

# “POVERTY, LITERACY AND MUSLIM SOCIETY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ASSAM”

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## Abstract

Poverty, a stubborn fact of life, has many facts and dimensions. Socio-economic conditions of a person or community depend on the access to basic necessities of life like food, shelter, health, education, etc. India is the home of more than one-third of world's poor population. Section 2 (e) of National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992 considered Muslim as the most backward community in India in the field of socio-economic status, education, politics, culture, etc. particularly in Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, UP and Gujarat.

Illiteracy is stunningly rampant in the Muslim world nearly 40 percent of the world's Muslim population are illiterate. This poses a threat to the development of society, economy and population growth. Poverty and illiteracy is certainly a curse to the Muslim community and impedes Islamic world's advancement in all aspects. Education is the way or the backbone of social progress. In this modern age of technology it is the utmost need to make them aware of their basic right to education, its necessities and how to access it.

Literacy has been envisioned as the great equalizer, able to mitigate the effects of poverty by equipping with the knowledge and skills they need to lead successful and productive life. In rural areas households with primary and lower level education have the higher poverty ratio. Successive Governments of independent India either have no strategy or have not implemented educational and other socio-economic schemes for the advancement of the community. The Sachar Committee report has corroborated these facts. This paper will explore the present socio-economic and educational status of the Muslim society, which is exploited and dragged by poverty and literacy especially in Assam.

Key words: Poverty, literacy, Muslims of Assam.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of human history, the problem of poverty has been an innate. Poverty refers to situation when people are deprived of basic necessities of life. It is often characterized of inadequacy of food, shelter and clothes etc. More than one-third of world's poor people are now resides in India where Muslim minority identified as backward community in the field of socio-economic status, education, politics, cultures and Assam in particular. Poverty considered as curse in the char dwellers and people of rural areas in the community of Assam India poses a threat to the development and prosperity of the society which negative impact on growing

economy and population growth in Assam. No doubt that education can eradicate the proportion of differences and promote the community in balanced.

## **2. METHOD AND MATERIALS :**

The present paper is descriptive in nature and based on secondary data which is collected from the journals, old research paper, books, periodicals; annual reports etc. these data is comprehensively used to fulfil the objectives. So, the method applied here in this paper is theoretical, not a field base one.

## **3. POVERTY :**

### ***3.1. Definition of Poverty:***

Poverty refers to a situation when are deprived of basic necessities of life. It is often characterized by inadequacy of food, shelter and clothes. Poverty is defines as inadequate supply of items that are essential to live a healthy and comfortable life. Poverty of society would therefore have to be defined in relation to their own economic dependency.

### ***3.2. Poverty in India :***

In India the definition of poverty line emphasizes a minimum level of living rather than a reasonable level of living. The deprivation of a significant section of society of minimum basic needs in the face of a luxurious life for the elite classes makes poverty more glaring. More than 65 years have passed since we attained political independences; still most of the people lead a sub-human life, while a microscopic minority lives in excessive luxury. As the number of poor people in India goes up to 400 million, which is equivalent to about one-third of the world's poor population, Government of India have undertaken a large number of steps for reduction or abolition of poverty. But still it is remain unchanged.

### ***3.3. Poverty of India Muslims :***

In there any provision/Act has been enact for the socio-economic development of Muslim Community of India ? Is there any reservation system in the field of jobs, education etc. like other backward communities in India? No doubt, before 2006 no serious effort has been made to assess the socio-economic status Indian Muslim. It is Sachar Committee in 2006 reports that Muslims were amongst the poor in country; it broadly showed Muslims to be stuck at the bottom of almost every economic or social heap. Though heavily urban, Muslims had a particularly low share of public jobs, school and university places, and seats in politics. They earned less than other backward or reserved category groups, were more excluded from banks and other finance, spent fewer years in school and had lower literacy rates. Pitifully few entered the army or the police force. But there is still a question mark (?) of their development.

Section 2(e) of National Commission for Minorities Act 1992 considered Muslim minority is the most backward community in India in the field of socio-economic status, education, politics, cultures etc. particularly in Assam, West Bengal, U.P. and Gujarat.

When population change is fast, instability may follow. Last year 77 people were killed and 400,000 were displaced in Assam, amid clashes between Muslim settlers and Bodo tribal groups who feel insecurity of existence and their land is under threat. Still, growing populations alone did not aggravate the violence in Assam. Shifting political loyalties were also a factor.

United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) country director Caitlin Wiesen said as far as religious groups are concerned, poverty head count ratio for Muslims is "very high in states of Assam, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Gujarat"<sup>1</sup>. Nearly, 50 percent of agricultural labours and 40 percent of other labourers are below poverty line in rural areas, where households with primary level and lower education have the higher poverty ratio. The situation is still grim for the poor in rural areas because agriculture sector, the mainstay of rural people, has not grown on expected lines.

#### **4. ILLITERACY :**

##### *4.1. Definition :*

Encarta World English Dictionary defines illiteracy, an adult or adults with a reading incapacity, a lack of knowledge of a subject, and / or an error in speech or writing. Almost one-quarter of the world's population or 905 million individuals between 15 years of age and adulthood cannot read and write, according to the most recent statistics in the World Education Report.

##### *4.2. Illiteracy in Muslim world.*

Illiteracy is strikingly rampant in the Muslim world. According to the International Islamic News Agency nearly 40 percent of the Muslim world's population cannot read or write, which means that there are hundreds of millions of illiterates in the OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) countries, mostly female. The report showed that adult literacy rate in the OIC countries is roughly 73 percent, lower than the global adult literacy rate (82 percent), and the rate of other developing countries (85 percent), based on 2013 statistics. This poses a threat to the development and prosperity of the society and negatively impact on the ability to promote and build a strong growing economy.<sup>2</sup>

##### *4.3. Illiteracy in India and Muslim community:*

There has been a growing concern about the lack of educational qualifications of Muslims in India. The Census of India 2001 for the first time gives detailed educational data across religious groups. The facts conclusively demonstrate that, on an average, Muslim men and

women are far less educationally accomplished than non-Muslim counterparts, and this is so across almost every state in India.

It is shown that only 55 percent of India's Muslim males were literate, compared to 64.5 percent of nation's non-Muslim men which 15 percent is less. Less than 41 percent of Muslim females were literate, against 46 percent of Indian's non-Muslim women. 3 Muslims, Indian's largest religious minority, are "**lagging behind**" almost in all meadow. The dropout rate among Muslim students is high. It is below even SC/ST students, who are generally considered the most educationally backward communities.

#### 4.4. Illiteracy and Muslim Society of Assam:

Muslim are the very poor community next to backward classes of India, particularly in Assam. It is because the major proportion of this community inhabits in both south and north bank of Brahmaputra, Barak valley, char, rural areas and rate percentage of in urban areas of Assam. The present scenario specially chars and in rural areas where the growth of population is very high but literacy rate is low in the minority community entirely. Education plays a vital role in the overall development of a community as well as country.

In recent times, Sarbananda Sonowal, Chief Minister of Assam, blamed that the growth of Muslim population in the state on high birth rate among the community due to illiteracy, dismissing suggestions that illegal migration from Bangladesh had twisted the demography of the state.<sup>4</sup>

There is no question of doubt that **Right to Education** is our constitutional right under Article 21A as well as the right of children to free and compulsory education bill (Act) 2009, which is envisages provision for free and compulsory to children belonging to the age of 06-14 years by the govt. of Assam is still not to have fruitful result in eradication illiteracy specially in char dwellers in the Muslim community in particular and country in general. We have a look into the below scenario of char areas.

Incalculable numbers of chars detached from the geographical mainland dot the 720km widen of river Brahmaputra. Their unique geo-morphology aside, these chars are characterized by settlements, agricultural patches, muddy roads, periodic markets, schools and other public institutions. The chars cover 3,608 sq km of the Brahmaputra basin, which works out to 4.6% of Assam's geographical area.

The char areas are distributed across 23 sub-divisions of 14 districts along the Brahmaputra's course from Sadiya in the east of Dhubri in the west. An estimated 25 lakh people reside in 2,251 villages on these chars straddling 299 gaon panchayats. Some 68% of the char dwellers are below poverty line (BPL).

There has been no socio-economic survey of the char areas in more than a decade. The last significant one by the Assam State Char Area Development Authority and the Directorate of Char Areas Development, Assam was in 2002-03. This survey revealed (see table below) literacy in the chars did not improve much from the 1992-93 scenario.

<i>Districts</i>	<i>No. of chars</i>	<i>Literacy rate 1992-93</i>	<i>Literacy rate 2002-03</i>
Goalpara	187	8.38	13.6
Barpeta	351	12.90	17.63
Kamrup	148	16.85	15.16
Nalbari	58	7.90	16.24
Bongaigaon	150	12.85	12.46
Dhubri	313	19.06	14.60
Morigaon	41	8.02	18.50
Nagaon	29	9.44	17.59
Dhemaji	95	14.44	15.69
Lakhimpur	182	14.01	18.50
Sonitpur	118	12.63	16.93
Tinsukia	86	14.20	14.00
Jorhat	210	31.90	60.55
Darrang	121	10.12	12.34

(Source: Socio-Economic Survey Report, Directorate of Char Areas Development, 1992-93 and 2002-03).

As per the 2002-03 survey, there are 1,852 Lower Primary schools, 574 Middle schools, 218 High schools, eight Higher Secondary schools and 18 Colleges cater to the educational needs of the char dwellers. This, for a population of 25 lakhs, means less than **one lower primary school for 1,000 people** and worse in the case of higher education. Moreover, these areas have a very high dropout rate for the male child at the primary school level.<sup>5</sup>

I wish to talk about the Char areas that account for 4.6 percent of the total land area of Assam. The Char-dwellers represent 9.37 percent of the state's population while they possess only 4 percent of Assam's agricultural land. The density of population in these areas is 690 persons per sq. km. Perhaps, these figures would not have been so important to us if the political discourse around illegal infiltration in Assam had taken into account those who live on the margins. Mostly Bengali-speaking Muslims, theirs is a saga of devastation and loss.

I agree with the observation of Mr. Gorky Chakraborty as one of the most important factors leading to social exclusion of Char dwellers.



“It gets manifested when the char-dwellers migrate in search of livelihood options. Their attire, traits, behaviour, language and religion on one hand and the lack of knowledge on the part of the people of the mainland about the chars on the other, ultimately leads to a scenario, where these char dwellers are straightaway labelled as **Bangladeshis** or illegal immigrants. Due to which, they have a tendency to abandon them as illegal immigrants, without displaying the courage to trace the root cause of their migration from the char areas. This not only creates doubt, suspicion and dispute among the population groups, but also generates a public opinion which becomes unfavourable for inclusion of the char dwellers into the mainstream. Any additional public expenditure gets highlighted as feeding the Bangladeshi’s at the cost of depriving the Indian nationals.”<sup>6</sup>

Today, it is not only the fate of a Char-dweller, but of many other Bengal-origin Muslims who are constantly faced with an identity crisis.

## 5. FINDINGS / RESULTS

### 5.1 Poverty :-

- ✓ Monthly per capita expenditure of Muslims is much lower than the national average.
- ✓ Majority of Muslim families in rural and char areas do not receive food grain.
- ✓ One out of every three Muslim family in rural areas survives on less than about Rupees 400/- (US \$6) per month.
- ✓ Most of children between 0-10 years of age group are suffering from malnutrition (anaemia) due to poverty in the Muslim country.

### 5.2 Literacy :-

- ✓ Socio-Economic status of Muslim is worse than Dalits.
- ✓ 25% Muslim children belonging to 6-14 years age groups either drop out or never attend school in their locality.
- ✓ Dropout rates is higher at primary, middle and higher secondary levels specially in Char-dwellers.
- ✓ In premier colleges only 1 out of 25 under graduate and 1 out of 50 for post-graduates is a Muslim.
- ✓ Below 10% of Muslim children among the school going age go to Madarsas.

## 6. CONCLUSION :

From the above discussion it is clear that the poverty and illiteracy is the root barrier to socio-economic status, educational, political, cultural development of community or a country. Financial dependency and education focused and cultural the standard of the society in the surface world. Education can play a foremost role to mitigate or minimise the poverty. Eradication of poverty would ensure a sustainable and

inclusive growth of economy is society. After passing several decades of independence Govt. of India has not succeed to eradicate poverty and illiteracy by implementing various schemes like MNREGA, IAY, OLD AGE PENSION, IRDP, JRY etc. And different educational policy especially in Muslim society. More over Ajmal foundation also made an effort to minimize both Poverty and illiteracy by implementing various schemes in the field of education, medication, financial help etc. Poverty and illiteracy as discussed is very worst in the rural and char dwellers of Assam Government should focus on the following suggestion.....

- Create proper awareness in regards of scientific family planning & population control specially in rural and char area.
- Special provision to ensure financial development to each and every household of Muslim community.
- Ensure compulsory education to each and every child under the Education Act 2009.
- Create constitutional provision for free Higher Education to Muslim community for balancing.
- Implementation of **reservation** system especially in job, education etc. Like other backward classes to balanced the Muslim community.
- Provide special schooling and medication system for char dwellers of Assam.

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