

A Study on the Status of Enrolment among Muslim Students in the selected Colleges of the Brahmaputra valley with special reference to Sivasagar district of Assam

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‘शोध उत्कर्ष’ एक स्वतंत्र पत्रिका है। इसे किसी भी सार्वजनिक, वाणिज्यिक या गैर-लाभकारी संगठन से कोई वित्तीय सहायता, अनुदान या फंडिंग प्राप्त नहीं होती है।

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Abstract- Higher education is vital for reducing the severe educational gender gaps globally faced by Muslim women. This five-year study (2019-20 to 2023-24) tracks their enrollment trends, highlighting a resilient recovery and stabilization by 2022-23 following sharp pandemic-related declines. The study aims to drive real-world impact by promoting equal access to education. Increasing the enrollment of Muslim women in higher education serves as a key catalyst for social inclusion, long-term gender empowerment, and overall equality. The present paper attempts to study the status of enrolment of Muslim students in the girl's college of the Brahmaputra valley with special reference to Sivasagar district of Assam. It is also an attempt to study the status of enrolment of Muslim students in the co-educational college of the Brahmaputra valley with special reference to Sivasagar district of Assam. Descriptive Survey method has been used on the basis of the formulated objectives because this method is a fact finding approach and deals with the data of present situation (Koul, 2013). Records from the Office of the Principal and DHE, Assam, have been used to collect information regarding enrolment of Muslim female college students in order to select the sample of colleges purposively. In the present study the required data have been collected from both primary and secondary sources.

Secondary data for the study have been collected with the help of journals, thesis, internet sources and books. The primary data for the study have been collected with the help of Questionnaire- A.

Key words: Higher education, Female Students, Muslim female Students, Enrollment, Under-graduate Course.

1.0 INTRODUCTION:- Higher education is critical for individual empowerment and societal development, fostering intellectual growth, economic progress, and social mobility. Muslim women, despite Islam's emphasis on knowledge, face significant educational disadvantages globally and in India, due to socio-economic constraints, cultural norms, early marriage, and limited institutional support. Studies including the Sachar Committee Report highlight low literacy rates, minimal higher education participation, and persistent gender gaps. Government initiatives have had limited impact due to poor implementation and awareness. This paper examines the enrolment status faced by Muslim students, particularly women, in higher education.

Demography of the Area Under Study:- Assam is the largest northeastern state of India by population and the second largest by area, covering 78,438 square kilometers. According to the 2011 Census, Muslims

constitute 34.22% of the state's population, making them the second-largest community in Assam and placing the state fifth nationwide in Muslim population density. Despite this significant demographic presence, a stark gap exists in higher education, as Muslims account for only 5.23% of total college enrolments in the state. Institutional data from the All India Survey on Higher Education (2018–19) highlights this baseline, showing that 49,869 Muslim males and 47,596 Muslim females were enrolled in higher education across Assam. Focusing on the specific area of this study, Sivasagar is a district located in Upper Assam of the Brahmaputra valley with a total population of 692,435, where Muslims make up a smaller minority of 10.43%. The district spans an area of 1,598.85 square kilometers and maintains a high overall literacy rate of 78.41%. Structurally, the higher education landscape in Sivasagar includes 15 provincialized general degree colleges available (as on 16.03.2023) according to the official website of DHE.

2.0 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE :- A review of existing international, national, and state-level literature reveals a consistent pattern of low enrolment rates and gender disparities among Muslim students in higher education. Some of the important studies are mentioned below:

2.1 Studies done at International level- At the international level, studies show that higher education in India grew rapidly between 1983 and 2004, but this growth was not equal. Big gaps still exist between the rich and the poor, cities and villages, and males and females (Azam & Bloom, 2008; Hamid et al., 2020). When looking at both India and Pakistan, researchers found that Muslim students—especially girls—lag behind because of shared problems like poverty, early marriage, gender inequality, and universities being located too far away from their homes (Saxena, 2014).

2.2 Studies conducted at National level:- At the national level, major reports and studies show that Muslims are one of the most educationally backward groups in India. The famous Sachar Committee Report (2006) highlighted that the literacy rate for Muslims was only 59% (compared to the national average of 64.8%), and less than 4% of Muslims had a college degree. Studies also show that location matters: for example, 85% of rural Muslim women in North India could not read or write, while 88% of urban Muslim women in South India were literate (John & Shinde, 2012). National data also reveals that Muslim

students have the highest dropout rates at the primary, middle, and high school levels (John & Shinde, 2012; Hoque, 2016). Muslim women face a double disadvantage, lagging behind both Muslim men and women from other religions, with a literacy rate of just 51.9% (Bano, 2017). Only a tiny fraction of Muslim women make it to higher education; one study showed that only 1.8% became graduates and just 0.33% finished postgraduate degrees (Saha, 2020). Recent government data from the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE, 2022) shows that Muslim students make up only 4.87% of all college students in India, which is a drop from previous years. However, there is one positive sign: recent trends show that more female Muslim students are enrolling in college than male Muslim students (Sabrang, 2023).

2.3 Studies conducted at State level: At the state and local levels, researchers look closely at the specific reasons why Muslim students, especially girls, drop out. In states like West Bengal and Assam, studies show that poverty is the biggest reason families cannot afford to send girls to school (Dutta, 2015; Hassan, 2017). Other major roadblocks include a lack of local schools, long and unsafe travel distances, a lack of female teachers, and strict social taboos or conservative community views that keep girls at home (Ahmed & Sultana, 2014; Barbhuyan, 2017). In villages, many girls drop out after the eighth grade because they find it hard to balance regular schoolwork with religious studies at local Madrassas (Ahmed & Deka, 2018). While all of these studies show that government help and community awareness are badly needed, none of them have actually looked at what is happening to Muslim students in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. This is the exact missing piece (research gap) that this research paper aims to study.

3.0 SIGNIFICANCE: This paper addresses a critical gap in higher education research by focusing on the enrollment trends of Muslim students in Sivasagar, Assam, India. While elementary education among Muslim girls has improved over time, multiple studies and the Sachar Committee report show that their representation and overall status in higher education remain low. This persistent backwardness is the primary driving force behind the researcher's focus. The researcher purposively selected under-researched area like the Sivasagar district. This geographic focus provides specific regional data and offers a roadmap for future studies to test and refine solutions in similar contexts. The core academic significance of the paper lies in its target to fill specific

research gaps. It directly investigates the precise trends regarding the enrollment of female Muslim students and the underlying gender disparities present at the college level. Ultimately, the study aims to drive an impact by promoting equal access to education. Increasing the enrollment of Muslim women in higher education serves as a key catalyst for social inclusion, long-term gender empowerment, and overall equality.

OBJECTIVES: The objectives of the present paper are:

To study the status of enrolment of Muslim students in the girl's college of the Brahmaputra valley with special reference to Sivasagar district of Assam.

To study the status of enrolment of Muslim students in the co-educational college of the Brahmaputra valley with special reference to Sivasagar district of Assam.

5.0 CONCEPTUAL AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF THE KEY TERMS: The conceptual and operational definitions of the key terms used in the study are as follows:

Higher education: It means 'advanced level of studies on various subjects which can be done at a college or university (Cambridge dictionary). In the present study Higher education refers to the educational the general UG level in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam.

Under Graduate Programme: An Under Graduate degree programme is the first- degree course of study that can be pursued at a university or college. In the present study, Under Graduate (UG) Programme refers to B.A., B.Sc. and B.Com Programme offered in the general degree colleges of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam.

Muslim Student: According to Cambridge dictionary, it means 'a person who follows the religion of Islam' and student means a person who is learning at a college or university. So, the term Muslim Student means learners following Islam. In the present study Muslim students refer to the students following Islam as their religion and pursuing UG programme in the colleges of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam.

Female Student: According to Cambridge dictionary, student means a person who is learning at an educational institution and the term female is used in technical or scientific writing to refer to a woman or girl. So, the term female student refers to a girl who is learning in a college or university. In the present study, female students refer to girls or females who are pursuing UG programme of B.A., B.Sc. and B.

Com in the colleges of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam.

Enrolment: Enrolment is the total number of pupils included in the attendance register of an educational institution in a particular academic year. In the present study, the enrolment refers to the total number of Muslim students of UG program enrolled in the colleges with reference to Muslim female students.

6.0 THE DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

The delimitations of the study are:

1. The study included Sivasagar district of Assam only.
2. It is confined only to the provincialised general degree colleges of Sivasagar district of Assam.
3. The findings regarding the status of enrolment of Muslim female students are limited to the last five academic years (i.e. from session 2019-20 to 2023-24) of UG program only.
4. The findings are confined to the sample colleges only.

METHODOLOGY: For conducting of the present study, Descriptive Survey method has been used on the basis of the formulated objectives because this method is a fact finding approach and deals with the data of present situation (Koul, 2013). Records from the Office of the Principal and DHE, Assam, have been used to collect information regarding enrolment of Muslim female college students in order to select the sample of colleges. In the present study the required data have been collected from both primary and secondary sources. Secondary data for the study have been collected with the help of journals, thesis, internet sources and books. The primary data for the study have been collected with the help of Questionnaire- A.

7.1 Population:

The population of the study included all the provincialised general degree colleges and principals of Sivasagar district in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam.

7.2 Sample and Sampling techniques:

7.2.1 Sample of districts:

The researcher purposively selected Sivasagar district (Upper Assam) of Brahmaputra valley of Assam.

7.2.2 Sample of colleges:

30% affiliated provincialised general degree colleges from Sivasagar district have been selected purposively as sample of colleges. Since, the total number of general degree college in Sivasagar is 15. So, its sample of 30% colleges included only 5 colleges. For this purpose, a list have been prepared containing all the 15 colleges arranged in decending order on the basis

of the higher proportion of Muslim female students who are admitted in 2023-24. From this list top 4 colleges have been included as sample. After that one girls' college have been included purposively in this list of sampled colleges to compare the higher education of Muslim female students in co-educational and girl's college. In this way, total 5 sample of colleges have been selected from Sivasagar district. So, purposive sampling technique has been used.

7.2.3 Sample of Principals:

After selection of the sample of colleges from Sivasagar district, the principals of all these selected sample of provincialised general degree colleges will be purposively selected as sample of principals.

7.3 Tools used in the data collection: For the study, the primary data have been collected with the help of Official Records on the basis of objective. The information has been collected by using records from the Office of the Principal and DHE, Assam. A questionnaire for the Principal has been used as tool for the data collection from the colleges.

7.3.1 Construction of the tools: The Questionnaire-A for the Principal has been constructed on the basis of the objectives. The first draft of the tool was sent to 4 experts (experts in the field of test construction who have prepared questionnaire in the relevant domain of knowledge) for necessary suggestions and modifications. As per the suggestions of the experts necessary modifications were made in the tool and the final draft of all the tools has been constructed.

7.4 Procedure used in data collection: The process of collecting data has been started from December, 2023. After taking permission data have been collected from the Office of the DHE, Assam to select the sample colleges. The researcher then visited the colleges and after taking permission from the respective Principals of the sample college, data have been collected from the office of the Principals. For this purpose, the researcher established rapport and provided necessary instructions to the sample of Principals and after that the questionnaire has been distributed respectively with the request of filling them up.

7.5 Statistical techniques used for analysis and interpretation of data: For fulfilling the objectives quantitative analysis has been done by calculation of percentage of responses.

7.6 Limitations of the Study:- This study's primary limitation stems from its use of purposive sampling. Rather than selecting a statistically representative sample of all higher education institutions

in the Brahmaputra Valley, the researcher deliberately chose specific colleges that possessed characteristics relevant to the study's goals of only one district. This study is a part of the PhD work of the researcher. Because of this sampling method, the findings cannot be generalized to the entire population of colleges across Assam or the Brahmaputra Valley region. Instead, the conclusions are highly context-specific and apply strictly to the selected institutions. Despite these constraints, the study still offers valuable insights into higher education enrollment patterns. These localized findings can serve as a meaningful foundation for future, more extensive research that utilizes probability sampling techniques.

8.0 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

Quantitative analysis has been done by calculation of percentage of data.

Objectives of the present paper:

1. To study the status of enrolment of Muslim students in the girl's college of the Brahmaputra valley with special reference to Sivasagar district of Assam.
2. To study the status of enrolment of Muslim students in the co-educational college of the Brahmaputra valley with special reference to Sivasagar district of Assam.

In accordance with the above objectives the analysis of the study has been discussed as below:

Objective number 1: To study the status of enrolment of Muslim students in the girl's college of the Brahmaputra valley with special reference to Sivasagar district of Assam

8.0 Analysis on the status of enrolment of Muslim students in the colleges of the Brahmaputra valley with special reference to Sivasagar district of Assam.

The rate of female enrolment has been calculated as percentage of female enrolment and the rate of male enrolment is calculated as percentage of male enrolment to the total. The formula used for percentage of enrolment for both male and female students and for total enrolment is given below:

- a) **Percentage of Female Enrolment** = $(\text{Total Enrolment of Female Students} \div \text{Total Enrolment of Students}) \times 100\%$
- b) **Percentage of Male Enrolment** = $(\text{Total Enrolment of Male Students} \div \text{Total Enrolment of Students}) \times 100\%$
- c) **Total Enrolment** = Total Enrolment of Male Students + Total Enrolment of Female Students

Analysis on enrolment pattern of Muslim students in the colleges has been made with reference to:

8.1.a: Analysis on the status of enrolment of Muslim students in the girl's colleges :- A year-wise trend analysis of Enrolment of Muslim female students has been done (Girl's College) Here's a trend analysis of Enrolment of Muslim students for the Girl's College , interpreting the changes over the five academic years which is shown in the Table No.8.1. The Table No.8.1 shows the enrolment of Muslim students in the Girl's College of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam in last five years with special reference to Sivasagar district of Assam .

TableNo.8.1

Status of enrolment of Muslim students in the Girl's College

(from In the above Table: TF=Total Female students, MF=Muslim Female students

019-20			2020-21			2021-22			2022-23			2023-24		
No. of MFS	No. of TF	% of MFS	No. of MFS	No. of TF	% of MFS	No. of MFS	No. of TF	% of MFS	No. of MFS	No. of TF	% of MFS	No. of MFS	No. of TF	% of MFS
71	513	13.84	75	547	13.71	63	477	13.21	57	407	14.01	67	464	14.43

The above Table No.8.1 shows that the trend of Enrolment in the Girls' College. Since Girls' Colleges admit only female students, the analysis focuses on changes in total Muslim female enrolment over time.

The data of the College indicates a relatively stable trend in the enrolment of Muslim Female Students during the five-year period. In 2019–20, Muslim female students constituted 13.84% of the total female student population, with 71 out of 513 students. This percentage remained fairly consistent in the following years, recording 13.71% in 2020–21 and 13.21% in 2021–22. As light increase was observed in 2022–23, where the percentage rose to 14.01%, and it further increased marginally to 14.43% in 2023–24. The number of Muslim female students fluctuated slightly but remained within a similar range throughout the period. Overall, the data suggests that College maintained a relatively consistent level of Muslim female representation with only minor changes overtime.

Overall, the data suggests that while the level of participation of Muslim Female Students (MFS) varies across the colleges, there has been a general improvement in the enrolment of Muslim female students, reflecting increasing access to higher education among this group.

Objective 2: To study the status of enrolment of Muslim students in the co-educational colleges of the Brahmaputra valley with special reference to Sivasagar district of Assam.

8.1.b: Analysis on Status of Enrolment of Muslim students in the Co-educational colleges :

Table No. 8.2 : Enrolment of Muslim Students in Last Five Years

2019-20 to 2023-24) with special reference to Muslim female students(MFS)

COLLEGE	2019-20		2020-21		2021-22		2022-23		2023-24	
COLLEGE	MM%	MF%	MM%	MF%	MM%	MF%	MM%	MF%	MM%	MF%
H	8.00%	13.46%	15.84%	10.00%	13.26%	12.50%	12.32%	19.26%	8.23%	16.12%
J	5.70%	8.80%	7.80%	5.30%	12.00%	10.40%	3.00%	12.50%	9.70%	16.00%
N	24.40%	17.02%	21.60%	41.60%	25.10%	21.80%	27.40%	34.90%	26.00%	32.40%

*In the above Table: TM= Total Male students, MM=Muslim Male students, %MM=Percentage of Muslim Male students, TF=Total Female students, MF= Muslim Female students, %MF=Percentage of Muslim Female students.

The above Table shows that while enrollment across the board shows wide institutional variations, Colleges H, J, and N represent environments with a lower minority presence. College H indicates Moderate or Low Presence of Muslim Students. In 2019–20, Muslim males made up 6.8% of the male population, and females made up 13.46% of the female population. By 2023–24, these figures rose slightly to 8.23% for males and 16.12% for females, indicating small but steady progress in female participation. College J indicates Very Low Presence of Muslim students. Muslim students remain a small minority here. Enrollment started at 5.7% for males and 8.8% for females in 2019–20, experiencing minor growth to reach 9.7% for males and 16% for

females by 2023–24. College N indicates Moderate Presence of Muslim students. This institution holds a stronger baseline, starting at 24.4% for males and 17% for females in 2019–20. It maintained a steady range over the years, ending with a notable jump in female representation at 32.4% (and 26% for males) by 2023–24. So, Colleges H, J, and N highlight a smaller, minority Muslim presence compared to other institutions in the region. However, the five-year trajectory reveals a positive overarching trend. Muslim female participation is consistently growing or remaining stable, even within colleges where overall community representation is low.

10.0 Findings and Discussions: The findings of the study and their discussion have been provided in accordance with the objectives of the study.

Objective 1: To study the status of enrolment of Muslim students in the girl's college of the Brahmaputra valley with special reference to Sivasagar district of Assam.

10.1 Findings and discussions related to the status of enrolment of Muslim students in the girl's college of the Brahmaputra valley with special reference to Sivasagar district of Assam.

Findings related to the status of enrolment of Muslim students in the girl's college:

The major findings of the study on status of enrolment of Muslim students in the Girls college of the Brahmaputra valley with special reference to Sivasagar district of Assam are mentioned below:

In the College the percentage of MFS remains relatively stable, fluctuating slightly between 13.21% and 14.43%, indicating consistent but modest participation of Muslim female students over the five-year period. Trends show that the College remained stable with minimal change in Muslim female enrolment.

Discussion on Findings related to the status of enrolment of Muslim students in the girl's college:

The data indicates that the participation of Muslim Female Students in this college is increasing overall. The College stable percentage indicates that participation has neither significantly increased nor decreased, pointing to a plateau in MFS representation. Overall, the data reflects positive trends in the enrolment of Muslim female students in the college. It can be said that the College showed increasing enrolment of Muslim female students.

Objective 2: To study the status of enrolment of Muslim students in the co-educational colleges of the Brahmaputra valley with special reference to Sivasagar district of Assam.

10.2 Findings related to the status of enrolment of Muslim students in the Co- educational colleges:

The major findings of the study on the status of enrolment of Muslim students in the Co-educational colleges of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam with special reference to Muslim female students are given below:

Colleges H, J and N have comparatively low Muslim student enrolment, particularly among females, indicating a more diverse or non-Muslim-majority student population in these colleges. College H is notable because the number of Muslim male students increased while total male enrolment decreased, a rare pattern not observed in other colleges.

Discussion on findings related to the status of enrolment of Muslim students in the Co-educational Colleges:

Based on the provided text, here is a detailed summary of the findings regarding Muslim student enrollment in the co-educational and girls' colleges of the Brahmaputra Valley, with special reference to the Sivasagar district of Assam:

The data of Colleges reveals significant variations in Muslim student participation. Some institutions (such as Colleges J and N) have low Muslim representations. In unique cases like College H, Muslim male enrollment increased even as total male enrollment declined, suggesting targeted institutional growth or retention strategies. The local findings broadly align with national data, such as the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) and Sabrang reports. Sabrang and AISHE data noted national enrollment drops and fluctuations in 2020–21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This explains the temporary dips observed in the studied colleges, particularly a noticeable drop in Muslim male enrollment in 2019–20 followed by only a slight recovery in 2020–21. Historical and national studies (e.g., Sachar, 2006; AISHE, 2022) emphasize the low higher education enrollment rates for Muslims (4.87% nationally in 2022). This structural marginalization is locally reflected in colleges like E, H, and J, which show stagnant, declining, or consistently low enrollment figures. Researchers note that dropout patterns among Muslim girls after Madrasa education in Assam may

contribute to these lower numbers. The data highlights distinct gender dynamics depending on the type of institution. All four studied girls' colleges showed a steady and consistent increase in Muslim female enrollment over the five-year period, proving that single-sex institutions play a highly supportive role in sustaining female participation. Co-ed institutions present a much more complex and varied picture. While the general trend of female predominance persists, the magnitude varies widely and is prone to year-to-year fluctuations. Furthermore, certain co-ed institutions deviate from the female-majority trend; for example, College N shows persistent and sharply increasing male dominance, echoing national concerns regarding gender disparities. While overall enrollment numbers for Muslim female students have improved and indicate positive progress toward gender equity, significant institutional and gender-based disparities remain. These localized insights provide policymakers and college administrators with the context necessary to design strategies to boost enrollment and close equity gaps.

11.0 Conclusion:- Higher education is vital for reducing the severe educational gender gaps globally faced by Muslim women. This five-year study (2019-20 to 2023-24) tracks their enrollment trends, highlighting a resilient recovery and stabilization by 2022-23 following sharp pandemic-related declines. Muslim female undergraduates consistently outnumber males, signaling a strong community shift toward female education. While co-educational colleges remain the preferred choice, interest in girls-only institutions is steadily rising. Clear progress is visible in girls' colleges, but significant gender gaps still remain within co-educational environments. To bridge remaining gaps and ensure equitable access, the study calls for targeted interventions, including gender-sensitive institutional planning, expanding girls' colleges, reforming co-ed spaces, and increasing community engagement.

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