

Socio-economic status of muslim women in Lakhimpur district of Assam

■ Swapna Dutta

Lakhimpur Telahi Kamalabaria College, Azad, LAKHIMPUR (ASSAM) INDIA
(Email: swapnadutta544@gmail.com)

ARTICLE INFO :

Received : 12.02.2015
Revised : 23.04.2015
Accepted : 07.05.2015

KEY WORDS :

Socio-economic status, Muslim women, Illiteracy, Poverty, Awareness

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE :

Dutta, Swapna (2015). Socio-economic status of muslim women in Lakhimpur district of Assam. *Adv. Res. J. Soc. Sci.*, 6 (1) : 56-60.

ABSTRACT

The study was conducted on socio-economic status of muslim women in urban areas of Lakhimpur District in Assam. One hundred twenty muslim women were purposely selected from two muslim dominated areas of Lakhimpur District. The information was gathered with the help of questionnaire cum interview technique. Interview questionnaire contained comprehensive questions relate to present study. The data were presented in tabular form. The study revealed that more than half of muslim women (67.5%) were below metric. Only 5.83 per cent of women were above metric. Analysis of literacy amongst muslim women highlights some important implication in the context of their socio-economic status. The educational backwardness of women makes them the largest group hindering the process of social change. Information was obtained about family income which is an important index of the socio-economic background. It was found that majority of sample household belongs to the monthly income up to the level of Rs. 10000/- only. It indicates a condition in which a person fails to maintain a living standard adequate for his physical and mental efficiency in present day situation. Further it has been found that the economic condition of the sample household, the majority of them *i.e.*, 51.66 per cent were in poverty line which affects the woman most because the female members in the family are denied education, healthcare, nutritious food due to poverty. Unhygienic sanitation was also seen because of poverty. It was seen that lack of education or poor educational status resulted in the married women depending on their husbands for undertaking any decisions concerning the family. Poor educational level also affected their awareness of certain factors affecting their lives such as family planning, right to information act, domestic violence laws etc.

INTRODUCTION

Status of Women's refers to the position of women in society in relation to men. Although geographically men and women share the same space, yet they are not treated equally in the world. In reality there exists inequality in women's access to education, health care, physical and

financial resources and opportunities in the physical, economic, social and cultural field. Everywhere in the world women are accorded a lower status than men. This lower status is reflected not only in their work but also in their limited access to productive resources and support services such as health education, survival, participation in decision making etc.

It has been noticed that muslim women are worst affected among women in India. Poverty is not the sole cause for the plight of muslim women, what seemed to distinguished muslim women from those of other communities. It is included the rigidity in the community, patriarchy, religious leaders and the community's fear that they will lose their Islamic identity if they allowed their children to take up secular education and attempt especially to prevent their girls from exposure to modernity. Purdah is distinct feature of muslim women and education of muslim women is generally restricted to religious knowledge. Although muslim girls and boys are educated in Muktabs (Primary School), Girl's are completely absent from Madrasas (School of Higher learning). Illiteracy among them and lack of exposure to realities adversely affected the socio- educational status of the community, pushing it further deeper in to poverty. Hence an attempt has been made to examine the socio-economic status of muslim women in Lakhimpur District of Assam with the following objectives so to suggest some solution that are more practical.

Objectives :

- To examine the educational level of muslim women.
- To see the economic status of muslim family.
- To know their awareness about some factors affecting their lives such as family planning, right to information act, domestic violence laws etc.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was conducted in urban area of Lakhimpur District of Assam. A sample of randomly selected one hundred twenty (120) muslim women between the age group 19-45 years were taken to achieve these objectives. With a view to ascertaining the field realities that studied, a visit to two predominantly muslim-dominated areas named as Chapori gone and Chandmari under 14 no. ward of Lakhimpur District was undertaken. The information was gathered with the help of questionnaire cum interview

technique. Various questions related to socio-economic status of the muslim families, including their views on educating girls, their views on Purdah etc. were included in the questionnaire. The collected data were tabulated and analyzed to calculate frequency, mean and percentage.

OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The results have been presented under four broad headlines- educational status of selected respondents, income of respondent's household, economic condition of respondents household and their awareness about some factors affecting their lives.

Educational status :

Education is an important variable, which affects demographic behaviour of people concerning fertility, mortality, morbidity, malnutrition etc. Education, it is believed brings about social change in a society. Therefore, higher literacy and standard of educational attainment is a *Sine-qua-non* for ensuring the social development of people. The high rate of illiteracy and low economic status of women stress the need for greater attention to their Economic emancipation. Jean Drese and Amartya Sen in their book 'India Economic Development and Social Opportunity' regard education and health as valuable to the freedom of person in at least five distinct ways- intrinsic importance, instrumental personal roles, instrumental social roles, instrumental process roles and empowerment and distributive roles. Proper use of increased capability through the attainment of literacy is instrumental in enlarging people's income earning and other opportunities, which can enable them to improve the quality of life (Decentralized Planning and Development, Banerjee A., p-298, 2004). Hence, it is necessary to examine the literacy status of muslim women to analyses the problems related to their lives. The following Table 1 showed the distribution of women in various levels of literacy.

From Table 1 it is evident that out of total 120 sample,

Sr. No.	Literacy level	No. of women (n=120)	Percentage (%)
1.	Illiterate	9	7.5
2.	Below metric	81	67.5
3.	Metric	23	19.16
4.	Above metric	7	5.83

a small percentage *i.e.*, 5.83 per cent of women were above metric, majority of women *i.e.*, 67.5 per cent were below metric and 19.16 per cent women were completed H.L.S.C. and 7.5 per cent of women were illiterate. Analysis of literacy amongst muslim women highlights some important implication in the context of their socio-economic status. The educational backwardness of women makes them the largest group hindering the process of social change. The illiterate women imposed a serious constraint both in realizing responsibility of bringing up future generations and the advancement of society. Since they cannot see any direct relationship between education and economic betterment, they have very little motivation to send their children to school. It is still not being realized that there is definite connection between education, good motherhood and efficient house management. The management of households and the upbringing of children is thus in the hands of low literate women. Only those with better educational qualifications have realized the importance of raising small families so that they could give a better life to their children.

Income of respondents household :

Income of the occupation is another important index of the socio-economic background. It plays an important role in one's life. The social status of a person is to a large extent, determined by income. Moreover, an individual's guided by income in regard to attitudes and style of life. Hence, it is necessary to study the income of the respondent's household in detail. Since the husbands of sample women were engaged in different occupation, they differed in their monthly income also. It must be mentioned here that at the time of survey, information was obtained about family income and not wife's separate income. Therefore, the given table only indicates family income. Table 2 gives the monthly income

of the respondents family in the three categories.

Table 2 indicates that 19.16 per cent of respondents family belongs to first category *i.e.*, income range below Rs. 5000/- and the majority constituting 65 per cent of sample households from second category had monthly income Rs. 5000- Rs. 10000/-. 15.83 per cent sample households had the monthly income above Rs. 10000/-. If we added together the first and second category of monthly income it was found that majority of sample household belongs to the monthly income up to the level of Rs. 10000/-. It indicates a condition in which a person fails to maintain a living standard adequate for his physical and mental efficiency in present day situation.

Economic condition of the sample household :

In this study the economic condition of the sample household refers to one's position in the ranking of individual as below poverty line, in poverty line and above poverty line, which is based on income and size of the family. In the context of the present study based on monthly income and size of the family, the monthly income of below Rs.5000/-is categorized as below poverty line, income between Rs. 5000-10000/- is categorized as in poverty line and monthly income Rs.10000/-is categorized as above poverty line. The amount of income represents income from all sources. On the basis of the income and size of the family, the economic status of the respondent's household was found as follows.

From the above table it has been seen that the economic condition of the sample household, the majority of them *i.e.*, 36.66 per cent were below poverty line and 51.66 per cent were in poverty line and only 11.66 per cent were above poverty line. Poverty affects the woman most because the female members in the family are denied education, healthcare, nutritious food which affects directly the future of women. Unhygienic sanitation was

Sr. No.	Income categories	Total no. of respondents (n=120)	Percentage (%)
1.	Below Rs. 5000	23	19.16
2.	Rs.5000-Rs. 10000	78	65.0
3.	Above Rs. 10000	19	15.83

Sr. No.	Category	No. of sample household (n=120)	Percentage (%)
1.	Below poverty line	44	36.66
2.	In poverty line	62	51.66
3.	Above poverty line	14	11.66

also seen because of poverty.

Awareness and participation in decision making in the family:

It is here lack of education or poor educational status resulted in the married women depending on their husbands for undertaking any decisions concerning the family. Illiteracy also affected their awareness of the factors affecting their lives. Table 4 shows the awareness of respondents for each factor that affect their lives.

From Table 4 we came conclude that family planning is a voluntary decision of the families concerned and there is no pressure from the government agencies in muslim-dominated areas. In such areas, agencies responsible for family welfare or family planning are not canvassing so far. Only 9.17 per cent respondents were aware of different family planning techniques available; therefore very few respondents had adopted family planning process. Illiteracy among women and lack of exposure to the realities adversely affected the socio-economic status of the community, pushing it further deeper into poverty. They did not practice family planning technique as they consider children as "God's gift" which cannot be denied. The survey also revealed that the educational status of women has a distinct effect on the number of children that they have borne. It is obvious that women with better educational qualifications have realized the importance of raising small families so that they could give a better life to their children. 30.83 per cent out of 120 respondents knew about their right to education. Their children were covered by Sarba Siksha Abhiyan Mission. Around 46.66 per cent out of 120 families have got ration cards. Most of them were ignore about Domestic Violence Act.

The investigator conducted an open discussion with each one of the respondents to know about their attitudes towards purdah pratha among muslim women. Respondents were given a chance to give their opinion willingly about this pratha. They viewed that the non-

existence of purdah among muslim women helped them to take advantage of certain existential conditions, and they can enjoy a freedom to some extent. Regarding girls education they opined that girls are required to help in household work.

Conclusion and recommendations :

There should be a movement is bringing in changes in the muslim society. It has been seen that the community is still under the clutches of orthodox and other religious leaders, who pose a hindrance to the social and economic development of the community. Therefore initiative has been taken to create awareness among the muslim women. Some of such recommendations are:

- All the rights under the constitution and all legal provisions, should reach the muslim women of the society and justice should not remain a distant dream for them.
- Working for the betterment of the lives of muslim women, there should be demanding codification of muslim laws.
- There has been taken up various educational schemes for the children and school dropouts especially for muslim girls. Government should manage to get some scholarships for muslim students.
- To enable muslim women in achieving economic stability vocational courses in embroidery, sewing, handicrafts, designing of clothes etc. should be provide to them.
- Periodical medical camps should conduct in the muslim dominated areas. These camps help in improving health and nutritional status of muslim women.

Even after six decades of independence, muslim women face considerable challenges. According to government reports muslim woman are among the poorest, educationally disenfranchised, economically vulnerable and politically marginalized group in the

Sr. No.	Awareness regarding the factors affecting their lives	No. of respondents (n=120)	Percentage (%)
1.	Knew about family planning	11	9.17
2.	Knew about right to information act	8	6.67
3.	Knew about right to education	37	30.83
4.	Knew about right to food and have ration cards	56	46.66
5.	Knew about domestic violence laws	8	6.67

country. Therefore a social and economic opportunity for muslim women is a crucial issue needing urgent action. A movement for secularism, democracy and human rights are needed for improvement in socio-economic status of muslim women.

REFERENCES

Gangetry, Priyadarshani M. (2011). Women of North east in present context, p. 315.

Human Development Report (2013). United Nations Development Programme. p. 156.

John L. Esposito and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, (1998). *Islam, Gender and Social Change* (Eds.). Oxford University Press, NEW YORK, U.S.A.

Kazi, Seema (1999). *Muslim Women in India*. Minority Rights Group International, UK. p.48.

Lalneihzov (2007). *Women's development in India: Problems and prospects*. Mittal Publication, New Delhi, p-17.

Muslims in India: Ministry of External affairs.

Sayyed, A.R. (1995). *Religion and Ethnicity among Muslims*, Rawat Publications, NEW DELHI, INDIA.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ 6th Year ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
★ ★ ★ ★ ★ of Excellence ★ ★ ★ ★ ★