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**GENDER SOCIALIZATION AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS: A STUDY OF THE GIRLS STUDENTS OF ASSAM**

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**ABSTRACT**

The present study has attempted to explore the influence of parents in the gender socialization of girl students and the impact of the gender socialization process on the career aspirations of those girl students. Parents are found to be playing an influencing role in teachings the gender-related or gender differentiated activities to their children from the time of their birth. It is the parents that teach gender roles to their children at very beginning of their childhood period. And, by learning these gender roles and gender expected behaviours, they have developed perception about the various aspects related to them like educational as well as occupational possibilities. In this way, the parents have direct or indirect influence up on their children's career choices and aspirations too. In the present study, the required data have been collected from the higher secondary first students of selected girls' colleges of Assam. Here, total 400 respondents have been collected from the selected colleges. In order to collect data, self-structured interview schedule has been employed. Apart from this, observation methods, as well as case study have also been employed to collect in depth data from the respondents. The results of the study reveal that the girl respondents in the study are mostly gender socialized by their parents and it has influenced their career aspirations too.

**Keywords:** Gender, Socialization, Gender Socialization, Career, Career aspirations, etc.

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## INTRODUCTION

From the time of the birth an individual is molded by the society in the way the society expect the individual to be. With the growth of the age, an individual child develops a sense about themselves and their expected roles in the society. This development occurs due to the process of socialization, which is considered as a way of social learning. Through this process a child develops into an individual who learn to respect the laws, rules, norms and customs of his surroundings or environment. Here, the child develops different behaviours according to his or her specific gender. A society sets different roles for both the genders. The concept of 'gender' is generally concerned with a set of social practices that influence the lives of both male and female. Here we can mention the definition of gender by Greenglass (1982). According to him, the term 'sex' generally refers to the biological status of an individual, whereas, the term 'gender' refers to the sociological or the cultural status of that individual. Giddens has also stated that gender is the psychological, social and cultural aspects of the male and female. As we have stated earlier in this study that children learn different social norms, rules and regulations and behaviours accepted by the society through the process of socialization. The gender socialization process is more specific form of socialization process. It is the process of learning social expectations and attitudes associated with the sex of the individual. According to Wharton (2005), it is the process with the help of which an individual take on the gendered qualities and characteristics and also learn the expected behaviors of the society from the individual as male and female. Looft (1971) said that because of this gender socialization process, girls generally use to perform those activities which reflect the social sex-role expectations. In our society, during the process of an individual child's development from childhood to adolescence, he or she can be exposed to different kinds of sex-differentiated activities. And these activities lead them to learn their gender roles. These activities and experiences can be termed as gender socialization. There are several different factors which play important role in the gender socialization of an individual. These include home, peer group, school, community, media, etc. And, according to Thorne (1993), in the family, it is the parents who are the first one to teach their children the meaning of being a male or female.

Due to the gender socialization of children at an early stage of life, girls mainly prefer to choose those careers which conform to the cultural stereotypes of female occupation. Adya & Kaiser (2005) have stated that it is the parents who play the significant role in the career choice of children. We have stated earlier in this paper that due to gender socialization, girls are found to be more confined to the household activities. It also has influenced in their educational as well as occupational domains. The gender socialization process and the cultural expectations related to it greatly influence up on the choices of various disciplines, occupational fields, etc. In this present paper, an attempt has been made to explore the influence of parents in the gender socialization of girl students and the impact of the gender socialization process on the career aspirations of those girl students.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In a Patriarchal society that females are always found to be considered as a subject of exploitation by their male counterparts in every sphere of her life. In India, the patriarchal social structures and ideologies have given precedence to men over women, who have great influence upon every aspect of Indian women's life including career choice and implementation (Mukhopadhyay and Seymour, 1994<sup>1</sup>). In order to come out from such exploitation females need proper education facilities and the right to choose the career of their choice so that they

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<sup>1</sup> Mukhopadhyay, C.C. & Seymour, S. Women, education and family structure in India. West View Press.

can become economically sound. It is assumed that when females get the right to make their own decision, their rate of oppression could be come down. Some Government and non-government institutions have come up with various career counseling programmes in order to increase the awareness and proper education for choosing a right career. But, due to several drawbacks these programmes are not properly implemented. Moreover, the number of female participation in those programmes is also not satisfactory. The main cause of low participation of females in career related activities are due to the dominance of the Patriarchy society. Moreover, when they put their career interest first, they may experience the feelings of guilt or selfishness (Heins, et al, 1982). They are socialized in such a way on which society accept them. In spite of such prejudices and biasness prevailing in the Patriarchy society, a large number of females have come forward to choose their careers of their choice and aspire to choose careers of higher status. However, they have to continue their traditional role simultaneously with their careers. Today, Indian women have entered into modern workforce like BPO (business process outsourcing), bartending, taxi drivers, etc. However, according to the Census of India 2011, Indian women who comprise 48% of the total population of the country, cover only 25% of the country's total workforce.

A number of studies have been conducted on career choice and gender influence. However, in the specific context of Assam, fewer works have been done till now. Hence, this study can be considered as significant in terms of exploring the specific ways in which gender socialization affects girls in their career aspirations. Furthermore, the study also intends to explore the types and levels of various career aspirations of girl in Assam. It will also investigate the role of gendered social and cultural position of girls and how gender Socialization put as a hindrance on girl students' career aspiration. This study will explore how they deal with the problems they face in their career aspirations. Hence, it can certainly be stated that this study is significant from sociological point of view.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The followings are the main limitations of the present study:

- (i) The present study is confined to the girl students studying in the girls' colleges of upper Assam, in Science and Arts streams only. There is scope for further research including the commerce stream also.
- (ii) The present study includes limited numbers of career options only. There is scope for study including the vast arena of career options available in the world.
- (iii) As the present study is confined with only the girl students as respondents, therefore, a comparative study is highly required to understand the influence of gender socialization on career aspirations of girls. So, here in this study, both male and female students should have been considered as sample.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

Considering the various factors and issues evaluated in the above discussions, the following has been taking up as the objectives of the study-

- (i) To investigate the socio-economic background of girl students.
- (ii) To explore the types and levels of career aspirations of girl students.
- (iii) To find out the main reasons for choosing their own careers.
- (iv) To explore whether any relationship exists between parents' role and career aspiration of girl students.

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## HYPOTHESIS

This proposed study follows exploratory research design. In exploratory research, hypothesis formulation is not an essential element of research process because the researcher's goal is to discover important and significant aspects of the research problem at hand without assuming about the problem prior to the research process. Hence, in this proposed study, no hypothesis has been formulated.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study includes the girl students studying in the higher secondary first year in the girls' colleges of Upper Assam<sup>2</sup>. Students at this level of their education belong to the adolescent stage, which is considered as the most significant stage of human life which covers the age group of 12 to 19 years of age (Chauhan, 1978). It is also an ideal stage for studying the career developments of the young minds. During this stage, significant changes occur in human lives that can affect the career preferences and aspirations too along with the other important aspects of their lives. This stage is especially significant for the girls as they attain puberty at this particular stage and thus the emergence of sexuality develops the escalation of gender role identity in them (Watson, 2002).

In order to conduct the study, the researcher has selected the following eight girls' colleges from five districts of Upper Assam- Hem Prova Barooah Girls' College (Golaghat), Devi Charan Baruah Girls' College (Jorhat), Sibsagar Girls' College and Moran Mahila Mahavidyalay of Sivasagar, Manohari Devi Kanoi Girls' College and Duliajan Girls' College of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia Women's College and Digboi Women's College of Tinsukia district. The rationale for taking these five districts is geographical proximity. All these five districts are situated in Upper Assam and have separate colleges for girl students. These eight colleges selected for the study are under Dibrugarh University, which is the second university in Assam, established in 1965.

The respondents of the study have been selected on the basis of purposive sampling method. There are about 1000 girl students enrolled in higher secondary first year classes of the above mentioned colleges. Girl students from each college were randomly selected as samples for the study. It has been considered in the study that 40% sample would be representative and significant for drawing out the conclusion of the study. Thus, total 400 girl students studying in higher secondary first year classes of those above mentioned colleges have been selected as sample for this study. The required data have been collected both from primary and secondary sources. The primary data have been collected with the help of semi-structured interview schedule, observation, and case study method. The secondary data have been collected from books, journals, official records, websites, etc. For this present research work, exploratory method has been employed.

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS OF THE RESPONDENTS

According to the American Psychological Association (2016)<sup>3</sup>, the socio-economic background have significant influence upon the personality, behaviour and all round development of the individual and also on the quality of life for children, youth and families.

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<sup>2</sup> Upper Assam is an administrative division of Assam. It is comprised of Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sibsagar and Tinsukia districts. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/Upper\\_Assam\\_Division](https://en.wikipedia.org/Upper_Assam_Division))

<sup>3</sup> American Psychological Association, (2016), Children, youth, families and socio-economic status. America (<http://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/children-families.aspx>)

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Domenico & Jones (2007) and Mau & Bikos (2000) have also stated that the socio-economic background of the family plays an important role in the career aspirations of an individual.

It has been found in the study that majority of the respondents in this study belong to O.B.C. category and most of them aspire for teaching career. Among the General and M.O.B.C. category also the number of respondents aspiring for teaching career is highest. Politics is the least aspired career by the respondents. Respondents belonging to O.B.C. (1.1%), General (1.04%) and S.C. (5.5%) are only found to be aspiring for this career.

In this present study most of the respondents belong to Hinduism, whereas, only a meager number of respondents belong to Christianity. Among the Hindu and Islam respondents the most aspired career is teaching. Respondents belonging to Jainism are found to be most aspiring for business as career. It has also been found in the study that more or less numbers of respondents from every religion are aspiring for administrative career.

Among the rural respondents of the study, most of them aspire for teaching career. However, in case of the urban respondents, administrative career is most aspired by them. Among the semi-urban respondents, business and self-employment are found to be the most aspired career by the respondents. In comparison to the urban respondents, it has been found in the study that the number of respondents aspiring for politics as career is higher.

It has been found in the study that among the lower income group of respondents, teaching is the mostly aspired career. In this group 2 respondents are found who are willing to choose player as their career. In case of the higher income groups, teaching as well as administrative is found to be most aspired career. This group has least aspirations towards politics as career. They aspire for careers like air-hostess, hotel management, mass-communication, etc.

### **GENDER SOCIALIZATION AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS OF THE RESPONDENTS**

It has been found out in this study that out of the total 400 respondents, almost half of the respondents, i.e. 49.25% are taught gender teachings by parents as girl at home. Out of these respondents, highest numbers of them, i.e. 85 (43.14%) prefer teaching career. 285, i.e. 71.25% of the total 400 respondents are trained by their parents to do household activities. Most of these respondents, i.e. 40.3% prefer teaching as their career. It has also been noticed in the study that 60% of the total respondents are found to have developed gender identity in them. Most of the respondents are found to have developed shyness because of the teachings of gender identity at home. Moreover, 231, i.e. 57.75% respondents are also found to have developed anxieties due to gender teachings at home. They found it difficult to meet new people.

It has also been found in the study that 228, i.e. 57% of the total 400 respondents in the study are suggested by their parents to dress differently as a girl. Most of them, i.e. 119 respondents are suggested to dress according to the norms of the society. And, it has also been found that 93 (23.25%) are suggested to cover their body. However, it has also been noticed that some of the parents want their daughters to dress according to their comfort (106 respondents) and to dress according to new trend (82 respondents). Here, only 125 (31.25%) respondents think that the way one dress can have effect on their career development. The rest of them do not think that way of dress have any effect on girl's career.

It has further been noticed that 193 (48.25%) of the respondents want to find any kind of employment immediately after completing their education. However, it has also been found in the same study that 12 (3%) respondents want to get married immediately after completing their education.

In the present study, it has been asked to the respondents, whether they were happy to identify themselves as a girl during their early childhood stage. It has been found in response to this question that 84 (21%) respondents were not happy to identify themselves as girl during

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their childhood. Among them, 34 (40.5%) were not happy because they were not allowed to move freely outside home. 9.5% of them were discriminated by their parents with their brothers, 7% respondents were not allowed to play with their male friends. Parents are found to be discriminative towards their daughters in this study. It has been found that out of the total 400 respondents, 122 (30.5%) are treated differently by their parents in comparison to that of the male members in the family. It has also been found that 37 (30.3%) are treated differently in case of doing household activities. Here, 22 (18%) respondents are found to be discriminated in terms of getting nutritious foods by their parents.

Regarding puberty attainment of girls, our society is always found to be traditional. It has been also found in this study that 252 (63%) respondents are compelled to behave according to the expectations of the society after attaining puberty. And, most of the respondents are compelled by their mothers only. Moreover, most of these respondents, i.e. 289 (72.25%) respondents are not allowed by their parents to attend college during their menstruation days. Girls are also found to be hesitating in mixing up with others during those days, avoiding activities outside home as a rule of the society, and other reasons like weakness, laziness, heavy bleeding, etc.

Here, although girls are found to be gender socialized at home by parents with the help of various gender teachings, but, 318 (79.5%) respondents are found to be provided equal opportunities with male members of the family in pursuing their formal education. However, among the rest of the respondents, most of them are not provided financial support, parental guidance, etc. Regarding their career aspirations, it has been found that out of total 400 respondents, 190, i.e. 47.5% will adhere to the customs of the society in terms of their career aspirations. Most of them (41.6%) state that they will involve in those careers which do not require much travelling. It has also been noticed that 34.7% respondents do not want to work with male members in terms of their career.

Among the total respondents only 25.75% believe that they do not have complete ability to involve in any career in this present study.

The following two case studies illustrate the above-mentioned points clearly:

#### CASE STUDY: 1

The respondent 'X' is a 16 years old girl and belongs to the Other Backward Class. She studies in higher secondary first year and her stream of education is Arts. Her father is a small businessman and mother is a housewife. She lives with her parents and elder sister, which is a nuclear family. She has been taught to act like girl in every task, for example, talking in a sweet voice, behaving politely, etc. Moreover, she along with her sister has been taught to do activities like cooking food, washing clothes, etc. from an early stage. And, thus spends most of the time inside the home, except going to the college. She has stated that she wants to go out with her friends to watch movies, restaurants, etc. But her parents do not allow doing so. The respondent has admitted that she has shyness to meet new people and cannot take the risk of starting a new work. She aspires for a career in business by establishing a beauty parlour of her own. However, her shyness has created a blockade in path of her career development. She knows that she has to take training of beautician course. But she states that she feels extremely shy to go to a completely new group of people for this purpose.

#### CASE STUDY: 2

The respondent 'Y' is a 15 years old girl student studying in the Science stream in higher secondary first year. The respondent lives in college hostel. Her family lives in a semi-urban area. Her father is a government employee and her mother is a college teacher. She has an elder brother who is studying engineering. The respondent states that she wants to become an A.C.S. officer. However, she states that she is not being able to involve herself completely in the

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preparation for that particular career, as she is unsure of her success in that career. Moreover, it requires in depth and broad study of various subject matters. She states that as a girl she may not be able to give much time for the preparation of that career. As she has to do all the household activities, therefore, she does not get time for study. And, as a result she is not being able to decide anything regarding her future career.

### CASE STUDY: 3

The respondent 'Z' is a 16 years old girl belonging to the general caste that is from Science stream and studying in higher secondary first year. She lives with her parents in a nuclear family. She has one younger brother and one younger sister. Her father is an advocate and her mother is a school teacher. However, she has admitted that she has an anxiety problem in talking to new people and starting new work. As her parents are working people, therefore, she has to take responsibility of looking after her younger brother and sister. Moreover, she also has to help her mother in doing household activities. As a result she has to spend most of the time inside the home and thus has little contact with others like neighbours, seniors, etc. She aspires for a teaching career like her mother. But she fears that her anxiety may hamper her career development. She always has the fear of not being able to study properly and complete her course. Moreover, she stated that she feels terrible to stay away from home and stay in a hostel for her masters in the future. She has to spend a lot of time in looking after her brother and sister. This has created anxiety in her mind. And, therefore, she feels anxious to talk to new people and start new work by anticipating the consequences.

### **CONCLUSION**

It is clearly understandable from the findings of the study that in our society, there is a close relationship between the process of gender socialization and career aspirations of girls. In this study, the exposure of the girls to the teachings of gender identity has influenced their career aspirations. Here, half of the girls are gender socialized by their parents at home. Here, their mother plays the most significant role. And, regarding career aspirations also it has been found that most of the respondents prefer teaching as their future career. It has to be mentioned here that most of the girls in the study have stated that teaching, along with nursing, has been feminized. Development of certain personality traits like anxiety, shyness, boredom, etc. due to gender socialization by parents has a direct or indirect effect on the career aspirations of the individual. Girls are found to be insecure, inferior, etc. in terms of choosing a particular career and its related responsibilities. Performance of household activities like cooking, washing clothes, cleaning the house, etc. are found to be an integral part of the girls' life. Moreover, the restrictions that have come from the parents' side regarding their free movement, along with the other gender teachings like not to mix up with male members, keep calm and not to speak in a louder voice as girls do not do so, etc. have developed various personality traits that have hampered the career aspirations of the respondents. Here, it has been noticed that most of the girls are provided equal educational opportunities by their parents along with their brothers. That means, providing only educational opportunity only cannot help the girl students in their aspirations of a career. Here, the girls are required to be socially aware, confident enough, and also to be aware of the various opportunities available to them in terms of their career choices.

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