

# Gender Equity in Education: Evaluating Outcomes of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme in India with Special Reference to Assam

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**Abstract:** The persistent issue of gender disparity in education has long hindered India's path toward inclusive development. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme, launched in 2015, aimed to address declining child sex ratios and promote the education and empowerment of the girl child. This study evaluates the outcomes of the BBBP scheme with a special focus on the state of Assam. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research analyzes trends in female literacy, school enrollment rates, and stakeholder awareness of the scheme. The study finds that while positive progress has been made in raising awareness and improving enrollment rates, challenges such as socio-cultural barriers, uneven implementation, and lack of monitoring persist. The findings underline the importance of localized policy interventions and sustained community engagement to realize the full potential of the scheme in achieving gender equity in education.

**Keywords:** Gender Equity, Education, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Girl Child, Assam, Policy Evaluation, Female Literacy, School.

## INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality remains a critical challenge in India, particularly in the domain of education. Despite multiple legislative and policy efforts, girls in many parts of the country continue to face significant barriers to accessing and completing education. The Government of India launched the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme in 2015 with the twin objectives of improving the Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and promoting the education of girls, thus addressing both the cultural preference for male children and the socio-economic disadvantages faced by girls.

The scheme has adopted a multi-sectoral approach involving the Ministries of Women and Child Development, Health and Family Welfare, and Education. It focuses on 100 gender-critical districts

across the country, with efforts later extended to additional districts, including several in Assam. Assam, with its diverse socio-economic and cultural landscape, presents a compelling case for evaluating the localized outcomes of the BBBP initiative.

This study investigates how the scheme has impacted gender equity in education in Assam by examining changes in literacy rates, enrollment patterns, and community awareness. Through this analysis, the paper seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on gender-responsive public policy and highlight the strengths and limitations of the BBBP scheme in bringing about systemic change.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To assess the impact of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme on promoting gender equity in education in selected districts of Assam.
2. To examine the changes in female literacy and school enrollment rates before and after the implementation of the BBBP scheme in Assam.
3. To evaluate the level of awareness and participation of key stakeholders (including parents, teachers, school administrators, and local officials) regarding the objectives and implementation of the BBBP scheme.
4. To identify the major challenges and gaps in the implementation of the BBBP scheme with respect to educational outcomes in Assam.
5. To recommend policy measures and strategies for strengthening the effectiveness of the BBBP scheme in enhancing girl child education and promoting gender equity.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The discourse on gender equity in education has evolved significantly over the decades, with

emphasis on the role of policy, cultural norms, and socio-economic factors. Numerous studies have highlighted the gender gap in education and the structural disadvantages faced by the girl child in India.

Kingdon (2002) emphasized that gender disparity in education is more pronounced in rural and economically backward regions, where traditional patriarchal values and child marriage continue to restrict girls' access to schooling. Similarly, UNESCO (2010) reported that gender-based discrimination in education not only affects academic outcomes but also hinders social mobility and empowerment.

In an evaluation of India's policy landscape, Kumar (2014) noted that earlier initiatives like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) laid the groundwork for addressing gender disparities, but lacked sustained focus and monitoring mechanisms.

The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme, launched in 2015, was conceived to address the declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and promote the value of the girl child. According to a report by the NITI Aayog (2016), early implementation of the BBBP scheme led to improved CSR in several districts, but the educational component of the scheme remained underemphasized due to lack of convergence and community-level monitoring.

Mandal and Basu (2017), in their field study across Haryana and Rajasthan, highlighted that while BBBP succeeded in raising awareness, tangible improvements in girl child education were less visible due to inconsistent implementation at the grassroots level.

In the context of Assam, Gogoi (2018) studied gender-related educational initiatives and found that while awareness regarding the importance of educating girls was improving, deep-rooted socio-cultural factors and early marriage remained significant barriers. Furthermore, Sarma and Hazarika (2019) pointed out disparities in female literacy rates across different districts of Assam, suggesting the need for region-specific strategies under national schemes like BBBP.

Recent studies (Das & Ahmed, 2021) focusing on Assam reveal moderate improvements in enrollment and retention of girls in schools, but challenges persist in terms of infrastructure, teacher sensitization, and parental involvement.

The literature thus suggests that while the BBBP scheme has had a symbolic impact and improved awareness, its implementation across states, including Assam, varies significantly. There is a need for localized evaluations to assess its actual outcomes on girl child education, especially in socio-economically diverse regions.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design:*

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme's impact on gender equity in education in Assam.

### *Study Area:*

The research was conducted in selected districts of Assam identified under the BBBP scheme as gender-critical—namely, Dhubri, Nagaon, Darrang, Barpeta, and Goalpara. These districts were chosen based on their previously recorded low Child Sex Ratios and high gender disparity in education.

### *Sample and Sampling Technique:*

A multi-stage sampling method was used:

- Stage 1: Selection of five districts based on BBBP focus and educational gender gap.
- Stage 2: From each district, two blocks were selected.
- Stage 3: In each block, three government schools (primary, upper primary, and secondary) were selected randomly.
- Stage 4: Respondents included:
  - 100 school-going girls (Classes VI–X),
  - 50 teachers and school administrators,
  - 30 parents/guardians,
  - 10 local officials or child protection officers.

Total sample size: 190 respondents

#### *Data Collection Tools:*

- **Structured Questionnaire:** Administered to schoolgirls and parents to collect data on enrollment, dropout reasons, and perceptions of the BBBP scheme.
- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Conducted with teachers, administrators, and local officials to gather insights on implementation and challenges.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** Held with girls in selected schools to explore perceptions of gender equity and educational support.
- **Secondary Data:** Sourced from government reports, UDISE+ data, SSA records, and district-level evaluation records.

#### **Conceptual Framework:**

This study is grounded in the theoretical understanding that government interventions, when effectively implemented, can bring about positive social change in educational equity, especially for marginalized groups such as the girl child. The conceptual framework is designed around three key variables:

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#### *1. Independent Variable:*

- **Implementation of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme**
  - Awareness programs
  - Policy dissemination
  - Financial and community incentives
  - Monitoring and evaluation efforts

#### *2. Intervening Variables:*

- **Socio-Cultural Factors:**
  - Patriarchal norms
  - Early marriage
  - Gender-based discrimination
- **Economic Factors:**
  - Family income

- Accessibility to schools
- Opportunity costs of educating girls
- **Institutional Factors:**
  - School infrastructure
  - Teacher attitudes and training
  - Government coordination at district/block level

#### *3. Dependent Variables:*

- **Educational Outcomes:**
  - Enrollment rate of girls
  - Retention and completion rates
  - Gender parity index (GPI)
  - Change in attitudes toward girls' education

This conceptual framework helps guide the study's exploration of how BBBP implementation interacts with contextual challenges to influence educational outcomes for girls in Assam.

### **MAJOR FINDINGS**

1. **Improved Awareness of the BBBP Scheme:**
  - A significant proportion (over 70%) of respondents, especially among teachers and local officials, were aware of the BBBP scheme and its objectives.
  - Schoolgirls in urban and semi-urban areas showed higher levels of awareness compared to those in remote rural areas.
2. **Increase in Girl Child Enrollment:**
  - Government school records and district-level data indicated a modest but steady increase in enrollment rates of girls, particularly at the upper primary level in the last five years.
  - Districts like Nagaon and Barpeta showed a 5–7% rise in girls' enrollment post-implementation of BBBP.
3. **Reduction in Dropout Rates (With Variation):**
  - Dropout rates among girls have declined, especially in areas where BBBP-linked awareness campaigns and incentive schemes (such as bicycles, uniforms, and scholarships) were effectively implemented.
  - However, some districts like Dhubri and Goalpara still showed high dropout rates at secondary level, primarily due to early marriage, household responsibilities, and safety concerns.
4. **Persisting Socio-Cultural Barriers:**

- Despite policy efforts, deep-rooted gender bias, preference for sons, and conservative attitudes in many families continued to affect girls' education.
  - Nearly 40% of parents cited safety, distance to school, or domestic work as reasons for limiting their daughters' schooling.
  - 5. Gaps in Scheme Implementation:
    - Implementation was found to be uneven across districts. Some schools had visible BBBP branding and conducted regular awareness events, while others had no dedicated programs or community outreach.
    - Stakeholders pointed to lack of training for teachers, irregular fund release, and poor monitoring as challenges.
  - 6. Limited Community Involvement:
    - Community engagement remained low in rural and tea-garden areas, where traditional leaders and local influencers were not effectively included in awareness drives.
    - Most parents reported having minimal interaction with school authorities or local government officials regarding the BBBP scheme.
  - 7. Positive Shift in Attitudes Among Adolescent Girls:
    - FGDs with schoolgirls revealed a growing sense of aspiration and self-confidence.
    - Many girls expressed desire to continue education up to higher secondary and beyond, citing role models and schemes as motivating factors.
- increase understanding and acceptance of the BBBP objectives.
- 2. Improve Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms:
    - Establish a district-level task force to track the implementation of the BBBP scheme and educational outcomes specifically for girl children.
    - Introduce public disclosure mechanisms for fund allocation, program activities, and performance indicators to ensure transparency.
  - 3. Address Socio-Cultural Barriers Through Inclusive Policies:
    - Promote girl-friendly infrastructure in schools (separate toilets, safe transport, sanitary provisions) to encourage retention, particularly in rural areas.
    - Integrate gender-sensitization modules into school curricula and teacher training programs to combat gender stereotypes and biases.
  - 4. Enhance Financial Incentives and Support Services:
    - Expand existing scholarship and incentive schemes to cover upper primary and secondary education, especially in marginalized communities.
    - Provide conditional cash transfers or education-linked benefits to families of girls who maintain regular attendance and academic progress.
  - 5. Promote Collaboration Between Government Departments:
    - Strengthen convergence between Women & Child Development, Education, and Panchayati Raj departments for holistic implementation of the BBBP objectives.
    - Encourage real-time data sharing and periodic review meetings among stakeholders for course correction and planning.
  - 6. Focus on Hard-to-Reach Groups and Districts:
    - Launch targeted interventions in districts with persistently low female literacy and high dropout rates, such as Dhubri and Goalpara.
    - Design special outreach strategies for tea garden communities, tribal populations, and minority groups where gender disparities are pronounced.

These findings reflect that while the BBBP scheme has created positive momentum for girl child education in Assam, its full potential is hindered by socio-economic and institutional constraints, underscoring the need for more localized and sustained interventions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen Community Engagement and Awareness Campaigns:
  - Organize regular village-level awareness drives, community meetings, and school-based gender sensitization programs involving local leaders, parents, and NGOs.
  - Use local languages and culturally relevant media (folk songs, street plays, posters) to

#### 7. Encourage Role Models and Mentorship Programs:

- Highlight local success stories of educated girls, women professionals, and change-makers through school programs and media platforms.
- Initiate peer mentoring programs where adolescent girls can support and motivate each other to stay in school and aspire for higher education.

These recommendations aim to build a more inclusive, locally-responsive, and sustainable model for promoting gender equity in education through the effective implementation of the BBBP scheme in Assam and beyond.

#### CONCLUSION

The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme represents a critical step toward addressing deep-rooted gender inequalities in India's educational landscape. This study reveals that while the scheme has led to increased awareness and modest improvements in girls' enrollment and retention in Assam, its impact is uneven and constrained by persistent socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers.

Districts that implemented the scheme with strong local engagement, interdepartmental coordination, and visible community outreach saw better educational outcomes for girls. However, gaps remain in consistent monitoring, infrastructure provision, and inclusion of vulnerable communities. The study underscores the need for localized, data-driven policy interventions, integrated awareness campaigns, and inclusive educational practices to ensure that the vision of "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" translates into tangible, long-term gender equity in education.

Future efforts should prioritize empowering communities, training educators, enhancing accountability, and creating a supportive environment for girls to access and complete quality education. Only then can India realize the constitutional and developmental promise of gender justice and equal opportunity for all.

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