empowerment-Stories of Success and Inspiration" explored how literacy learning can support women's empowerment and the development of greater equality, benefitting not only individual women, but families, communities and economies too. In her paper, she mentioned that the stories drawn demonstrate how with imagination and determination, literacy learning was

taking place and making a difference. Robinson-Pant (2014), in her paper “Literacy and Education for Sustainable Development and Women's Empowerment” mentioned that the importance of literacy to sustainable development and the empowerment of women should be explicitly recognised within the post-2015 education goals, as a first step towards mobilising adequate resources for adult education and lifelong learning. In the Preamble of the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal four (Education 2030), the participants committed to ensuring that all youth and adults, especially girls and women, achieve relevant and recognised functional literacy and numeracy proficiency levels and acquire life skills, and that they are provided with adult learning, education and training opportunities. Robinson-Pant (2016) in the paper "Promoting Health and Literacy for Women's Empowerment" discussed the links between health, well-being, women's empowerment and education, focussing on the role of literacy. In the paper, it was argued that cross-sectoral approaches involving stakeholder collaboration across these three areas would be essential in realising Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) five i.e., to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls and by identifying good practices from all world regions, the paper showed how literacy programmes with a health component would contribute in achieving the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. The paper also mentioned that providing lifelong learning opportunities to women and girls enables them to make informed decisions about their health and that of their communities and that the urgent need for these opportunities was apparent when it was considered that women constituted two thirds of the world's 758 million adults who cannot read or write a simple sentence. According to the United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation Institute for Statistics (UIS), as in June 2014, 758 million adults aged 15 years and older (adults) in the world were illiterates, out of which 279 million were men and 479 were women population. Further, UIS in its information paper on "Adult and Youth Literacy-National, Regional and Global Trends, 1985-2015" showed that, in 2015, the number of illiterate adults in India were 266,367 (000) which accounted for the highest population of illiterate adults in the world.

Over the years, the Government of India has taken various steps to enhance female education, directly or indirectly. With the objective of promoting adult

education, a series of programmes have been introduced since the first five year plan, the most prominent being the National Literacy Mission which was launched in 1988 to impart functional literacy to non-literates in the age group of 15 to 35 years in a time bound manner. In the 86th Amendment to the constitution, approved in 2002, providing free and compulsory education to all children aged 6 to 14 years has been notified. Saakshar Bharat, the new variant of earlier National Literacy Mission, a centrally sponsored scheme of the Department of School Education and Literacy (DSEL), Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India, was launched on the International Literacy Day viz., 8th September 2009 with the aim of raising literacy rate to 80 per cent and to reduce gender gap to 10 per cent. Under the Saakshar Bharat, population of 15 years and above is considered. In spite of the several programmes taken by the Government, a huge population are illiterates and female illiterates are more than male illiterates across India (mentioned in Chapter 4).

In this Chapter, the reasons of gender disparity in education and means to reduce the gap in Assam with special reference to Baksa and Kokrajhar districts have been discussed. First of all, to discuss the reasons of gender disparity in education, reasons of gender disparity in literacy rate have been found out. To find out the reasons of gender disparity in literacy rate, primary data on reasons of female illiteracy were collected from Baksa and Kokrajhar districts (the sample design is shown in chapter 3). Secondly, means to reduce the gender disparity in Literacy Rate based on the reasons found out has been discussed.

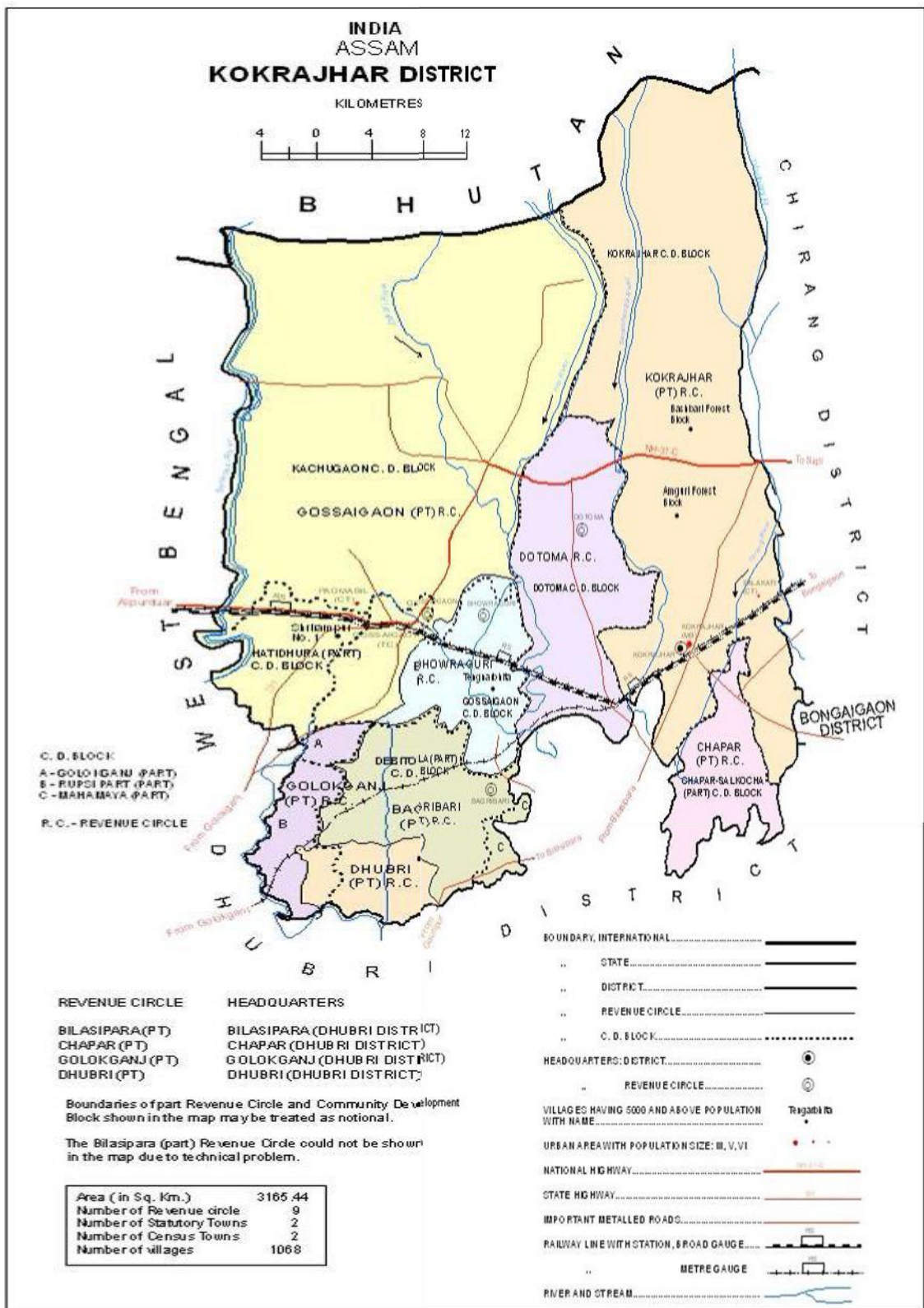
7.2. Observations:

First of all, reasons of gender disparity in LR and thereafter, means to reduce the gap in Assam with special reference to Baksa and Kokrajhar districts have been discussed.

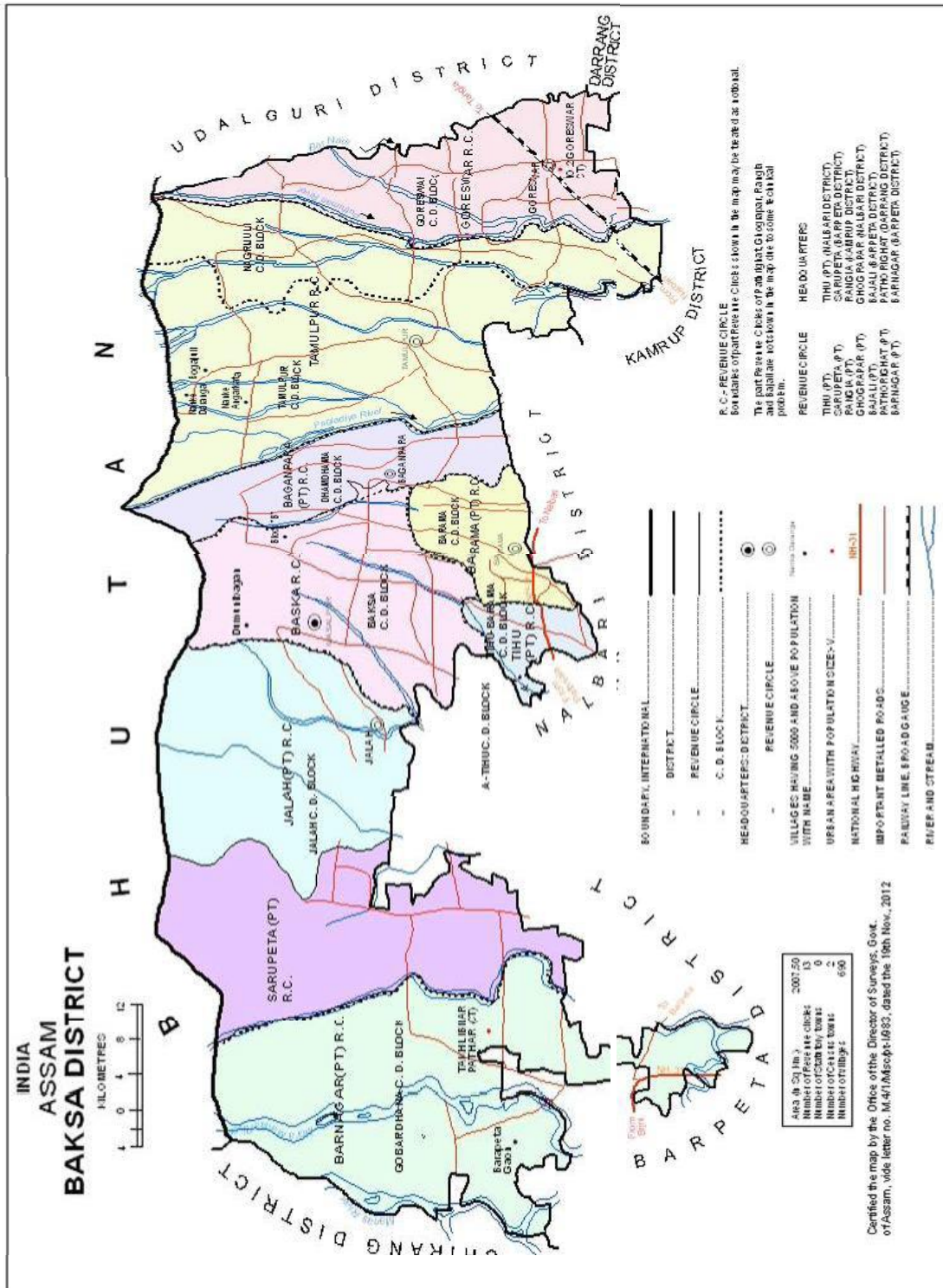
7.2.1 Reasons of Gender Disparity in Literacy Rate in Assam with Special Reference to Baksa and Kokrajhar Districts:

In the discussion of reasons of gender disparity in LR in Assam with special reference to Baksa and Kokrajhar districts, household income, performance of

Map 7.1
Map of Kokrajhar District showing the Surveyed Blocks:



**Map 7.2
Map of Baksa District showing the Surveyed Blocks:**



household chores, distance of learning place, society's attitude, parental education and knowledge of relevance of literacy or adult education or lifelong learning have been discussed. The result of the field survey on the reasons of gender disparity in LR has been shown in the Table 7.1.

Table 7.1
Reasons of Gender Disparity in Literacy Rate in Baksa and Kokrajhar Districts

Reason <i>1</i>	Response <i>2</i>	Persons <i>3</i>	Percentage <i>4</i>
Low income of household	Yes	208	94.12
	No	13	5.88
Performance of household duties	Yes	193	87.33
	No	28	12.67
Society's attitude	Yes	175	79.19
	No	46	20.81
Distance of learning place	Yes	144	65.16
	No	77	34.84
Educational status of mother	Illiterate	206	93.21
	LP	12	5.43
	UP	3	1.36
Educational status of father	Illiterate	201	90.95
	LP	16	7.24
	UP	4	1.81
Knowledge of relevance of literacy or adult literacy or lifelong learning	Do not have	205	92.76
	Have	16	7.24

Source: Field Survey, **Note:** Yes represents as problem and No represents as not problem

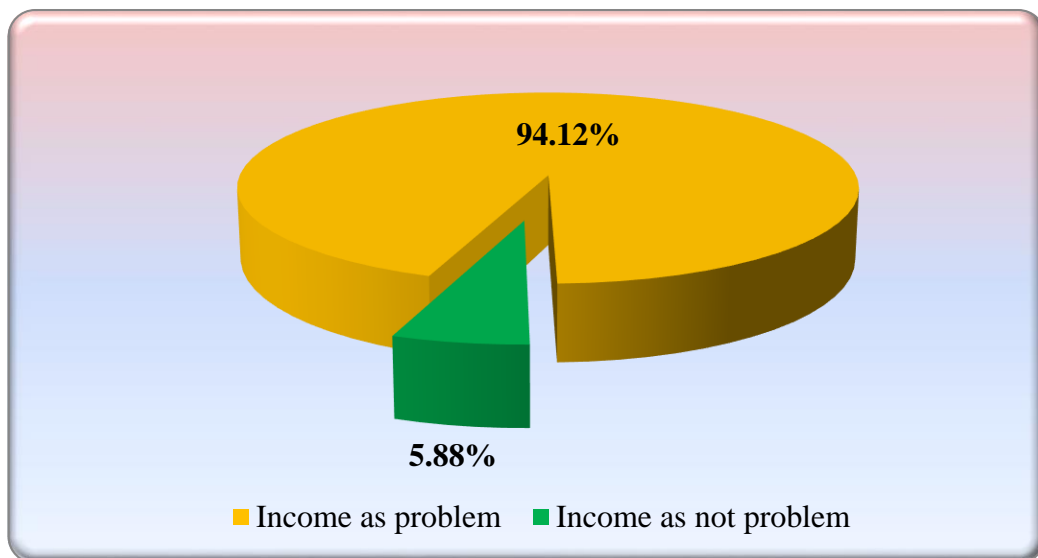
7.2.1.1 Household Income as a Reason of Gender Disparity in Literacy Rate:

Household income plays an important role in acquiring education. Despite government support in acquiring education, household income is important to meet complementary expenditures, such as expenditure on fooding, clothing and health. In spite of knowing that education will enhance individual's opportunity for job and hence earning and that through lifelong learning one can comfortably learn, many poor people might choose earning rather than learning (literacy) because of their poor economic condition. Perhaps, along with poor economic condition, ignorance of the importance of literacy or adult literacy or lifelong learning might compel the poor people to opt for earning rather that learning. In this study, it is also found from the secondary data that impact of Per Capita Net State Domestic Product (PCNSDP) on

Gender Parity Index (GPI) of LR was significantly positive in India, and in Assam, impact of poverty on GPI of LR was significantly negative (shown in chapter 4, Tables 4.20 and 4.34).

The result of the field survey reflects that household income is an important reason behind the gender disparity in LR. As shown in Table 7.1 and Diagram 7.1, 94.12 per cent of the sampled respondents have responded that they were illiterates due to low household income. They responded that they had and have household income problem behind their inability to access literacy learning.

Diagram 7.1
Samples who had and have Household Income as Obstacle in Accessing Literacy



Source: Field Survey

7.2.1.2 Performance of Household Chores as a Reason of Gender

Disparity in Literacy Rate:

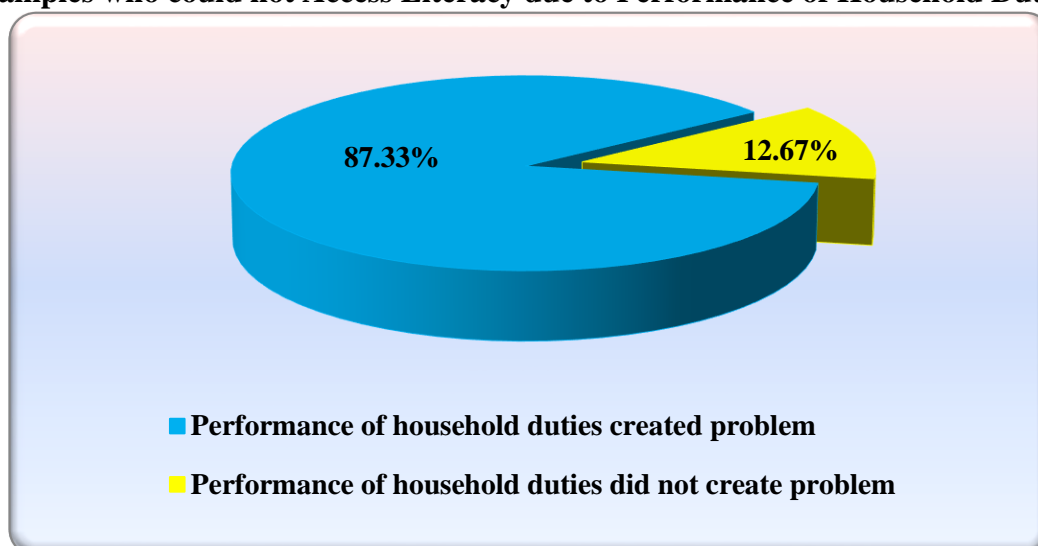
According to the Indian Census, performance of household duties is not considered as a work²⁷.

²⁷According to the Indian Census, work is defined as participation in any economically productive activity with or without compensation, wages or profit. Such participation may be physical and/ or mental in nature. Work involves not only actual work but also includes effective supervision and direction of work. It even includes part time help or unpaid work on farm, family enterprise or in any other economic activity. All persons engaged in "work" as defined above are workers. Persons who are engaged in cultivation or milk production even solely for domestic consumption are also treated as workers. Reference period for determining a person as worker and non-worker is one year preceding the date of enumeration.

Therefore, in performing those duties, an individual is considered non-worker²⁸. Household duties or chores include cooking, cleaning utensils, looking after children, fetching water etc. In India, in most of the societies, females perform household duties. Therefore, in doing those duties they are not considered economically productive. Moreover, an individual who needs to spend maximum time of day in performing such duties will hardly find time to be engaged in work or to go to access education for individual development and the development of society.

It is revealed in the result of the primary data that due to the performance of household chores majority of the respondents were unable to access literacy skill. Out of the 221 respondents, 87.33 per cent responded that due to the performance of household chores they could not acquire literacy skill (Table 7.1 and Diagram 7.2).

Diagram 7.2
Samples who could not Access Literacy due to Performance of Household Duties



Source: Field Survey

²⁸A person who did not at all work during the reference period (one year preceding the date of enumeration) is treated as non-worker. The non-workers broadly constitute students who did not participate in any economic activity paid or unpaid, household duties who were attending to daily household chores like cooking, cleaning utensils, looking after children, fetching water etc. and are not even helping in the unpaid work in the family form or cultivation or mulching, dependent such as infants or very elderly people not included in the category of worker, pensioners those who are drawing pension after retirement and are not engaged in any economic activity. Beggars, vagrants, prostitutes and persons having unidentified source of income and with unspecified sources of subsistence and not engaged in any economically productive work during the reference period. Others, in this category includes all Non-workers who may not come under the above categories such as rentiers, persons living on remittances, agricultural or non-agricultural royalty, convicts in jails or inmates of penal, mental or charitable institutions doing no paid or unpaid work and persons who are seeking/available for work (Indian Census).

As shown in Table 7.2 and Diagram 7.3, 47.96 per cent of the respondents also reported that they spent on an average, more than 10 hours per day (in the last one year) in doing household duties and therefore, their maximum time of day was spent in doing household chores. They also responded that they were satisfied being illiterate rather than go to acquire literacy with their responsibilities in doing household duties along with their low household income problem.

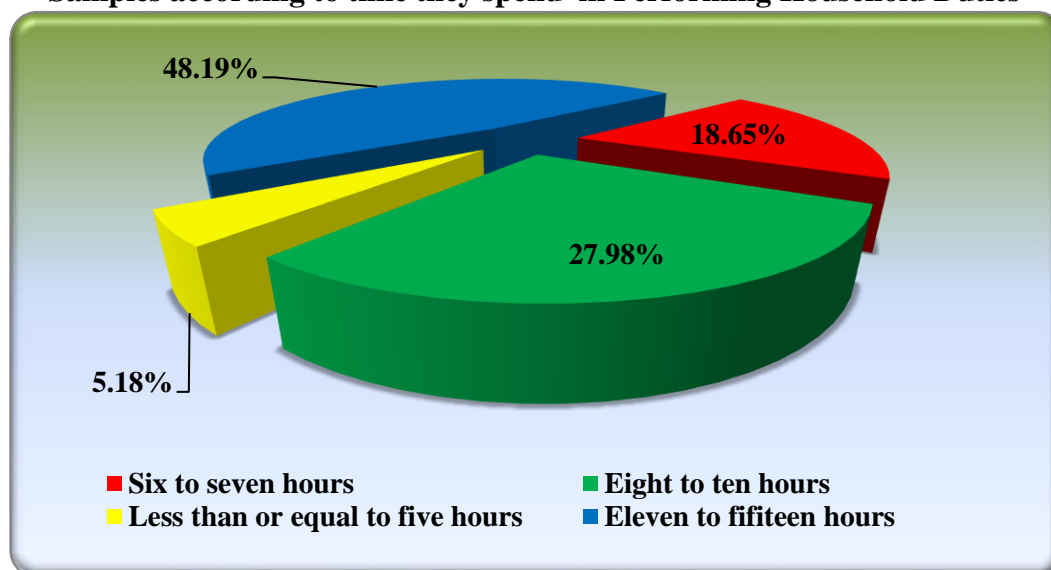
Table - 7.2
Samples according to time they spend in Performing Household Duties

Persons/per cent	Less or equal to 5 hours	6-7 hours	8-10 hours	11 and above hours
Per cent	5.18	18.65	27.98	48.19
Persons	10	36	54	93

Source: Field Survey

Note: Samples are only those who responded that performance of household duties was a problem behind their illiteracy.

Diagram 7.3
Samples according to time they spend in Performing Household Duties



Source: Field Survey

7.2.1.3 Society's Attitude as a Reason of Gender Disparity in Literacy Rate:

In most of the Indian societies, males are accorded higher status than females. Dowry system, child marriage, female foeticide and female infanticide, trafficking of

women and forced prostitution, that have been prevailing in India, reflect the status of women in India.

Child marriage is defined by global organisations as a formal marriage or informal union entered into by an individual before reaching the age of 18. In the Indian context, the legally prescribed age of marriage for males is 21 and for females 18. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), factors that promote and reinforce child marriage include poverty and economic survival strategies; gender inequality; sealing land or property deals or settling disputes; control over sexuality and protecting family honour; tradition and culture; and insecurity, particularly during war, famine or epidemics. Other factors include family ties in which marriage is a means of consolidating powerful relations between families. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), girls are disproportionately more affected than boys. The document of UNICEF upon "Ending Child Marriage-Progress and Prospects" in 2013 mentioned that, 720 million women (aged 18 years and older) were married before the age of 18 while only 156 million men (18 years and older) were married before the age of 18. The document also mentioned that child marriage among girls was most common in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa and the 10 countries with the highest rates were found in those two regions. Moreover, the document mentioned that South Asia was home to almost half (42 per cent) of all child brides worldwide and India alone accounted for one third of the global total. Further, the document showed that progress was made over the last three decades and if that rate of progress is sustained, the proportion of women married as children would continue to decrease from 33 per cent in 1985 to 22 per cent by 2030 and to 18 per cent by 2050, but despite gains, this rate of decline is barely fast enough to keep pace with population growth and therefore even if progress continues, the total number of women married as children will still be around 700 million in 2050, although nearly 490 million girls will have avoided early marriage. In addition to all the above information, the document mentioned that child marriage was more common among uneducated women. Child marriage is a manifestation of gender inequality, reflecting social norms that perpetuate discrimination against girls, and child marriage has undesirable consequences on health, education and development of the girls and these consequences last beyond their adolescence (UNICEF).

Female foeticide is the abortion of a female foetus outside of legal channels. Though the Indian Government passed Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act (PCPNDT) in 1994 to ban and punish prenatal sex screening and female foeticide, yet the foetal sex determination and sex selective abortion has not been eliminated. Female infanticide is the killing of a girl child within weeks of her birth. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation of the Government of India in its report on the "State of Children" mentioned that 3 million girl children have gone missing in 2011. It also mentioned that, earlier studies have said, 5 lakhs girls a year go missing in India due to female foeticide in families. Researchers of the Lancet Journal based in Canada and India also stated that 5,00,000 girls were being lost annually through sex selective abortions. According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) India and China were the only two countries in the world where female infant mortality was higher than male infant mortality in 2000s. The UN-DESA also said that an Indian girl child aged 1-5 years was 75 per cent more likely to die than an Indian boy, that made the worst gender differential in child mortality for any country in the world. According to the United Nations Report, high girl child mortality is explained by socio-cultural values.

Dowry is a payment of cash or valuable gifts from the bride's family to the bridegroom upon marriage. In the Modern India, Dowry has become a social problem leading to physical violence on the bride and financial burden and emotional stress on the parents, other family members and relatives of the bride. In spite of the Laws that have been enacted against Dowry in India, harassments and deaths relating to Dowry have been taking place in India.

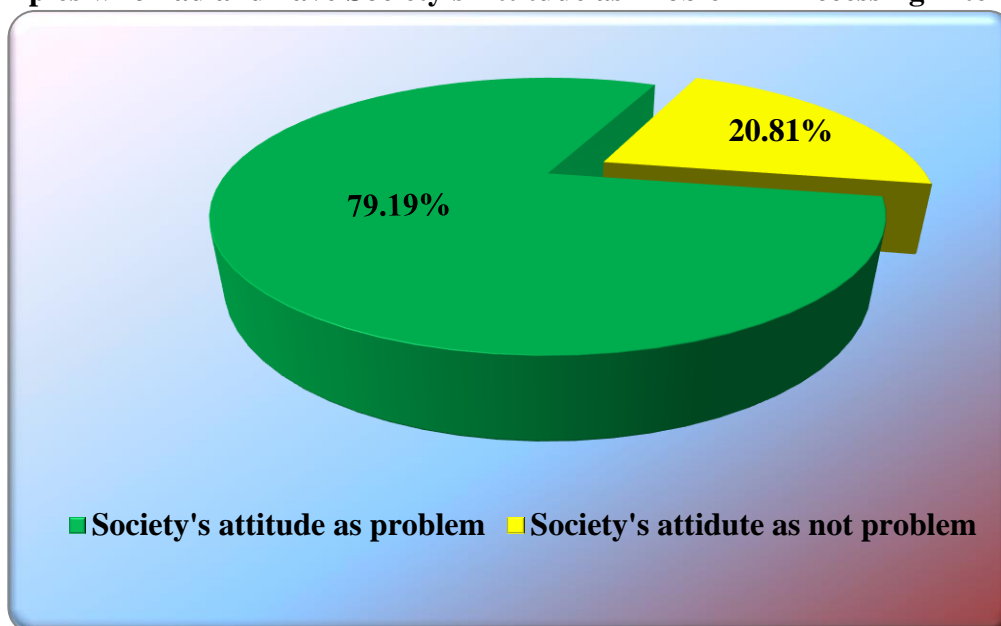
In patriarchal Indian society, that females generally after marriage have to go to their husband's house and that females in many regions and among many societies of India still have no right upon their parents property, all depicts the lower status of females in India.

All the above evils which are obstacle towards bringing gender equity are prevalent in most of the Indian societies. These practices and tradition affect the females in acquiring education either in her childhood or in her older ages. Due to the above mentioned practices and tradition which are not in favour to the females, many parents might consider their girl child as their burden and therefore might decide not

to send their girl child to schools or learning places. They might believe that spending on their girl child is just a wastage of money as they would go to her husband's house after her marriage and that they would not be their security at their old age. Moreover, many Indians of different societies believe that learning at older ages is not fruitful. Smt. Smriti Z. Irani, on 8th September, 2014, the then Union Human Resource Development Minister of India, said "Our endeavour today is to generate public awareness regarding the significance of literacy and learning opportunities and celebrate the success of individuals and groups in the field of adult literacy".

It is found from the field survey that 79.19 per cent of the respondents could not acquire education due to the society's attitude (Table 7.1 and Diagram 7.4). The respondents, who stated positive, informed that their parents along with the society have the view that spending on girl child is just a wastage of money as they will go to her husband's house after her marriage and that she will not be their security at their old age. Further, the respondents who responded positive and were above 15 years informed that their family members and the society believe that learning at older ages is not fruitful and therefore they did not feel important to acquire education but go the way they were.

Diagram 7.4
Samples who had and have Society's Attitude as Problem in Accessing Literacy



Source: Field Survey

Table 7.3
Status of Married Females in the Sample upon age at Marriage and place of living after Marriage

District	Total	Persons/ Percentage	Married	Unmarried	Married before 18 years	Shifted to husband's place after marriage
					Out of total married	
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>
Baksa & Kokrajhar	221	Persons	190	31	126	185
		Percentage	85.97	14.03	66.31	97.37

Source: Field Survey

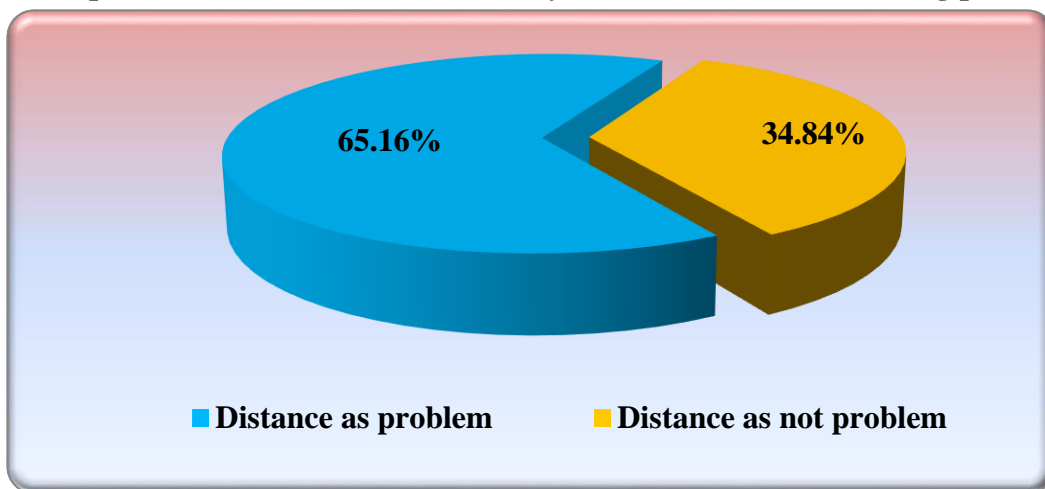
It can be seen from Table 7.3 that majority of the married females in the sample got married before age 18. It is also found from the survey that 97.37 percent of the married females out of the total married females in the sample shifted to their husband's place after marriage.

7.2.1.4 Distance of Learning Place as a Reason of Gender Disparity in Literacy Rate:

Several reasons related to the distance of learning place might be an obstacle for females in acquiring literacy skill. Parents may feel insecure in sending their daughters if the place of learning is far away. They may not decide to send their daughters to learning place if the learning place is far away because of the reason of lesser time on domestic help that she would be able to give. They may not decide to send their daughters to learning place if the learning place is far away because of the reason of transportation cost or higher transportation cost.

As shown in the Table 7.1 and Diagram 7.5, 61.16 per cent of the respondents responded that they had problem with the distance of learning place behind their illiteracy. Further, they also informed that, even now, if they had the chance of learning (literacy skill), they would not prefer to go for leaning in case of the distance being more than 5 km.

Diagram 7.5
Samples who could not Access Literacy due to Distance of Learning place

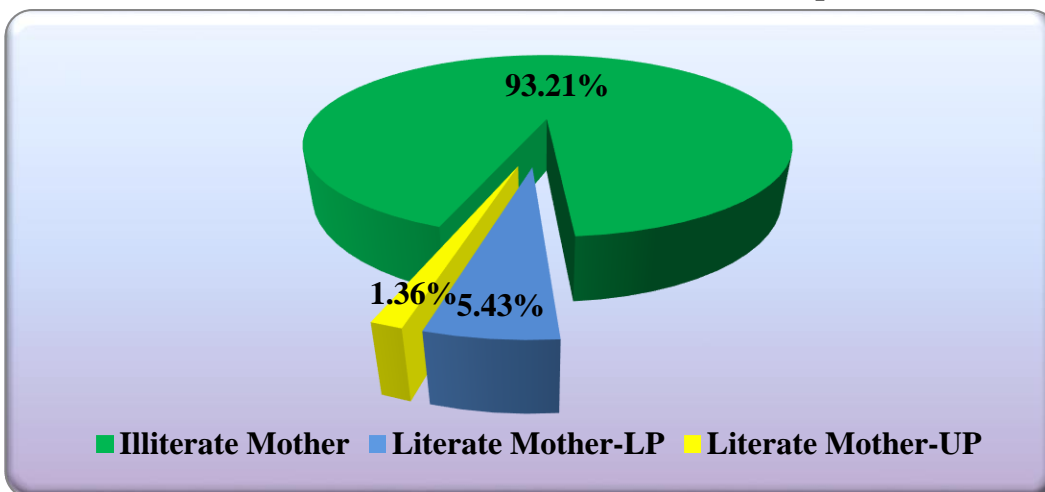


Source: Field Survey

7.2.1.5 Parental Education as a Reason of Gender Disparity in Literacy Rate:

Education not only benefits the individuals but it benefits the family and society as well. More specifically, literacy is an important factor for individual development as well as development of the family and society. Parental education is an important factor behind acquiring education.

Diagram 7.6
Educational status of the Mothers' of the Samples



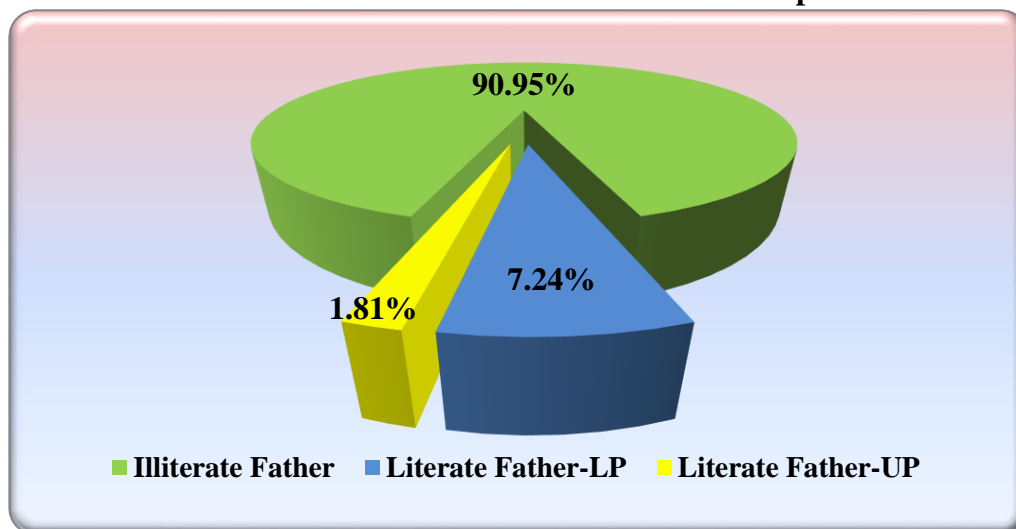
Source: Field Survey

The Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2006, mentions the social benefits of literacy. According to it, the practice of literacy can be instrumental in

people's achievement of a range of capabilities such as maintaining good health and living longer, learning throughout life, controlling reproductive behaviour, raising healthy children and educating them.

As shown in Table 7.1 and diagrams 7.6 and 7.7, the result of the survey reveals that 93.21 per cent of the respondents and 90.95 per cent of the respondents have illiterate mother and father respectively. Therefore, it can be inferred that parental education is important factor in education and therefore it is a reason behind gender disparity in education in Assam and Baksa and Kokrajhar districts in particular.

Diagram 7.7
Educational status of the Fathers' of the Samples



Source: Field Survey

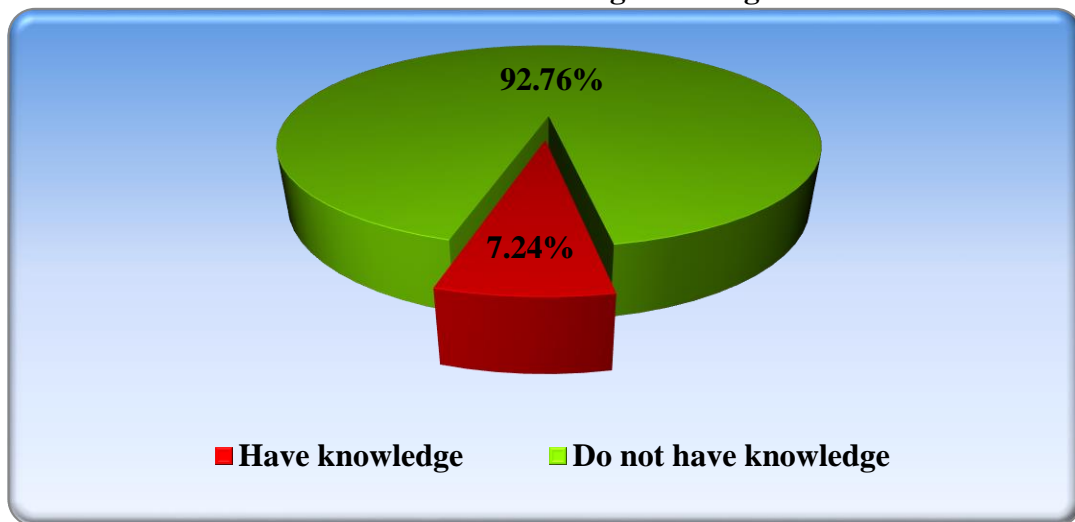
7.2.1.6 Knowledge of Relevance of Literacy or Adult Literacy or Lifelong Learning as a Reason of Gender Disparity in Literacy Rate:

An important factor behind the success of any policy is the cooperation of the people concerned. On the other hand, people's cooperation depends upon the people's knowledge upon the subject. Perhaps lack of knowledge upon the importance of literacy or education may be one of the important reasons behind the inability of many countries to fulfil the Education For All yet. The Incheon Declaration, 2015 has identified the unfulfilled business of Education For All and Millennium Development Goals. Research in a number of different countries and organisation has pointed to

the difficulties of translating broad global ambitions for gender equality in education into action at local level (Unterhalter et al, 2011).

The result of the survey shows that knowledge of the importance of literacy or adult literacy or lifelong learning is an important factor in acquiring literacy skill and therefore it stands as an important reason of gender disparity in literacy rate in Assam and Baksa and Kokrajhar districts. It can be seen from Table 7.1 and Diagram 7.8 that 92.76 per cent of the respondents do not have knowledge of the importance of literacy or adult literacy or lifelong learning.

Diagram 7.8
Samples who do not have Knowledge of Relevance of Literacy or Adult Education or Lifelong Learning



Source: Field Survey

7.2.2 Means to Reduce the Gender Disparity in Literacy Rate in Assam with Special Reference to Baksa and Kokrajhar Districts:

On finding out the reasons of gender disparity in literacy rate in Assam with special reference to Baksa and Kokrajhar districts, means to reduce the gap have been suggested in this section. The following are some means to reduce the gender disparity in literacy rate in Assam with special reference to Baksa and Kokrajhar districts:

7.2.2.1 Raising Poor Households' Income:

Low household income is found to be an important factor behind gender disparity in literacy rate as seen from the field survey. Therefore, uplifting the economic position of the households will contribute in reducing gender disparity in literacy rate. Although the Government has taken various policies to uplift the economically poor people, a sea change in the percentage of poverty has not occurred in Assam. Still a good percentage of poverty can be observed in India as a whole as well as in Assam. Therefore new policies that raise poor peoples' income or poor households' income should be taken up. Along with it, strategies for proper implementation of the existing policies as well as new policies should be taken up.

7.2.2.2 Establishing more Learning Places:

Distance is found as another reason of gender disparity in literacy rate. Therefore more centres for learning need to be opened up. More number of lower primary, upper primary, secondary, higher secondary, under graduate, distance learning and adult literacy institutions should be opened up, so that many people, specially females, do not remain far away from education due to performance of household duties or the matter of security or time problem or age problem.

7.2.2.3 Financial Aid by Government in Education:

It is found that, poverty played an important role in the variation in literacy rate across Assam (chapter 4, Table 4.34). Moreover, it is also found that household income is an important factor of gender disparity in literacy rate. Therefore in an attempt to reduce gender disparity in literacy rate, government's financial support in education to the poor is important. In a household, when the question of acquiring education either by male or female arises, due to low income of the household, male get preference. Moreover, government's aid would at least attract or support many poor people including females to acquire education. Therefore, government's financial aid deems important in an attempt to reduce gender disparity in literacy rate. Government's support may occur in many forms such as free books, free uniforms, free admission fee etc.

7.2.2.4 Motivation:

The study has found that knowledge of the relevance of literacy or adult literacy or lifelong learning is an important factor behind gender disparity in literacy rate in Assam and Baksa and Kokrajhar districts. Moreover, behind the success of any policy, knowledge about the subject by the concerned people is important. Therefore in order to reduce the gender disparity in literacy rate, motivation of the people is important. In the name of motivation, relevance of literacy, adult literacy, lifelong learning and literacy and women empowerment should be widely communicated. The success of the goal of eliminating gender disparity in education largely depends on it. Males as well as females should be motivated so that gender disparity of either males being unfavourable or females being unfavourable in education does not arise in future. To motivate the people, government, Non Governmental Organizations, Women organisations, Youth organisations etc. can come forward.

7.2.2.5 Data on Providing Learning:

In the case of providing learning, there need to be monitoring and gathering of data and reporting to the authority so as to examine whether policies are working or not for the target groups or individuals, place and the way it has to be.

7.3 Conclusion:

An attempt has been made in this chapter to find out the reasons of gender disparity in education and means to reduce the gap in Assam with special reference to Baksa and Kokrajhar districts.

In a nutshell, low income of household, performance of household duties, society's attitude, parents educational status and knowledge of the relevance of literacy or adult literacy or lifelong learning are found to be important factors behind gender disparity in literacy rate in Assam and Baksa and Kokrajhar districts. In order to eliminate gender disparity in literacy rate, raising poor households' income, establishing more learning places that meet the requirement of people belonging to different ages and places, financial support of government in education and motivation need to be taken up.

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