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EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF DESHI MUSLIMS: A CASE STUDY OF GOALPARA DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT:

Education is conceptualized as a basis for expediting analytical skills, knowledge and critical thinking along with craftsmanship, practical experience and problem solving ability of man. Much of the literature and public concern about education and economic development in general, and education and employment in particular, revolve around the interaction between demand for and supply of skilled human resources. Skilled human resource is dependent on educational attainment. Therefore, education is regarded fundamental to enhancing the quality of human life and ensuring social and economic progress (UN, 1997). Considering the importance of literacy for development, UNDP (2000) has adopted knowledge as measured by a weighted average of adult literacy (two-thirds), mean years of schooling (one-third), and male educational attainments as the major components of human development. Education is one of the basic objectives of development and it enhances human capabilities as conceived by Sen (1999) that paves the way for improvement of quality of life. Therefore, an attempt is made to search about the educational attainment of Deshi Muslims of Goalpara district of Assam.

The Deshi Muslim community is an indigenous ethnic group of Assam (Ali, 2017). The indigenous Muslim people who have been living in the undivided Goalpara district are known as Deshi Muslim (Rahman, 2014). Traditionally, this section of people is rural based and primarily depends on Agriculture and other petty manual works for their livelihood. So, this section of people remains far behind to achieve educational attainment. The idea of equality regarding educational development among all sections of people seemed questionable in such situation. To observe the reality in grassroots a micro level study is adopted. Therefore, a study entitled "Educational attainment of Deshi Muslims: A Case Study of Goalpara District" is adopted.

KEYWORDS: Educational Attainment, Literacy and Deshi Muslims.

INTRODUCTION:

Education is the systematic process of facilitating learning or the acquisition of knowledge, analytical skills, values, beliefs and habits. It makes a person civilized, refined, cultured and educated. Education being an important social activity, its meaning has been varying by the ages due to change in social and physical conditions. Different educationists have interpreted it differently.

According to M. K. Gandhi, "By education I mean an all- round development, drawing out of the best in child-man, body, mind and spirit."

According to Aristotle, "Education is the creation of a sound mind in a sound body."

According to Nelson Mandela "Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the

world.”

The above famous quotations emphasize on the importance of education for the development humankind. Education plays a significant role in the dissemination of modern attitudes, values, approach and rational outlook (Khurshid, 2008). Education is the basic objective of development and it is essential for a satisfying and rewarding life. At the same time, education plays a key role in the ability of a developing country to absorb modern technology and to develop the capacity for self-sustaining growth and development. Therefore, UNDP in 1990 has been considered education as a vital indicator of Human Development Index (HDI) in order to measure the social status of any country.

The Deshi Muslims community is an indigenous ethnic group of Assam (Ali, 2017). The indigenous Muslim people who have been living in the undivided Goalpara district are known as Deshi Muslim (Rahman, 2014). On the basis of numbers of majority people of Rajbongshi community and social and cultural similarities of Deshi Muslim people with Rajbongshi community, it would like to say that majority of Deshi Muslims people came from Rajbongshi community (Karmakar, 2004). Physical structure of Deshi Muslims, language-culture, behavior etc. indicates that this section of people was converted from Koch-Rajbongshi, Nath-Kalita or kaibarta etc. communities (Datta, 1995). Presently, people of this district are from various ethnic groups such as Koch-Rajbongshi, Jogi, Deshi Muslim, Kalita, Kaibartta, Brahman, etc. They all speak in one language regardless of caste, creed and religion, which is known as ‘Deshi Bhasa’. The evidence of this reality was found from the research work of eminent Assamese scholar Dr. Birendra Nath Datta (1995), where he indicated this language as a ‘Deshi Bhasa’¹ after a depth research on this language.

The Deshi Muslim people were one of the prominent factions of Muslims of erstwhile Kamatapur Kingdom. Contemporarily, the undivided Goalpara district extended to North Bengal, earlier eastern Rangpur and Dinajpur districts (now under Bangladesh). After decades of time gone and administrative reorganization took place, a considerable part of Deshi Muslims remained in undivided Goalpara district (now divided into Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Goalpara, Kokrajhar, Chirang and South Salmara-Mankachar districts) that was under the erstwhile Rangpur district and now most factions of this sections of people are remaining in various places in some part of Bangladesh, North Bengal and different districts of lower Assam.

There is a general feeling that Deshi Muslim community is the most backward than its other counterparts in respect to educational development. Traditionally, this section of people is rural based and primarily depends on Agriculture and other petty manual works for their livelihood. So, this section of people remains far behind to achieve educational attainment. The idea of equality regarding educational development among all sections of people seemed questionable in such situation. Considering backwardness of Deshi Muslims sect of the assamese society particularly in Goalpara district, it has become imperative to look into the ground realities in micro level. Therefore, the educational attainment of Deshi Muslims is conceptualized and intended to induct it particularly the Deshi Muslims of Goalpara District of Assam.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To achieve the main objective of assessing educational attainment the present paper selects the following objectives:

1. To assess the educational attainment of Deshi Muslims.
2. To identify the factors responsible for low level of educational attainment.

BRIEF NOTES ON DATA BASE AND METHODOLOGY

In pursuance to the objectives and the research design, the study proposes to gather both secondary and primary information.

The secondary information were collected from various published sources such as; Governmental reports, Official records, Statistical Hand Book of Assam, Journals, Periodicals, etc. Among government reports-reports of Planning Commission of India, reports of Registrar General of India and reports of various agencies were used for secondary information. Various books containing the issue and various issues of journals and periodicals such as Economic and Political Weekly, Journal of Rural Development, Yojana, Kurukshetra, State

Government reports etc. were treated as some sort of sources of secondary data. Moreover, various reports published by different institutions and agencies such as reports of OKDISCD, Deshi Janagosthiya Mancha, Goria-Moria and Deshi Jatiya Parishad, etc. were used as sources of secondary information.

To achieve the core objective of the study primary information were gathered through purposive multi-stage random sampling technique. The sample survey technique adopted to collect primary information can be elaborated as follows.

COLLECTION OF PRIMARY INFORMATION

In the first phase of the survey, Goalpara district of Assam was chosen purposively as the area of the study because mostly the Deshi Muslims inhabit in this district of Assam.

The district has 829 Revenue Villages, 5 Revenue Circles and 8 Community Development Blocks (CDBs), where Deshi Muslims are a major fraction of the society. In the second phase of the survey, 3 (Three) administrative blocks have been chosen randomly from the total of 8 Community Development Blocks such as; Rangjuli, Matia and Lakhipur Community Development Blocks. Deshi Muslim Villages are situated in a stretch amounting to 11 in Rangjuli, 11 in Matia and 10 numbers in Lakhipur CD Blocks respectively. In the third phase of the survey, 12 villages were chosen from each of the Blocks randomly from a total of 32 villages adopting a specific procedure of about 8:3 in each village. The study adopts the selected households as sample units. In the fourth phase, a pilot survey was conducted through which the selected households were identified followed by visits to them with a questionnaire schedule. The questionnaire schedule was tested with the objectives of the study followed by its finalization during this phase. In the fifth stage of the survey, the pre-tested questionnaire schedules were used to collect required primary data which included a sample size of 250 households. The size was justified because it was about 10 per cent of total Deshi Muslim households inhabiting in the selected blocks of Rangjuli, Matia and Lakhipur comprising 83, 83 and 84 respectively.

EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF DESHI MUSLIMS

Education is conceptualized as a basis for expediting analytical skills, knowledge and critical thinking along with craftsmanship, practical experience and problem solving ability of man. Much of the literature and public concern about education and economic development in general, and education and employment in particular, revolve around the interaction between demand for and supply of skilled human resources. Skilled human resource is dependent on educational attainment. Therefore, education is regarded fundamental to enhancing the quality of human life and ensuring social and economic progress (UN, 1997). Considering the importance of literacy for development, UNDP (2000) has adopted knowledge as measured by a weighted average of adult literacy (two-thirds), mean years of schooling (one-third), and male educational attainments as the major components of human development. Education is one of the basic objectives of development and it enhances human capabilities as conceived by Sen (1999) that paves the way for improvement of quality of life. Therefore, an attempt is made to search about the educational attainment of Deshi Muslims of Goalpara district of Assam.

This part of the chapter deals with the literacy as well as the educational attainment of Deshi Muslims in the study area.

LITERACY RATE OF THE SAMPLE HOUSEHOLDS

Literacy Rate of sample Deshi Muslims of Goalpara District of Assam shows comparatively a poor status than those of their counterparts, in the state as well as at national level. The Literacy Rate of Deshi Muslims of the sample community development blocks is shown in table 1

Table 1
Literacy Rate of the Sample Households

Blocks	Persons	Male	Female
Rangjuli CD Block	294 (65.77)	166 (71.55)	128 (59.53)
Matia CD Block	303 (64.74)	173 (67.31)	130 (61.61)
Lakhipur CD Block	296 (65.49)	160 (70.48)	136 (60.44)
Total	893 (65.32)	499 (69.70)	394 (60.52)

Notes: The figures in the brackets represent percentage of the total sample size.

Sources: Field survey.

The table 1 shows the poor literary status of the sample Deshi Muslim households. The literacy rate of Deshi Muslim male is at 69.70 per cent and female at 60.52 per cent constituting a literacy rate of 65.32 per cent of the total sample persons.

The literacy rate of the state is much higher at 72.19 per cent of which 77.85 per cent male and 66.27 per cent female. If it is compared to the national rate of literacy which is at 73 per cent, it is seen that the national rates are much higher than the Deshi Muslims. In national scenario male literacy rate is at 80.09 percent and female literacy rate is at 64.6 per cent as per 2011 census.

It is found that the overall literacy rate of Deshi Muslims is low compared to state as well as national levels. In addition to low literacy of Deshi Muslims, the women literacy is lagging behind their male counterparts. So, the dual barrier of literacy i.e., in one hand the low level of overall literacy and the low women literacy on the other hand would pose a hindrance in the path of development of socio-economic status of Deshi Muslims in general and women section of this community in particular. However, the present study finds that female literacy of Deshi Muslims is far below at about 60.52 per cent than that of 63.13 per cent of the district, about 66.27 per cent of the state and about 65.46 per cent of the national averages.

The implication of educational backwardness of the Deshi Muslims as found in the above analysis necessitates an insight into their institutional academic attainment. The following section makes a discourse into the educational attainments of the Deshi Muslims in the sample area.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF SAMPLE HOUSEHOLDS

Besides the overall literacy rate of any section of people, the levels of educational attainment are significant for socio-economic transition. The levels of educational attainment of Deshi Muslims of Goalpara district of Assam reflect comparatively a poor status as revealed in the following table 2.

Table 2
Educational Attainment Level of the Sample Households

Blocks	Level of achievements				
	Sex	LP	UP	HSLC	Above 10+2
Rangjuli Community Development Block	Male	80 (34.48)	52 (22.41)	18 (7.75)	16 (6.89)
	Female	73 (33.95)	44 (20.46)	6 (2.79)	5 (2.32)
Sub- Total		153 (34.21)	96 (21.43)	24 (5.27)	21 (4.60)
Matia Community Development Block	Male	80 (31.12)	72 (28.01)	12 (4.66)	9 (3.50)
	Female	64 (30.33)	58 (27.48)	5 (2.36)	3 (1.42)
Sub- Total		144 (30.72)	130 (27.74)	17 (3.51)	12 (2.46)
Lakhipur Community Development Block	Male	77 (33.92)	55 (24.22)	15 (6.60)	13 (5.72)
	Female	58 (25.77)	53 (23.55)	15 (6.66)	10 (4.44)
Sub-Total		135 (29.84)	108 (23.88)	30 (6.63)	23 (5.08)
Total		432 (31.59)	334 (24.35)	71 (5.13)	56 (4.04)

Notes: The figures in the brackets represent percentage to the sample size.
Sources: Field Survey.

The levels of educational attainment of Deshi Muslims of Rangjuli, Matia and Lakhipur Community Development Blocks of Goalpara District are depicted in the table 2. The table shows that 31.59 percent of the sample households attain upto Lower Primary (LP) level and 4.04 percent of them have education upto above 10+2 level. Further, the table reveals that there is decreasing ratio in vertical attainment of education such as Upper Primary (UP), High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC), 10+2 levels and onwards. The findings imply that Deshi Muslims are far below in respect to achievement of higher education. The low rate of vertical educational attainment is responsible mainly for socio-economic backwardness.

Factors Responsible for Low Level of Educational Attainment of Deshi Muslims

Low educational achievement is one of the major problems of developing countries and it is same in India. Although universalization of primary education is adopted in Indian education system and primary education is made compulsory, yet a portion of children below the age of 14 years are being left out from the basic education. Further, many children entering into the school are unable to complete their education for various reasons. Among the reasons, many parents regard children to be economic assets instead of sending them to schools as revealed by many studies. A large set of literature on education achievement of the child suggests the importance of family economic resources in children's well-being (Becker, 1991, 1993; Becker & Tomes, 1986). Within this viewpoint, some scholars make a clear distinction between income and assets in terms of household resources. Assets are important because they can bring economic security, especially in times of economic stress and it is also provide a position and signaling in the community, change the way people think, and expand the available opportunities. Parents with assets may perceive a brighter future for their children than those who do not hold any assets. This may positively affect parenting behaviours and investment and thus affect children's educational attainment. Among developing countries, India stands out in terms of the

remarkably low levels of mobility in terms of educational achievement because of very poor quality of school level infrastructure. Duraisamy (2001) studied the effectiveness of incentives on school enrolment and attainment in Tamil Nadu and found that school quality plays a major role in both supply and demand for education. If parents in poor rural households perceive the quality of their children schooling to be poor, they may be reluctant to send their children. The factor responsible for low educational attainment can be resembled to the 'risk aversion' in farm sector.

RISK AVERSION FACTOR

The concept of risk aversion indicates that an individual prefers lower returns with known risk to higher returns with unknown risks (Thirlwall, 2011). Implication of the statement is that farmers usually intend to be sticky to traditional methods so as to escape from the unknown risks arising out of new technique of production. It is seen that risk aversion of parents in respect to provide education to children of Deshi Muslim is found one of the prominent reasons for their educational backwardness. The present study finds that more than 40 per cent parents of the Deshi Muslims are willing to send their child for money making activities rather than to send them to educational institutions. They averse risk of education of their children as its opportunity cost is higher. This consideration prevails among them because they are poor and prefers present to future earnings. There is a traditional saying "Porhi Ki Hobo" in Deshi dialect meaning "What education will bring forth". Presence of a large number of educated Deshi unemployed youths in their society has brought such mindset to the present parent groups.

Among many responsible factors for low attainment of education can again be established as poverty, illiteracy, obsolete customs and traditions, scarce educational facilities, etc. The associated factors responsible for low educational attainment of Deshi Muslims are depicted in the following table 3.

Table 3
Responsible Factors for Low Educational Attainment of Sample Households

Factors	Response			
	No response	Yes	No	Total
1. Economic factor (Poverty)	5 (10.87)	36 (78.26)	5 (10.87)	46 (100)
2. Social factors (Illiteracy of parents)	4 (5.80)	60 (86.96)	5 (7.24)	69 (100)
3. Cultural factors (Adherence to traditions)	4 (8.51)	40 (85.11)	3 (6.38)	47 (100)
4. Institutional Arrangements – education (Teachers absenteeism, and poor quality)	3 (9.68)	22 (70.97)	6 (19.85)	31 (100)
5. Administrative factors (Lack of enrolment campaign)	2 (4.76)	35 (83.33)	5 (11.91)	42 (100)
6. Others	3 (20.00)	10 (66.67)	2 (13.33)	15 (100)
Total	21 (8.4)	203 (81.2)	26 (10.4)	250 (100)

Notes: The figures in the brackets represent percentages to total sample size.

Source: Field survey.

The table 3 shows the yes and no responses in regards to the six prominent factors responsible for low educational attainment of Deshi Muslims. It reveals that 81.2 per cent of the sample households have been trapped by the factors shown in the extreme left column of the table. The responsible factors of low educational attainment of Deshi Muslims are elaborated below.

POVERTY

Poverty is one of the important factors for low level of educational attainment of Deshi Muslims. Table 3 reveals that about 78.26 per cent of the parents of Deshi Muslims are facing the burden of poverty. Due to unavoidable problem of poverty, the parents of Deshi Muslims are compelled to send their child to earning activities in order to run their family rather go to schools. The findings reveal that Deshi Muslims are engulfed with less economic resources, thereby, they are poverty ridden people. General poverty has been sustaining this section of people backward in all spheres of livelihood. This finding accords with the findings of Tembon et al (1999) which studied the family level determinants of schooling of boys and girls in Guinea. This study indicated that parents' education and household wealth are the two important determinants of educational achievement of the child.

ILLITERACY

Illiteracy of parents is also another crucial factor for low educational attainment of Deshi Muslims. It is seen that about 86.96 per cent of Deshi Muslim parents are illiterate, of which maximum is the female section (refer table 3). It is also found that the early marriage system is still prevailed in the Deshi Muslims society. Illiteracy leads Deshi Muslims to obsolete culture where girl children are neglected. Their concept about their girl child is that formal education to them is not so important and they are basically engaged with child-care of siblings and other domestic works. Illiteracy of parents resulted on low educational attainment of Deshi Muslim children, more prominently girl child. This finding is resembled to the finding of Tembon et al (1999) that mother's educational background has significant positive impact on the girl child school enrolment.

CULTURE AND TRADITIONS

Adherence to traditions is another factor for low educational attainment of Deshi Muslims. Table 3 indicates that 85.11 per cent of parents of Deshi Muslims have obsolete mindset as they are educationally backward. The mindset of parents of Deshi Muslims restricted them to send their girl child to enroll in higher education. It is found that the evil things like early marriage system, birth escalation process are still prevailed in the Deshi Muslims Community. As a result, the family size is found large, which influence on the household economy, further which ultimately affects the educational attainment of their children.

TEACHER ABSENTEEISM AND POOR QUALITIES

Teacher absenteeism and poor qualities of teacher along with inadequate facilities in schools in the form of rooms, black boards and other educational aids, virtual absence of separate toilets for girls and absence of congenial environment to retain children in studies have all contributed to low educational attainment of Deshi Muslims. It is seen that in most of the schools, especially in primary level teachers (about 70.97 per cent) are often remain absent or stay without teaching. This situation is responsible for detracting pupils from the families who are supported to send their kids to school.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study on "Educational Attainment of Deshi Muslims: A Case Study of Goalpara District" brings forth into the record the 'educational attainment of Deshi Muslims inhabited in specific areas of Goalpara district of Assam'. The holistic approach of inclusive growth is seemed to remain untouched to this section of people. Even after seven decades of independence, Deshi Muslims in Goalpara district are lagging behind than other community in terms of Educational attainment. The Deshi Muslims are primarily concentrated in rural areas. Since Deshi Muslims inhabit mostly in rural areas, their livelihood depends on agriculture. Besides, they are seemed to be deprived from the quality education.

The results of this study necessitate certain policy initiatives to transform the poor educational status of Deshi Muslims in Golapara district. Therefore the state government as well as central government is urged upon to implement strategically the following recommended polices.

Literacy rate of the Deshi Muslims must be improved. To increase literacy rate of this section of people the following measures may be undertaken.

- (a) Ensure 100 per cent school enrolment and the government is urged upon to take necessary measures to improve educational facilities.
- (b) Research and Development (R&D) must be fostered for this section of people to increase educational attainment.
- (c) Area specific Educational Packages must be initiated for this section of people and especially for womenfolk's literacy of Deshi Muslims.

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