

## Socio economic conditions of women in minority community of Assam with special reference to Christian community

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### Abstract

In a country like India, where women constitute nearly 50 per cent of the population, it is impossible to think for further development of the nation, until and unless women are empowered. In India, the majority of the poor are living in rural areas (i.e. 68.48 per cent as per 2011 provisional census) and women are its main component. That is why; the improvement of social and economic conditions of the women is considered as an urgent requirement for overall development of the rural economy. So far as the contribution of different communities towards nation building in India is concerned, it is found that all the communities are contributing a lot in the nation building process which cannot be ignored. In this regard, the contribution of minority communities is also found very much significant. The present paper makes an attempt to evaluate the socio economic status of the women of the Christian community in Assam taking Telahi development block of Lakhimpur district as area of study.

**Keywords:** socio economic condition, women empowerment, nation building, minority.

### 1. Introduction

In the world, although women community is equal to men in population, it is the matter of concern that yet in the modern sophisticated world, women are treated as second citizen or subordinate to men. Though various efforts are being made to improve the status of women, women folk has not taken their maximum use and remain still backward. In almost all the countries, governments are providing special provisions for women’s development and efforts are being made to extract maximum use of women’s talent.

In India, the majority of the poor are living in rural areas (i.e. 68.48 per cent as per 2011 census) and women are its main component. That is why; the improvement of social and economic conditions of the women is considered as an urgent requirement for overall development of the rural economy. The great philosopher and emancipator of Indian women, Swami Vivekananda therefore opined, “There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing.” On the other hand, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was of the view that in order to awaken the people, it is the woman who has to be awakened. According to him once the woman is on the move the household moves and then the village moves and thereafter the country moves.

In India, where women constitute nearly 50 per cent of the population, but only 65.46 per cent of the women are literate as per 2011 census. Thus, it is impossible to think for a developed nation until and unless women are empowered. Therefore, the need of the present hour is to make the women fully independent and empowered them through various social, political as well as economic activities. In this respect, economic empowerment of women is a vital element for strong economic growth in any country. Because, empowering women enhances their ability to influence the changes and creates a better society. With this motto, the Planning Commission of India has laid more emphasis on women empowerment issues in its Ninth and Tenth Five Year plans.

Accordingly, in order to empower women and to fight against poverty, the Government has introduced Self-Help Group Programme as an innovative and dynamic antipoverty programme. National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) was the main initiator of Self-Help Group movement which was started from 1996-97 in India.

So far as the contribution of different communities towards nation building in India is concerned, it is found that all the communities are contributing a lot in the nation building process which cannot be ignored. In this regard, the contribution of minority communities is also found very much significant. The National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992 (Section-2©) notified five religious communities in India as minority communities depending on the size of their population structure. These five communities are Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, Christian and Zoroastrian (Parsis). Table-1.1 shows religion wise distribution of population in Lakhimpur district and Assam (as per 2011 Census Report).

**Table 1.1:** Distribution of population by religion in Assam and Lakhimpur district

Religion	Lakhimpur		Assam	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1	2	3	4	5
Hindu	7,97,130	76.49	1,91,80,759	61.47
Muslim	1,93,476	18.57	1,06,79,345	34.22
Christian	46,217	4.43	1,16,58,67	30.74
Sikh	412	0.04	20,672	0.07
Buddhist	1074	0.10	54,993	0.18
Jain	250	0.02	25,949	0.08
Others	2410	0.23	27,118	0.09
Not stated	1168	0.11	50,873	0.16
Total	10,42,137	100.00	3,120,5576	100.00

Source: Religious Census Report, 2011.

It is observed from the Table-1.1 that out of the total population of 10, 42,137 in the district (as per 2011 Census

Report), 76.49 per cent of the total population in the district is belong to Hindu and other community, while the percentage of minority communities viz. Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist and Jain to the total population in the district is found out at 18.57, 4.43, 0.04, 0.10 and 0.02 per cent respectively.

The present paper makes an attempt to evaluate the socio economic status of the women of the Christian community in Assam taking Telahi development block of Lakhimpur district as area of study. Accordingly, a study was conducted by the researcher in the block and required information have been collected.

### 1.2 Objectives of the study

The study was carried out with the objectives of:

- i) To examine age wise distribution of Christian women.
- ii) To examine the educational status of Christian women.
- iii) To study the awareness of the Christian women about different women related development programmes.
- iv) To study about involvement of Christian women in different income generating activities.

### 1.3 Methodology

The study is mainly based on primary information collected personally by the researcher in the year 2014. The study was carried out in Telahi development block of Lakhimpur district. Since, the development block has only one village viz. Ulubari (Revenue Village- Angerkhowa), where Christian community people reside; therefore, Ulubari village has been selected purposively to carry out the study. As the community has five SHGs in the sample village formed by women, so, five SHG members from each SHG have been selected randomly to know about their income generating activities.

### 1.4 Size of family, size of land holding and occupational pattern of the households

The pace of development of any society is largely dependent on the socio-economic conditions of the people living in that society. In addition to the economic conditions, attitudes, traditions, prevailing environment, motivations and initiatives taken by the Government can play a pioneer role in developing any society or a community. Therefore, the directions of development vary from place to place, society to society and community to community.

In this part of the paper, an attempt has been made to give a brief outline of the Christian households living in the sample village by eliciting their size of family, size of land holding and occupational pattern in order to understand the economic status of the community as a whole.

It was found that in the sample village, there are total 69 number of households out of which, 55 households belong to Christian community (Adivasi), two households belong to Ahom community and 12 households belong to Muslim community. The total population of 55 Christian households is 273 on an average 4.96 persons per household. Table-1.2 shows distribution of households by size of family.

**Table 1.2:** Distribution of households by size of family

Family size	No. of households
2-5	11
6-8	37
9+	07
Total	55

Source: Field Survey

It is seen from the table that majority of the households (37) households have a family size of 6-8, 11 households have a family size of 2-5, and seven households have family members of more than nine numbers, out of which four households are found joint families having a family size of 11-13.

So far as the size of land holdings by the households belong to that community is concerned, it was found that out of 55 households, 30 households have cultivated land area from 3-7 bighas and 25 households do not have cultivated land except their homestead. This depicts the dependence of households on non-farm activities. Thus, working as a daily wage earner is the main occupation of majority of the people. In the total population, three persons work in Government sector, six women are engaged in nursing activity in private sector hospitals, and four male persons are working as driver in private sector. These information gives us a partial picture of the economic status of the sample community.

### 1.5 Age-wise distribution of women

During the period of study it was found that out of 273 Christian people in the sample village, the number of female is 127, and thus the sex ratio is worked out at 870 per thousand male population. Table-1.3 depicts age-wise distribution of Christian women in the sample village. As shown in the Table-1.3, majority of the women are in the age group of 31-50, and the number of women in the age group of 1-20,21-30 and 51-60+ is found out at 26, 17 and 20 respectively.

**Table 1.3:** Distribution of women as per age group

Age group	No of women
1	2
1-20	26
21-30	17
31-40	33
41-50	31
51-60+	20
Total	127

Source:-Field Survey.

### 1.6 Educational status

Education plays a unique role in the process of development in any society through spread of knowledge and awareness among the members of the society. Table-1.4 provides information regarding the educational status of the women belong to the sample community.

**Table 1.4:** Educational status of women

HSLC passed	HS passed	Graduate	Post-graduate
1	2	3	4
12	11	Nil	Nil

Source: Field survey.

It is observed from the table that out of 127 female, only 12 women are found HSLC passed, 11 HS passed and none of the women could able to reach higher level of studies. And, nearly 20 girls are studying at the school level. Thus, regarding educational status of the Christian women, it can be said that their willingness for higher studies is found to be very low, and this may be due to poor economic condition of the family or poor performance in the result. So far as knowledge of the adult women regarding different Government sponsored

schemes are concerned, it was observed that they were not totally aware about different schemes launched by the Government for empowering the women folk of the society. Thus, majority of the married women are passing their lives only as a housewife and fully depends on the income of the male persons of the family.

### 1.7 Involvement in income generating activities

It is observed that, although the SHG movement could able to bring a radical change among the women through participation in different income generating activities; but, economic condition of all the SHG members (who have undertaken economic activities) could not be improved by these activities. And, most of the SHG programmes are not successful in its implementation mainly because of the attitude and mindset of the women to perform the activity. It was found during the period of study that the women of the sample community have five SHGs in the village formed by ten members in each SHG. Out of the five SHGs, one SHG has been formed in the last few months, and other four SHGs have already completed 3-7 years of its formation. Of these four SHGs, one SHG (Tabita SHG) has received a financial assistance from the Development block under SGSY programme to undertake vermi culture activity. However, other three SHGs are assisted with the revolving fund by the development block under SGSY programme. Surprisingly, it was found that Tabita SHG, who has been assisted in the year 2009-10, with bank loan and subsidy amount of Rs.1,20,000/ to undertake economic activity, continued its activity only up to 2 years and later on the SHG could not continue its production due to lack of marketing the product as reported by the SHG members. On the other hand, other three SHGs, who have been assisted with revolving fund of Rs.25,000/ under SGSY programme, are mainly engaged in lending operations and earning nearly Rs.500/ to Rs.1200/ per month individually as interest from their deposits. Thus, it was found that women of the community are not enthusiastic to undertake any economic activity in a permanent nature to generate additional income, and not aware to extract the benefit of the Government sponsored programmes. Thus, during the period of study, it was observed that the socio-economic conditions of the community is found to be very low in comparison to other communities of the society, even lower than that of women of the SC and ST community of the area.

### 1.8 Findings of the study

The main findings of the study are

- i) It is impossible to think for a developed nation until and unless women are empowered. Therefore, the need of the present hour is to make the women fully independent and empowered through various social, political as well as economic activities. In this respect, economic empowerment of women is a vital element for strong economic growth of the country.
- ii) It was observed that out of the total population of 8, 89,010 in the district (as per 2001 Census Report), 79.48 per cent of the total population in the district is belong to Hindu and other community; while the percentage of minority communities viz. Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist and Jain to the total population in the district is found out at 16.14, 4.13, 0.08, 0.15 and 0.02 per cent respectively.

- iii) It was found that in the sample village, there are total 69 number of households out of which, 55 households belong to Christian community (Adivasi), two households belong to Ahom community and 12 households belong to Muslim community. The total population of 55 Christian households is 273 on an average 4.96 persons per household.
- iv) It was found that majority of the households (37) have a family size of 6-8, 11 households have a family size of 2-5, and seven households have family members of more than nine numbers, out of which four households are found joint families having a family size of 11-13.
- v) So far as the size of land holdings by the households belong to that community is concerned, it was found that out of 55 households, 30 households have cultivated land area from 3-7 bighas and 25 households do not have cultivated land except their homestead. This depicts the dependence of households on non-farm activities. Thus, working as a daily wage earner is the main occupation of majority of the people.
- vi) It was found that out of 273 Christian people in the sample village, the number of female is 127, and thus the sex ratio is worked out at 870 per thousand male population. It was observed that majority of the women are in the age group of 31-50, and the number of women in the age group of 1-20, 21-30 and 51-60+ is found out at 26, 17 and 20 respectively.
- vii) It is observed that out of 127 female, only 12 women are found HSLC passed, 11 HS passed and none of the women could able to reach higher level of studies. And, nearly 20 girls are studying at the school level. Thus, regarding educational status of the Christian women, it can be said that their willingness for higher studies is found to be very low, which may be due to poor economic condition of the family or poor performance in the result.
- viii) The sample community has five SHGs in the village formed by ten members in each SHG. Out of the five SHGs, one SHG has been formed in the last few months, and other four SHGs have already completed 3-7 years of its formation. Of these four SHGs, one SHG (Tabita SHG) has received a financial assistance from the Development block under SGSY programme to undertake vermi culture activity.
- ix) It was found that Tabita SHG, who has been assisted in the year 2009-10, with bank loan and subsidy amount of Rs.1,20,000/ to undertake economic activity, continued its activity only up to 2 years and later on the SHG could not continue its production due to lack of marketing the product as reported by the SHG members.
- x) Three SHGs, who have been assisted with revolving fund of Rs.25, 000/ under SGSY programme, are mainly engaged in lending operations and earning nearly Rs.500/ to Rs.1200/ per month individually as interest from their deposits. Thus, it was found that women of the community are not enthusiastic to undertake any economic activity in a permanent nature to generate additional income, and not aware to extract the benefit of the Government sponsored programmes.
- xi) During the period of study, it was observed that the socio-economic conditions of the community is found to be very low in comparison to other communities of the society,

even lower than that of women of the SC and ST community of the area.

### **1.9 Conclusion**

From the above analysis it can be said that the socio-economic conditions of the women of the Christian community is very low in comparison to other communities in the block, so, more needs to be done to empower the women of the sample community so that they become empowered socially, politically and economically. In this respect, they should come forward to take the benefit of the Government sponsored programmes; and in this respect, the NGOs and Government should also give more emphasis to improve their socio-economic conditions.

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