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### **Women Education and Rural Economic Development of the Muslims Community of India. Special Reference to Assam**

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#### **Abstract:**

*The present paper aims to analyse the state wise educational status of Muslims in India. It also aims to compare the educational status of Muslims with the educational status of other religious communities in India. The country level and state level published data have been obtained from census of India. At the same time the association between the educational statuses of Muslims is sought with their socio-economic development. The results have revealed that the educational status of Muslims in India is not satisfactory and needs special attention. It is found that more than half i.e., 53.95 per cent of the total population of the Muslims in India is illiterate with 17.48 per cent literate people just for the name sake only. Technical education or higher education is meager among the Muslims. From the results it is also clear that Muslims who accounts for 13.46 per cent of the total population of the nation show lowest literacy rate, lowest percentage of higher education and lowest degree of female education. The percentage of higher education, sex ratio and female literacy rate is also highest in this religious community.*

*In this paper, a case study has been done on the present women educational status of the Muslims community of Assam along with the problems associated with it and the role of women in upliftment of the rural economy of Assam. An attempt has been made to study in details the present women educational status of the Muslims community of Assam, problem associated with it, the role of Muslims women in economic activities and the way to uplift the rural economy of Assam through active participation of women by educationally empowering the women section of the community.*

**Keywords: Women Education, Development, Muslims, Religious Communities, Income, Poverty**

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**Introduction:** Education is one of the significant social indicators having bearing on the achievement and the growth of an individual as well as community. This is perceived to be highly suitable for providing employment and, thereby, improving the quality of life, the level of human well-being and access to basic social services (Misra, 2007). The progress and all-round development of a country depends upon harnessing the skills and abilities of all sections Socio-Economic Development of Muslim Women of society, regardless of

caste, creed, religion and sex. Women have been discriminated against for ages and they have not been given equal opportunities in many social, economic and cultural spheres. If we do not involve women in development activities, it not merely obstructs their own development, but also affects the progress of the entire nation. The status of women could be the best indicator of a nation's progress. Women's active role is regarded as an integral part of a progressive social system.

Education is a key indicator of human development and is included in the commonly used Human Development Indices, such as those developed by the UNDP. These indices focus on enrolment at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. So far as the minorities in India are concerned, Muslims are the largest minority in the country. Majority of this community is educationally and economically extremely backward. Almost all other minorities are educationally and economically better-off. Unfortunately, Muslims have not been able to get their due share in total welfare work done by the government, for economically weaker sections of the society in the country since Independence. Different governments appointed committees from time-to-time to find out the causes of educational and economical backwardness of Muslims like Hunter Commission (1870), Gopal Singh Committee Report (1983) and the latest one is the Sachar Committee (2006) (Ahmad, 2012).

**Educational Status of Muslim Women in India:** Educationally, Muslims comprise one of the most backward communities in the country. Muslim girls and women lag behind their male counterparts and women of all other communities. According to Census 2001, the literacy rate among Muslims (59.1%) was far below the National average (65.1%) and other socio-religious-communities (70.8%). The Muslim female literacy rate was 50.1 per cent below the Muslim male literacy rate (Census, 2001) many as 25 per cent of Muslim children in the age group of 6-14 year have either never attended school or has dropped out. Muslims have the highest dropout rate in the country. Only one out of the 25 undergraduate students and one out of the 50 post-graduate students is a Muslim in premier colleges. The share of Muslims in all courses is low, particularly at the PG level and marginal in the science stream (Sachar, 2006).

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The NSSO 2007-08 educations round further confirmed a high proportion of Muslims as illiterates. The proportion of illiterates among Muslims males is at par with the SCs/STs and higher than the OBCs. Muslim women (47.3%) count amongst the most illiterate segments of the society, their status comparable only with SC/ST (53.2 per cent) women. levels of educational attainment, nearly one-fourth (23.1%) of all Muslim males and one-fifth (20.1 per cent) of females were merely literate. A substantial proportion of this — male (18%) and female (15.4%) had attained only primary education. Meanwhile, at the higher levels of education, upper primary and above, Muslim proportion was significantly lower than that among all other SRCs including SCs, STs and OBCs (Fazal, 2013).

**Reasons for the Educational Backwardness of Muslim Women in India:** The more important causes of educational backwardness in Indian society, as summarized by the Backward Classes Commission, are as follows:

1. Traditional apathy for education on account of social environmental condition or occupational handicaps.
2. Poverty and lack of means among the communities to educate their children.
3. Lack of sufficient number of educational institutions in rural areas.
4. Living in inaccessible areas and lack of proper communications.
5. Lack of adequate educational aid, in the form of scholarship, monetary grant for the purpose of books, clothing and hostel facility (Ramkrishnaya, 1986).

The reasons usually suggested for the present educational backwardness of Muslims can be broadly grouped under three main headings:

First, backwardness of education among Muslims can be seen in the context of larger problem of education and backwardness of Indian masses in general. Second, the educational status of Muslims can be examined in the context of their place in economy. Third, the Muslim community is not a homogenous community, so their response too varies largely towards programmes of literacy and education (Kamat, 1991).

The working class of all communities lagged behind in education because education is directly related to the question of return. Therefore, the Muslim community is not the exception (Ahmad, 1991). Most Indian Muslims today consist of working class and the landless agricultural labourers in rural areas. They are artisans and craftsmen and other daily wage earners in urban areas; the appeal of education to this stratum of society is very limited for several reasons. Education is an activity that requires sizeable investment of time, energy and resources even when education is provided by the state and local government schools without charge.

**Objectives of the Study:** Though Muslims women can take a decisive role to uplift the economic status of the community still their poor educational status is standing as a hindrance on this way. Hence, my paper has made an attempt to analysis the women education status in the Muslims community of Assam and their role in uplifting the economic status of the rural sector of the community.

The major objectives of the study can be stated as below:

1. To study the educational status of the women in the muslims community of Assam and problems of women education in the community.
2. To study the role of women in economic activities of the Muslims community of Assam and impact of it on education.
3. To observe and identify the problems of empowerment of Muslim women.
4. To find out the prospects of women empowerment.

**Methodology:** The research design of this study is based on collection and analysis of both primary and secondary data. While the primary data has been collected through schedules designed especially for the study, the secondary data has been collected mainly from project documents, Status Paper (Progress Reports) and other documents prepared from time to time by the State and District Project Office. The Evaluation Team also studied other evaluation and appraisal reports concerning Alternative Schooling and NFE.

**History of Assam:** Assam is one of the more prominent states in India and has been involved in the political and the social issues of the nation since a long time. Assam was a prominent province even during the British rule in India and among the few provinces to retain their name and structure after independence. The state has undergone many changes with respect to territories and areas within its boundaries over the years. The state and its leader played a prominent role in India's freedom struggle. The state is known for its scenic beauty and wildlife. The city of Dispur is the capital of Assam.

The Population of Assam according to the 2011 census stands at about 31 million, making it the 14th most populated state in India. The state makes up about 2.5% of the country's population a figure that has gone up since the last census in 2001. The state is spread over an area of about 78000 sq. km. making it the 16th largest state in the country in terms of area. The density of population per sq. Km. is about 397 and is fairly equal to the national average. The state has a growth rate of about 17% which is again very close to the national growth rate of about 17%. The population of the state is rising considerably due to rapid efforts towards development and progress. The literacy rate in the state is about 73% a figure that has improved tremendously in the last few years due to the consistent efforts of the government. The sex ratio in Assam exceeds the national average by a good 30 points and is one of the better states in the country with respect to the sex ratio. The statistics in the Assam Census 2011 reveal facts that can be instrumental in planning for a better development plan for the state. Assam Literacy Rate 2011

Literacy rate in Assam has seen upward trend and is 72.19 percent as per 2011 population census. Of that, male literacy stands at 77.85 percent while female literacy is at 66.27 percent. In 2001, literacy rate in Assam stood at 63.25 percent of which male and female were 71.28 percent and 54.61 percent respectively. In actual numbers, total literates in Assam stands at 19,177,977 of which males were 10,568,639 and females were 8,609,338.

Description	Assam Table Data	
	2011	2001
Approximate Population	3.12 Crores	2.67 Crore
Actual Population	31,205,576	26,655,528
Male	15,939,443	13,777,037
Female	15,266,133	12,878,491
Population Growth	17.07%	18.85%

Percentage of total Population	2.58%	2.59%
Sex Ratio	958	935
Child Sex Ratio	962	965
Density/km <sup>2</sup>	398	340
Density/mi <sup>2</sup>	1,030	880
Area(Km <sup>2</sup> )	78,438	78,438
Area mi <sup>2</sup>	30,285	30,285
Total Child Population (0-6 Age)	4,638,130	4,498,075
Male Population (0-6 Age)	2,363,485	2,289,116
Female Population (0-6 Age)	2,274,645	2,208,959
Literacy	72.19%	63.25%
Male Literacy	77.85%	71.28%
Female Literacy	66.27%	54.61%
Total Literate	19,177,977	14,015,354
Male Literate	10,568,639	8,188,697
Female Literate	8,609,338	5,826,657

**Assam Religious Data:** Hinduism is majority religion in state of Assam with 61.47 % followers. Islam is second most popular religion in state of Assam with approximately 34.22 % following it. In Assam state, Christianity is followed by 3.74 %, Jainism by 0.08 %, Sikhism by 0.07 % and Buddhism by 0.07 %. Around 0.09 % stated 'Other Religion', approximately 0.16 % stated 'No Particular Religion'.

Description	Population	Percentage
<u>Hindu</u>	19,180,759	<u>61.47%</u>
Muslim	10,679,345	34.22%
Christian	1,165,867	3.74%
Buddhist	54,993	0.18%
Not Available	50,873	0.16%
Other Religion	27,118	0.09%
Jain	25,949	0.08%
Sikh	20,672	0.07%

**Population Growth Rate:** In Assam is one of the major minorities' communities of the North Eastern region of India. They are originated from purbo bongio. Their major economic activities are agriculture and allied activities. But it is a very serious matter that Muslims community is suffering from some serious economic and social problems like in sufficient infrastructural facilities and economic backwardness, negligence of woman education, superstitions etc. which are standing as hindrances on the way of development. To keep pace with global changing economic and social environment Muslims community

of Assam must have to solve all such problems. International Journal of Science, Environment and Technology. Women are nearly the half of the total population size of a society. That is why, their participation in economic development activities is very important. In this respect, the Muslims women can take a decisive role to up life the economic status of the community. Generally, the women section of the Muslims community is very active in household as well as in economic activities. They are born weaver, skilled in agricultural and allied activities but the modes of operation of economic activities are primitive in nature. The causes behind it are low rate of literary of the women section in the community, low rate of capital formation of the community etc. That is why, women section of the community generates low rate of income in their economic activities. In the context of the economic development of the rural sector of the Muslims community of Assam, it is very urgent to study the problem of women education in the community and their role in uplifting the rural economy.

Women especially from the rural area constitute the largest marginalized section of India and their marginalized should be a matter of deep concern for all. Women particularly upper class and urban areas are more conscious of their rights and duties as well as positions and powers, but the women of the rural areas are a bit different, they are content with the meal of a day and such a mental set up does not make any room in their minds to imagine the life beyond their imagination as well as expectation. The position and the status of women all over the world have risen incredibly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century though these have been very low in the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century in India and elsewhere when they treated like objects that can be bought and sold. For a long time in India women remained within four walls of their house.

Empowerment is multi-faceted approach in this paper context of gender equality and discrimination. Inequality between men and women and discrimination against women has also been age -old issue all over the world. Thus, women's quest for equality with men in matters of education, employment, inheritance, marriage, politics, cultural affairs and self-dignity, civil rights and recently in the field of A Sociological Study on Empowerment of Muslim Women in Assam.

Education is playing vital role in women empowerment. The developed countries of the world are more advanced in empowering women than the rest of the world. Without proper education, guidance, environment no country could be achieved the full potential development of the women society as well as empowerment.

**Women Empowerment in Islamic (Muslim) Perspective:** Legislators' earlier times were harsh towards women. Hindu code of laws says that woman is worse than destiny, storm, death, hell, poisonous snake. The holy Bible says a woman is much better than death also mentioned in the Old Testament (chapter of sermon) that anyone wishes to prove himself dear to God, should save him from women. Islam is the only religion and a way of life which presents a very balanced image about women and recognizes the importance of women with a place of respect and reverse to women in human society. It gives sample of

consideration to her natural delicateness and has assigned her the duties that are suited to her physical strength. The Islamic ideology - Sariah and Hadith allow women participating in day-to-day life activities by declaring the education as the basic fundamental obligation for every woman and man to give essential knowledge, according to the requirement. Prophet Mohammad (S) himself induced women to learn weaving, that shows the women should be trained in handcrafts and home industries, such as tailoring, embroidery, weaving, small industries, business conduct.

Also, Islam has recognized the polygamy, divorce, inheritance, testimony and blood money etc. and explains the sphere of activities of a woman and her participation in various section of social life and thereby basic right in positive trend given to her by Islam.

The Quran states- “Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah (the God) has given the one more strength than other and supported them from their means.

According to the French scholar Dr. Gustawali- “Islam has brought a comprehensive development in the cultural and social position of women. The Quranic laws of inheritance are more in favor of women compared to the laws of Europe and others.

An eminent Indian author Milan Ra m- “The people who are followers of the religions should acknowledge the excellence of Islamic Sariah. If it so, then the superiority of Islamic ideology will be raised to level which will be beyond imagination. In fact, what Islam presents is the accurate solution of all the problems.”

**Government Initiatives on Empowerment Of Women:** The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to woman, but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of woman. Every Year the 8<sup>th</sup> March is observed as International Women’s Day when women’s problems, policies and programs are only discussed. The Department of Women and Child Development set up in 1985 serves as the nodal agency for women’s advancement. The National Commission for Women is a statutory body created in January, 1992 to facilitate redressed grievance and to accelerate the socio -economic development of women, to promote awareness about women’s problems and work for the empowerment of women. The Central Social Welfare Board promotes welfare activities for all marginalized sections including women to ensure that women receive due benefits in governments, public expenditure, the government has been promoting a “gender-based budgeting” in spite of receiving high attention the implementation of the laws, policies and programs for the benefit of women has plenty of scope for improvement to make them more target oriented and effective. The Government of India passed The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women in the year 2001 emphasized on different goals like creating environment of realize and develop the full potentiality of women, equal access to healthcare, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc. It is also emphasized on fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres- political, economic,

social, cultural and civil, building strengthen partnerships with civil society, particularly women's.

### **Findings of the Study:**

1. Muslim women are mostly illiterate. In this area the parents are not so conscious about the women education. Lack of Institution one of the major factors of women empowerment. Adult Education, Total Literacy and other programs are not actively activated and functioning among the Muslim women.
2. In the poor section of the society the "Traditional Sex Role" of the mother, grandmother, aunts, sisters of the girl child makes her to go school and other participation as it becomes secondary.
3. Women in this area remain marginalized due to discrimination, deprivation, exploitation, sexual and other harassments and atrocities and poor implementations of government measuring including laws. They are subject to most domestic violence.
4. This society is mostly male dominant; women are found to be equal partners in progress, yet they remain subjected to marginalization and exploitation.
5. Muslim women in the study areas are the poorest, backward and economically vulnerable mostly unorganized labor etc. their work opportunities are only related to age based activities. The engagement in secondary and tertiary sectors is very low. In present time they are migrating towards the other urban regions of India searching their unorganized labor work opportunity.
6. Lack of proper religious knowledge and misinterpretation of the Islamic law of Sariah and Hadith are playing a vital hindrance in empowering women. The Islamic clerics are away from the proper interpretation of rule of Sariah as well as some of them (clerics) divide the society sectional division results social chaos.
7. Social evils like early child marriage hinders to the empowerment of women. There is a social mandate existing mostly in the Chapori areas that, boy's maximum 15-16 years age and girls 12 to 14 years age have to go under marry.
8. Excessive birth is one of the major problems for the maintaining good health among the Muslim women and most vulnerable among the Bengali origin Muslim.
9. Maintenance of health status is very poor among the Muslim women. Communication and transport problem, lack of sufficient staff, dearth of sufficient health centre, and lack of primary health training, malnutrition are the causes of not accessing the maternal and other health facilities of women in Muslim dominant rural areas.
10. The low participation in politics, public policy and decision-making process have led to the marginalization of the women. They cast their votes only but not aware of the philosophy and ideology of the political parties. In India 33 percent seats are



reserved for women in local self-government according to the 73rd and 74th amendment of our constitution but the elected women representatives are not free from the domination of their male counterpart also they have to work under male dominant circumstance.

11. Gender inequality and discriminations are highly existing factors among the women mostly in rural areas. There is no congenial environment.

**Conclusion:** For Empowerment of Women in every society must change their attitude, behavior in positive trend and essential to create congenial environment towards the women and to recognize their rightful place in the decision-making process. Women should have greater autonomy in decision-making, greater ability to plan their lives and free them from shackles imposed by prevailing customs, beliefs and practices. They should become active members in development process rather than mere beneficiaries of programs and services. Women must be provided opportunities to have control over production resources that would lead to better life for their families and their children. Women mostly working in groups there are need to organize women's societies for various activities involving group engagement a strong and effective women cooperative movement is desirable to boost economic development process of rural women and families. Women should not only be financial supporter but should also play the role of decision-making process of the family. To solve the problems of women empowerment the attitude of the male dominant society should be changed. Both the State and Central Government have to play a vital role in the process of policy frame and execution.

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4. Baruah, Jayanta – „Women in the North-Eastern States“, APPOCCUS Publishing, Guwahati, Assam-2015 exists among the Muslim society in empowering women.