

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CULTURAL LIFE OF THE EAST BENGAL ORIGIN ASSAMESE MUSLIMS: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

The problem and prospects of these Muslims been discussed. They have numbers of problems in relation to their social, economic, cultural, and political life. The ancestors of the present generation had migrated here in search of better life and security. But, here also they have burdened with many problems. So their conditions become 'fled from the frying pan into the fire' and 'their attempt at escaping from difficulties and oppression at home became prey to these in another place'. These people have some socio-economic problems, which are quite different from others. Being the dwellers of flood prone areas, they every year faced the problem of flood and erosion. It has rendered every year number of people as poor and landless. Higher number of marginal and land less people, highest number of poor people, higher growth rate of population, all these are found as characteristics feature of their socio-economic life. Apart from these, there are some political and social problems. These are unique and many a times have created a situation of challenge at their identity. The indication with the illegal infiltrators have put their identity under scrutiny and sometimes identified them as illegal migrants, anti-Assamese, antinational etc. In this chapter, it has also been mention that, they have formed a sizable amount of total population of Assam in general and of the undivided Goalpara and Kamrup district in particular. This huge number of population in every situation would take a decisive role. In this regard, speculation goes that, their acknowledgement and acceptance to Assamese fold would surely give dividend in consolidation of Assamese identity as well as socio-economic development of Assam. From agriculture to government services, from labor to political leader, these people have been rendering their services for the greater interest of Assam and Assamese national life. They have never been feeling a second identity beyond Assam and Assamese. Therefore, if the mainstream group recognizes their contribution as well as their attitudes of Assamesization, no doubt the Assamese identity will get a solid base. Numerous leading intellectuals, social thinkers of the state, have contemplated their importance and role in favor of relater Assamese life. It has prompted them to propounding for integration of these Muslims into greater Assamese life.

Keyword: Assamese, Muslim, East Bengal, Socio-Economic, Culture, Life

Introduction

The study on the Socio-cultural life of East Bengal Origin Assamese Muslims is a logical and relevant topic in view of their diversity and varieties of question of Assamese nationality and culture. While discussing the subject, with this viewpoint; we have found some important aspect of the study. These may be cited like this-

1. From the present study, it has been observed that, the migration of East Bengal origin Assamese Muslims is related with pre independence migration in Assam. They are not indifferent from their contemporary migrating people to Assam. Like the others, they also migrated to Assam province from one of the province of than India, i.e. East Bengal. So they canoed not studied as a separates group from others on the basis of partion after Independence.
2. Compare to other migrators', the East Bengal origin Assamese Muslim took settlement to the Agricultural sector in the beginning. Obviously, the migrating poor people had directly come into contact with the indigenous peasants. As they worked in the same field together, they came very close to each other and in course of time this relationship in the work place paved the way for the first wave of integration. In spite of their different cultural background, this group of working people made an intimate relationship with the Assamese culture. So, some of tham in the undivided Kamrup district accepted Assamese as a medium of instruction at school level. So they were the first among the contemporary migratory who came forward to accept the Assamese language in school.
3. In the social life, the East Bengal origins Assamese Muslims have been involving themselves with the different aspects of Assamese life and culture. This tendency of identification with the greater Assamese nationality is still continuing. But due to some contemporary social and political reasons along with their period of settlement they have not been able to assimilate fully with the Assamese identity. In spite of that, their socio-cultural life can't be studied without associating them with the Assamese life and culture since the pre independence period.
4. Fourthly, the social and cultural aspects of the group in question have developed a hybrid form under the influence of indigenous Assamese life and culture. This hybrid socio-cultural life of the East Bengal origin Assamese Muslims bears both original life and culture mixed with Assamese life and culture. But it's trend is more towards the path of assimilation than disintegration. It is a positive aspect of the study. The present study on Socio-cultural life of East Bengal origin Assamese Muslim of undivided Goalpara and Kamrup has presented these Muslims a distinct socio-religiousm group of Assam in general and of this two district in particular. They have distinct nests in their social and cultural life. However, the study revealed that the differences are not enough to designate them

as a heterogeneous group in relation to greater Assamese life and culture. As a part of this identity, it has been seen that, they have great contribution in the socio-economic fields of Assam. Moreover, they have also contributed in the development and consolidation of Assamese language, literature, and culture. Their cultural life would be able to enrich the unique culture of the Assamese people if it can be well assimilated. To facilitate this, there is an urgent need to solve the problems faced by this group, so that they can cultivate Assamese culture and contributing their own to enrich it. The present study has been done within the limitation of socio-cultural life of these Muslims of undivided Goalpara and Kamrup. But there is greater scope for study on their language, Socio-economic life, Folk lore, literary contribution and many other related topics. It also has the scope for comparative study with other social groups in relation to various fields. The present study is only a simple effort in this regard. It is hope that the study will help and encourage the future scholar to explore and undertake various research themes in relation to their language, literature, socio-economic life, folk culture and so on. So far through this study it has been seen that East Bengal origin Assamese Muslim represents a distinct socio-cultural-religious group of Assam. Their history, social and cultural lives have given them the distinctness. They have come from a different cultural hegemony but since their migration and settlement in Assam in general and in the undivided district of Goalpara and Kamrup in particular they have been trying to integrate with the traditional life of Assam. The journey or transition from one tradition to other institutes various changes in their traditional life and this has given the distinctness to their socio-cultural life.

Their venture of transition from one to another tradition have not achieved in its full form due to some related reasons. The time factor as well as various socio-political factors found responsible in this regard. In this study all these have been discussed But it is a fact that, they have been showing mingling attitudes since their settlement period to Assamese life in general. In the post-colonial, postindependence period, the changing socio-economic condition has accelerated the process. Accordingly, these Muslims now designated themselves as Assamese and part and parcel of greater Assamese life. Nevertheless, the assumption regarding their complete assimilation to Assamese life is still a matter of concern. It has not achieved partly due to contemporary socio-political conditions of Assam in general and partly because of their socio-political and economic problems.

The study on the socio cultural life of these Muslims of undivided Goalpara and Kamrup district has revealed that, they have been facing lot of problems in relation to their social, economic, cultural, political life. Of these, some have similarities with others, but some are quite different from other social groups. As a marginalized group, they have been facing some common problems. These are related to their socioeconomic life. The problems like, backward economic condition, poverty, dominance of landless and poor people lower literacy rate, specially in case of women, higher birth rate, backward status of education, backward communication, unemployment, poor health and hygiene condition etc. are some common problems of these people. Apart from these, there are some other problems too, these are unique in nature and related with their socio-cultural and political life. These are also concerned with their identity and integration.

The economic backwardness is a major problem of these Muslims. Their social life is characterized by presence of highest number of poor people. They had come here to sustain their lives and livelihood under economic pressure. But more than one hundred years have passed, but their condition has not changed so far. Poverty remains as a dominant factor for their backwardness. During the period of migration, initially, the availability of land had given them enough opportunity to get settlement. However, in the subsequent decade the increase of migrants created problem for settlement eventually many of them turned to landless or marginal farmers.¹ The condition becomes more serious in the post-independence period. Since 1950 the recurring flood and erosion of Brahmaputra has been damaging agriculture fields and 1 Banking enquiry commission report, p-83 eroded number of villages in the *char chapori* belt. As a result, the number of poor people enhanced every year.

One of the major social problems of these Muslim is higher birth rate. The lack of education, early marriage of girls' child, and lack of knowledge of family planning – all are working as contributory factors in this regard. The increase in population have squeezed the land holding size per family and turned many of them as landless poor. So it is found that all these have been contributed in poverty ness of these people. 6.1.4. In case of Education, the overall literacy rate of these Muslims, compare to others has been found as lowest. The rate among women is most perilous. The illiteracy has been deprived these people from social progresses as well as getting social justice. Due to illiteracy, many of them have become easy victim of religious dogmatism. Similarly, in social life become victimized of politics. On the other hand due to backward economic condition most of these Muslims have been deprived from pursuing quality education As a result their human resource are comparatively less qualitative than others.

In case of land occupation, they have been faced lot of problems. In the *charchapori* belt their land occupation is found temporary in nature, settled as 'eksona', 'touji'pattaland. Due to ignorance and illiteracy many a times their ownership is challenged by the so-called 'dewani' or 'matabbar' and occupied their land. The 'Miyadi'pattaland or permanently settled land, has been found, very limited in the *charchapori* belt. It has been depriving these people from getting the government beneficial scheme or government loan etc. So government schemes for eradication of poverty remain out of reach for them.

In case of socio-cultural and political problem, it is seen that these are vulnerable problem and these are basically concerned with their identity question. There is a common allegation on these Muslims that they have not assimilated with the indigenous people. Assimilation is a natural process and it happened among the groups who are equal in status, from socio-cultural point of view. The mutual influence have helped different group to merge in to a single entity. Historically these Muslims were poor and backward migrant community. Moreover, they hailed from a different cultural tradition. Therefore, their migration has placed them as a minority group here. As a result they have failed to influence the host tradition of Assam and become submissive to the host community. Further, the colonial politics have segregated these Muslims from the rest of people since their settlement period. In the post-independence period, the same notion has been continued through various social political issues. As a result, the mode of integration and assimilation shown by these Muslims has been looking as a matter of consideration. Sometimes their contribution has been

acknowledge by the host community and accepted them as a well come group to the Assamese fold. On reverse some issues have intended these Muslims as anti Assamese, anti-nationals. So in case of these Muslims 'social exclusion' cannot be denied. These Muslims have been contributing to the national life of Assam since their settlement in Assam. Besides economic contribution, in case of Assamese language and literature they have been contributing a lot. Even in case of politics too when required they have been extended their cooperation. But despite all these they have been keeping outside of the so called Assamese fold by saying that they are yet to assimilate with the main stream life. But it is difficult to determine the degree of assimilation required for being Assamese. It has been seen that there are some reasons that debarred these people to assimilate with the mainstream life. These are hardly been taken into consideration by any intellectuals or social thinkers. This are-

1. They are coming from a different tradition that is heterogeneous in nature compare to Assamese culture.
2. Their place of settlement is unique and in most cases they are isolated from the mainland. Further the colonial mode of settlement keep these Muslims away from the indigenous people. It has developed a mental gap.
3. The social and economic backwardness of these Muslims have created a status differences with the rest of people
4. Since pre independence period the 'identity crisis of Assamese' as raised by section of Assamese middle class and continued henceforth has been entangled with these Muslims in terms of 'Muslim -Bengali' dominance, in terms of 'Muslim league- Pakistani supporter', in terms of 'illegal Pakistani', in terms of 'illegal Bangladeshi' and lastly 'Jihadist fundamentalist' etc. All these have estranged these Muslims from the main fold of Assamese.

These above mentioned reasons are found responsible for obstructing the complete assimilation of these Muslims with Assamese fold. The study has revealed that their settlement in Assam, particularly in this two undivided districts geographically, politically, and socially parted them from East Bengal forever. Eventually the participation of these Muslims in the agriculture sector have placed these Muslim into direct contact with the indigenous people. It has provided greater opportunity to develop a cordial relation with the indigenous people. This have been inspired these Muslims to develop a socio-cultural life which is complementary to greater Assamese life. In case of other contemporary migrants it is seen that they still have been maintained a relation with their past. But in case of these Muslims the independence of India and separation of East Bengal as East Pakistan, later on as Bangladesh have placed them as an isolated group in Assam. As a result they have taken the option to merge with the indigenous life of Assam and began to adjust their socio-cultural life with the new surroundings. They have already become major contributor in agriculture economy of Assam. In social life gradually move to Assam language and accept it as own language. Moreover try to intricate with the every social, political issues related to Assamese life and thus try to become Assamese like other social group.

So it is evident that these Muslims are an integral part of greater Assamese life. Since their initial days of settlement the Assamese intellectuals, writers, various civil societies have acknowledge their endless contribution to Assamese life with a hope that in future they will be become Assamese like others. But significantly some sensitive issued tagged with these Muslims since pre independence period have not only turmoil the process of integration and assimilation but also develop a sense of insecurity and distrust among them. The experience of PIP scheme (1964-68), Assam Movement (1979-85) and list may be extended upto the ethnic violence in bodo-dominated areas of lower Assam (1992, 1994, 1998, 2008, and 2012) time and again proved the truth.

Under such a condition the need of the hour is to estimate their 'Assamese' identity on the basis of social fact and reality. Assimilation is a natural process. So in case of these Muslims the forced assimilation can never be possible. The modern mode of social living, network and accessibility have tide different group of people to work and live together. These Muslims are now also a part of these. The experience and knowledge they have gathered from the greater society now transmitted to their own society. In this way the social differences are now gradually merging. It is seen in every aspect of life like construction of dwelling house, adornment of bride, dress, food habits, marriage function, celebration of festivals etc. Even in case of creative art like creative literature, performing art likes Drama, song etc. this has been seen. Earlier majority of these Muslims had remained confined within their own areas only. But the changing economic condition has been forced these people irrespective of their economic class to come out from the traditional geographical bearing. There expositions to outer world have created a changing trend in respect of their socio-cultural life. In this changing trend the tendency of merging with a greater tradition is noticeable. This natural mode of change now waited for positive response from the main stream Assamese life.

Conclusion

These Muslims are representing major share (nearly 70-80 laces) of state population. from economic point of view this huge number of population has been playing an important role in the state economy. Besides agriculture at present they have been playing the major source of labour force required for modern developmental work. This huge number if utilized in proper way from economic perspective will surely provide strong economic base to state. Similarly in case of other social, political and cultural issues of Assam they have been assigning the important role. In time of reorganization of state in 1950, in time of language movement of 1965, in time of Medium Movement they have took part in favour of Assamese and Assamese national life. So an Assamese mind has been active among them.

In case of Assamese language, also it is seen that in recent time various smaller groups of Assamese fold now favoured their self-linguistic identity. It has practically put a negative impact on Assamese. But despite this the Assamese language still holds the majority status only because of these Muslims. They also provided the greater reader bank for Assamese writers. Again, from political point of view in recent times the various ethnic and racial groups of Assam have parted them from the greater Assamese identity and

trying to establish self-identity. Some are even demanding the geographical segmentation of present Assam. The demand of Bodoland, Kamatapur, and Karbi state are instance of this. All these social and political issues have put a great challenge to Assamese identity.

Amidst these changing socio-economic and political condition the Assamese identity has been facing daunting challenges for its existence. In this critical juncture the recognition of this Muslim, surely provide a strong vintage ground for Assamese Identity.

Reference:

1. Banking enquiry commission report, p-83