

Education and Socio-economic Marginalization of Muslim Women: A Case Study of North 24-Parganas District in West Bengal

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Abstract: *The Muslim women tend to suffer not only the gender problem, but also the impoverished minority status of the Muslim community. Muslim women are at double disadvantage with low educational status and community pressure. Their lives, movements in public places are under constant scrutiny and control. Education is the oxygen of the human beings in the contemporary technology-driven world of knowledge and economy. Low level of literacy and education impede national growth and lead to violation of human rights as well as the rights of religious community. At the same time, higher literacy rates bring social change, cultural advancement and economic development.*

The present study examines the reciprocal relationship between literacy and socio-economic determinants as consequences of the low level of socio-economic development of the Muslim Community in West Bengal and an attempt to analyse the empowerment of Muslim women in the three selected villages of the District North 24-Parganas is made. The study concludes with the suggestions to enhance Muslims literacy, which is an ultimate solution to reduce existing group disparities in socio-economic development in West Bengal.

Keywords: Muslim women, education, empowerment of women, work participation rate

Introduction

Social change in Muslim community and particularly of Muslim women has not received much scholarly attention from the sociologists or other social scientists. Muslim women in India are still vulnerable and it

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is a fact that their emancipation could be a crucial step towards the development of their community. The present status of Muslim women reflects the dominance of traditional and conservative attitudes in their community. But with increasing literacy among the Muslim women, their outlook, thinking and perception have been under gradual changes and at the same time it has aided changes in the overall Muslim community in India.

According to 2011 census of India, the Muslim population constitutes of 27.1% of West Bengal's total population i.e. 91,276,115. Hinduism is majority religion in the state with 70.54%. These two communities (Hindus and Muslims) share more than 97% of the total population.

Table 1: Population of West Bengal by Religion - 2011

Description	Population	Percentage
Hindu	64,385,546	70.54 %
Muslim	24,654,825	27.01 %
Other Religion	942,297	1.03 %
Christian	658,618	0.72 %
Buddhist	282,898	0.31 %
Not Available	228,267	0.25 %
Sikh	63,523	0.07 %
Jain	60,141	0.07 %

Source: Census of India - 2011

Hinduism is majority religion in State of West Bengal with 70.54 %. Muslim is second most popular religion in State of West Bengal with 27.01%. In West Bengal state, Christianity is followed by 0.72 %, Jainism by 0.07 %, Sikhism by 0.07 % and Buddhism by 0.07 %. Around 1.03 % stated 'Other Religion', approximately 0.25 % stated 'No Particular Religion'.

In comparison to the other religions or groups residing in West Bengal, the Muslims have been lagging behind the mainstream communities in terms of socio-economic condition, livelihood pattern, educational status and cultural life.

	Total	Males	Females	(%) males	(%) females
West Bengal	24654825	12640092	12014733	51.27	48.73
Rural	19146627	9784832	9361795	51.10	48.90
Urban	5508198	2855260	2652938	51.84	48.16
Source: Census of India-2011					

Since independence in 1947, the socio-economic condition of the Muslims in India has not changed notably. From time to time, Govt. of India had appointed various committees to find out the causes of educational and economic backwardness of the Muslim community. Among them, one is the *Ranganath Misra Commission* (2007) that came out with the statement that Muslims are socially, economically, educationally, politically and culturally underprivileged and are far behind the mainstream of Indian society. The other *Sachar Committee* (2006) in its detailed report stated, poverty is the main cause of poor education among the Muslims in India. In 1993, Government of India also acknowledged them as the “National Educationally Backward Minority”.

However, it is admitted that “Empowerment of women” is the key route for the development of any society. Unfortunately, only a few studies or research have been done on the dismal condition of Muslim women in India. In the book “Educating Muslim Girls: A Campaign of Five Indian Cities” is an empirical work based on the first hand information of Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon (2005) that critically analyzed the status of education of Muslim women in India. In the book “Rural Muslim Women: Role and Status” by Sekh Rahim Mandal (2005) analyses the socio-economic and cultural condition of the Muslim women and their problems in the district of Siliguri sub-division in West Bengal. Suman K. Kundu and Ananya Chakraborty (2012), in their article “An Empirical Analysis of Women Empowerment within Muslim Community in Murshidabad District of West Bengal” have examined the issues related to Women Empowerment within Muslim Community. Md. Intekhab Hossain (2013) in the article “Socio-Economic and Educational Status of Muslim Women: a Comparative Outlook” described the miserable condition of the Muslim women in West Bengal.

Areas of Empirical Studies

The primary data has been collected from three villages namely ‘Matikumra’, ‘Rajkuber’ and ‘Simulia’

under “Deganga” Block; “Chowrasia” Gram Panchayat and District North 24-Parganas of West Bengal. The sampled villages are mostly dominated by Muslim community.

Objectives

This study mainly seeks: (i) to understand the level of education among the Muslim women in these areas (ii) to explore the status of employment amongst Muslim women and (iii) to examine their working pattern as well as socio-economic condition followed by a few observations and remarks.

Educational situation of Muslim Women in West Bengal

After six decades of independence, the majority of Muslim women belongs to the economically impoverished and politically marginalized sections in Indian society and is in the most disadvantaged condition with the least literacy rate. The *Gopal Singh Committee* instituted by the Government of India in 1983, declared that Muslims are a 'backward' community in India as well as in West Bengal.

One of the most crucial instruments of empowerment of women is education. The policy calls for special measures to be undertaken to universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender-sensitive education system and develop vocational and technical skills among the women. It would also enable the women particularly the Muslim women to take up employment and become financially empowered. In general, Indian women are relatively undereducated. Families are far less likely to educate girls than boys, and far more likely to pull them out of school due to social norms, fear of violence and expect them to help house keepers at home. India has the largest population of non-school going working girls in the world (UNESCO). Within this picture of overall poor statistics, it is a predictable certainty that the corresponding figures for Muslim women are still lower than any other community and the situation of West Bengal is not an exception.

The *Sachar Committee* Report stated that 4% of all the children of the Muslim community are enrolled in recognized schools and a total of 9% attend some sort of school recognized or unrecognized and 91% do not have any school to attend. Those enrolled hardly complete school education and 90% of the enrolled get dropped out.

Educational backwardness is a key factor responsible for the social, cultural, economic, and political backwardness of the Muslim community in Bengal. It is well known that the literacy and educational levels of Muslims in West Bengal are far below the National average.

Literacy rate in West Bengal is 77.08% and significantly higher than the national average of 74%. But among the Muslim community literacy rate reached to only 57.18%, which is much lower than the national average figure.

Table 3: Literacy Rate 2001 and 2011 by District

Sl. No.	District	Literacy rate in 2001	Literacy rate in 2011	Change
1	Purba Medinipur	80.16	87.66	7.50
2	Kolkata	80.86	87.14	6.28
3	North Twenty Four Parganas	78.07	84.95	6.89
4	Haora	77.01	83.85	6.84
5	Hugli	75.11	82.55	7.44
6	Darjiling	71.79	79.92	8.14
7	Paschim Medinipur	70.41	79.04	8.63
8	South Twenty Four Parganas	69.45	78.57	9.12
9	Barddhaman	70.18	77.15	6.97
10	Nadia	66.14	75.58	9.45
11	Koch Bihar	66.30	75.49	9.19
12	Dakshin Dinajpur	63.59	73.86	10.26
13	Jalpaiguri	62.85	73.79	10.94
14	Bankura	63.44	70.95	7.52
15	Birbhum	61.48	70.90	9.41
16	Murshidabad	54.35	67.53	13.18
17	Puruliya	55.57	65.38	9.81

Sl. No.	District	Literacy rate in 2001	Literacy rate in 2011	Change
18	Maldah	50.28	62.71	12.43
19	Uttar Dinajpur	47.89	60.13	12.25
West Bengal		68.64	77.08	8.44
Source: Census of India-2011				

As already mentioned, women education among Muslims in the state is much lower than men. The educational status of Muslims in West Bengal, like other parts of the country is also depressing.

	District Name	Muslim		
		Total	Male	Female
1	Darjeeling	50.38	60.86	37.92
2	Jalpaiguri	55.34	64.98	45.01
3	Koch Bihar	56.07	64.59	47.11
4	Uttar Dinajpur	36.04	45.98	25.50
5	Dakshin Dinajpur	67.21	72.81	61.33
6	Malda	45.30	51.56	38.68
7	Murshidabad	48.63	54.21	42.76
8	Birbhum	59.86	68.28	50.97
9	Barddhaman	68.79	75.54	61.39
10	Nadia	49.41	54.42	44.03

11	North 24Parganas	65.05	71.41	58.13
12	Hugli	73.50	79.43	67.31
13	Bankura	59.91	71.81	46.96
14	Puruliya	53.44	71.32	34.14
15	Medinipur	64.97	75.05	54.36
16	Haora	67.80	74.13	60.78
17	Kolkata	68.06	71.25	63.61
18	South 24Parganas	59.83	68.84	50.27
	West Bengal	57.18	64.61	49.75
Source: Census of India 2011				

Table-4 shows the Muslim female literacy rate (49.75%) in West Bengal. Also, Muslim female literacy rate is much less than the Muslim male literacy rate of 64.61%.

Table - 5 Rate of Literacy among the Muslim Males and Females in West Bengal		
West Bengal	Literacy Rate	
	Male	Female
State	64.61	49.75
Urban	72.04	59.23
Rural	62.92	47.87
Source: Govt. of India, Census Report, 2011		

Table-5 shows that the average literacy rate of Muslim women in the State is 49.75 where as in urban areas it is 59.23% and in the rural areas it is 47.87%. Thus it seems there is significant rural urban gap in the literacy rate.

Rahaman and Bhuimali (2011: 84 and 91) mentioned “among various reasons, the major reasons for educational backwardness among the Muslims are poor economic condition, limited number of government and government aided schools in Muslim areas and lack of job opportunities of the educated people in the community. Perhaps Muslim women are lagging behind in education because of socio-

Table-6: Muslim Literacy Rate in Comparison to Other Religious Communities							
	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikhs	Buddhist	Jains	Total
Male	81.12	64.61	77.20	91.37	89.09	96.46	77.08
Female	63.09	49.75	62.30	81.98	66.22	88.87	59.61
Total	72.44	57.18	69.72	87.19	74.73	92.81	68.64
Note: Total population includes “Others” and ‘Religion not stated’.							
Source: Govt. of India, Census Report, 2011							

cultural pattern of the families and the society, the hostile attitude towards girls’ education and lack of

infrastructural facilities for education in Muslim concentrated areas. Muslims have limited access to the far off schools. Thus the need of the hour is to provide job oriented education and also to set up sufficient number of technical schools for male and female separately in the Muslim concentrated areas”

Table-6 above reveals the inter-religious disparities in literacy level of West Bengal. Literacy condition of the Muslims is worse than that of all other religious communities of the state; they recorded lowest literacy rate among the religious groups as only 57.47 percent of them are literate. Literacy level of Bengali Muslims are not only less than the state’s and national average literacy level but also national Muslim average literacy level, where only 64.61 per cent of males and 49.75 per cent of females are literate, or they are the most illiterate religious community in the state of West Bengal. The highest literacy level is found among Jain 92.81 per cent, while Sikh accounted for 87.73 per cent and Buddhist and Christian with 74.73 per cent and 69.72 per cent of literacy level respectively occupy third and fourth position among the six religious group of the state.

In the reports of the ‘National Education Survey’ it is shown that Muslim Women are seven times behind Hindu women in high school education and in post-high school they are nine times behind them.

Hasan and Menon (2004: 47) state that “the educational backwardness of Muslim women is a matter of particular concern, especially the high drop-out rate, resulting in subsequently fewer proportions of them managing to complete high school”. There is also a common belief that Muslim parents feel that education is not important for girls and that it may instill a wrong set of moral and cultural values. Even if girls are enrolled, they are withdrawn at an early age to marry them off. This leads to a higher drop-out rate among Muslim girls in West Bengal.

Socio-Economic Condition of Muslim Women in West Bengal

Empowerment of women implies their better position in socio-political and economic spheres. Empowerment of Muslim women is crucial as they continue to be victimized by traditional social structure, social systems and social institutions of their community. Educational backwardness of majority of the Muslim women is one of the crucial factors for their lagging behind in employment, while economic empowerment is also essential for raising their status in social hierarchy and social change. Therefore, lack of education, economic dependency, poverty and ignorance of their rights have made them further vulnerable to exploitation.

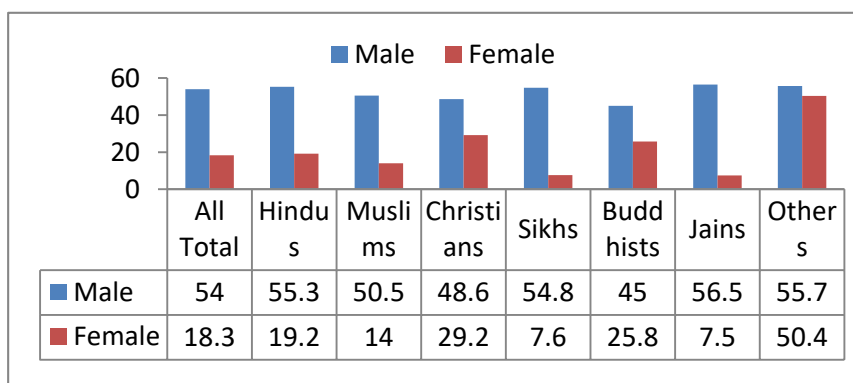


Figure-1: Sex-wise Work Participatant Rate in West Bengal among various Religious Communities (percentages)

Source: Govt. of India, Census Report, 2011

It is observed from Figure-1 that the Work Participatant Rate (WPR) of Muslim women in Bengal in comparison to the other communities is very poor. Here Work Participation Rate (WPR) in case of Hindus, Christians and Buddhists are 19.2%, 29.2% and 25.8% respectively. But the Work Participation Rate of Muslim Women is only 14% in West Bengal that depicts a gloomy picture.

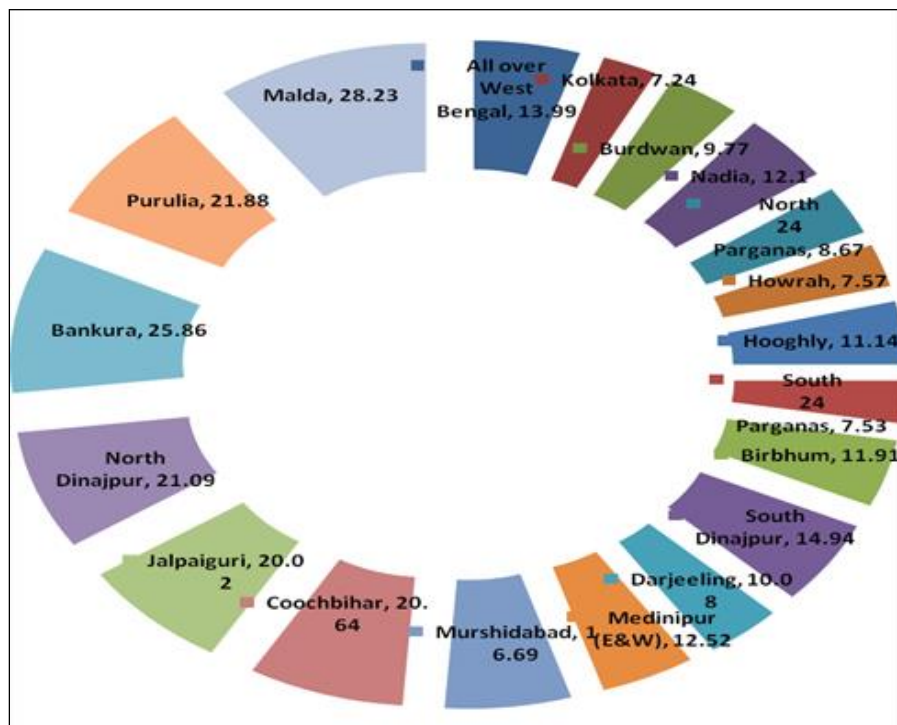


Figure 2: District wise Work Participant Rate among the Muslim Females in West Bengal (percentages)

Source: Govt. of India, Census Report, 2011

A large number of Muslim women in rural Bengal are predominantly engaged as agricultural labourer. A substantial number also specializes in handicrafts like needle works, *zari* works, tailoring, embroidery and paper crafts. Muslim women from poverty stricken suburban and other remote areas of Bengal are found to arrive in Kolkata and other towns every morning largely by local trains in search of daily workers job.

Muslims are mostly self-employed and their share in regular paid jobs is low. The Hindu population is relatively better employed in regular salary-paying jobs in urban areas. "The work participation rate of Muslim women is extremely low. The landholding is better among Hindus than Muslims in rural part of India. Muslims, are, by far, the least educated when compared with Hindus and Christian populations in India" (Shariff, 2003: 92).

Table-7: District Wise Females' Work Participant Rate in Various Occupations among the Muslims of West Bengal (in %)					
Sl. No.	Districts	Cultivators	Agricultural Labours	Household Industry	Other Works
1.	Kolkata	1.76	0.67	13.04	84.53
2.	Burdawan	11.39	16.83	27.53	44.25
3.	Nadia	18.91	7.95	24.57	48.57
4.	North 24 Parganas	7.50	15.30	23.28	53.92
5.	Howrah	2.50	5.24	52.01	40.25
6.	Hooghly	12.83	14.48	29.30	43.39
7.	South 24 Parganas	10.27	29.51	21.22	39.00
8.	Birbhum	9.76	12.90	46.25	31.10
9.	South Dinajpur	23.05	31.41	6.66	38.89
10.	Darjeeling	7.25	28.49	2.75	61.51
11.	Medinipur (East and West)	12.65	27.19	31.12	29.04
12.	Murshidabad	3.61	4.14	74.13	18.11
13.	Coochbihar	30.77	53.32	3.29	12.61
14.	Jalpaiguri	20.34	47.55	1.99	30.12
15.	North Dinajpur	25.47	45.33	11.81	17.40
16.	Bankura	17.58	19.52	39.40	23.50
17.	Purulia	20.07	55.50	12.46	11.97
18.	Malda	4.88	14.16	74.13	18.11
All over West Bengal		11.01	19.21	38.95	30.84
Source: Govt. of India, Census Report, 2011					

Table-7 shows that Muslim women have the lowest work participation rate (WPR) among all three categories of work in West Bengal.

Some Employment pictures of Muslims in West Bengal

A Recent report titled “Living Reality of Muslims in West Bengal” published by Pratichi Trust in association with SNAP and Guidance Guild reveals that (a) around 80% of rural Muslim households in Bengal earn Rs.5000/- or less a month (b) 38.3% Muslim households in rural Bengal earn Rs.2500/- or less per month (c) 1.55% households’ main earner is a school teacher (d) Public sector accounts for the income of only 1.54% Muslim households (e) Private sector accounts for income of only 1% of Muslim households. These are the few gloomy features of the economic condition of Muslims in West Bengal.

According to Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Staff Census Report, 2014-15, Govt. of West Bengal shows that in the Govt. services only 5.47% are Muslim employees out of total 3.5 lakh employees in West Bengal.

Table 8: Employees of Muslim Community in the Govt. Services in West Bengal between 2007 and 2015

Government Service	Year (2007-2015)	Percent (%)
Other than K.P and K.C	2007	2.1
	2015	5.47
Kolkata Police (K.P.)	2007	9.13
	2015	9.44
Kolkata Corporation (K.C.)	2007	4.87
	2015	4.79
Source: Staff Census Report, 2014-15, Govt. of West Bengal		

Few years back in 2008, an RTI query filed by a Kolkata-based citizen named ‘Sabeer Ahamed’, shows the representation of Muslim employees in two major Government departments to be abysmally low. It does not even have a representation of 10% of the workforce in the Kolkata Police (KP) and Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC). According to the information revealed by the Kolkata Police, the total number of employees in the force is 24840 of which only 2267 are Muslims, constituting a merely 9.13%

of the overall strength (Table-8). Out of total employees in the Kolkata Police, only 414 are women, where 12 of them (2.9%) are Muslims. The figures from the KMC paint an even grimmer picture. The municipal body has only 1,555 Muslim employees in its workforce of 34,731. Of them 4556 women employees it has, only 136 are Muslims, comprising just 2.98%.

Islam and Status of Muslim Women in Bengal

The common perception is that religious conservatism among Muslim women in not accessing education is incorrect. In Islam, both men and women are encouraged to acquire education. The social and cultural life of the Muslims, living in various parts of the country, display distinctive features, as they are influenced by both Islamic as well as regional and local traditions. Muslims are the members of Islamic community (*Umma*) out of common belief and faith. Bengal has a significant Muslim population. Bengali Muslims adhere to the basic principles of Islam and at the same time they share the local traditions of Bengal. Bengali Muslims share the traditions of Bengali culture, which is common to both Hindus and Muslims of this region. It is a historical fact that most of Bengali Muslims were converted from Hinduism.

But it is a stigma of our society that a lot of Muslim women are still living in malnutrition, illiteracy, superstition and under Mollah's (fundamentalist) ignorant ruling. Sometimes they believe that Mollahs can cure almost all diseases by ism (verse of religion). Somehow, they also believe that Mollahs can understand and provide answers to all the problems from railway engine to every scientific, economic problem as described in our holy book. A large number of poor Muslim men and women in Bengal have not seen a doctor in their life time. So they depend on the quack. Earlier, fundamentalism (Mollah Raj) had declared that woman leadership/empowerment is prohibited in Muslim religion. Though, the increasing literacy rate among Muslim women show that the Mollah beliefs are gradually losing ground and it is a silver lining of the Muslim community. In fact, Islam took a positive view and came forward to safeguard whatever was essential for upliftment of women in Muslim society. Islamic Law also highlighted the preservation, protection and promotion of the rights of women in Muslim society.

A Case Study of North 24-Parganas District

North 24 Parganas district is a district in southern part of West Bengal. It is bordered with Nadia district on the north and south with Kolkata. "Barasat" is the district headquarters of North 24 Parganas.

The Deganga Community Development Block is an administrative division in Barasat Sadar subdivision of North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal. Headquarter of this block is located at "Debalaya". Villages 'Matikumra', 'Rajkuber' and 'Simulia' where we have conducted our studies are located under the "Chowrasia" Gram Panchayat of Deganga Block.

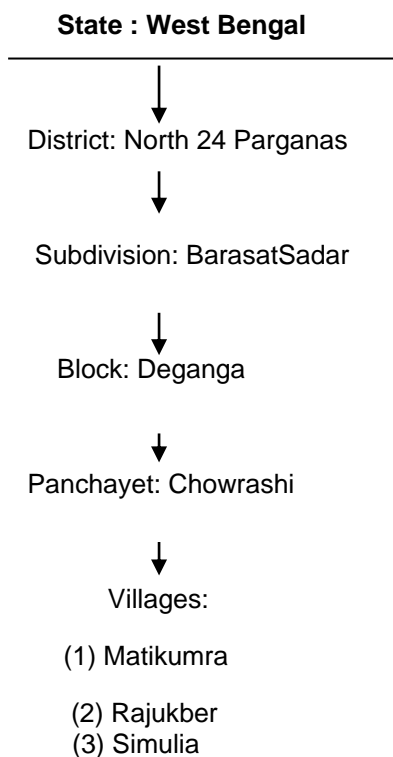


Table-9: Educational Status of Muslim Women									
Village	Illiterate (%)	Educated Women						Literate (%)	Total (%)
		Primary (%)	Middle (%)	H.S. Exam. (%)	Graduate (%)	Post Graduate (%)	Ph. D (%)		
Matikumra	63.33	15.33	11.33	6.33	2.33	1.35	0	36.67	100
Rajukber	58.21	16.13	13.23	7.33	3.54	1.56	0	41.79	100
Simulia	50.02	18.17	14.04	10.22	5.51	2.04	0	49.98	100

Source : Field Survey

At random, 50 households were chosen for sample survey from all the three selected villages and the empirical results are shown in Table-9. The village survey shows a poor literacy level among Muslim women. The literacy rate of women in the village of “Matikumra” is only 36.67%, in “Rajkuber” 41.79% and in “Simulia” village it is 49.98%. Among the villages, the literacy rate of Muslim women of village “Simulia” is better than the other two villages.

Level of Education of Women

It is illustrated from table-9 that in “Matikumra” village, 15.33% women are educated upto Primary level, 11.33% up to Middle school, 6.33 % are up to H.S. level, 2.33 % are educated up to Graduate level and 1.35 % are educated up to Post Graduate level out of the total literate of 36.67 %.

In “Rajkuber”, 16.13% women are educated up to Primary level, 13.23% up to Middle school, 7.33% are up to H.S. level, 3.54% are Graduate and remaining 1.56% has completed Post Graduate level out of the total literate of 41.79 %. In “Simulia”, 18.17% of the women are educated up to Primary level, 14.04% up to Middle school, 10.22% are up to H.S. level, 5.51% are Graduate and remaining 2.04 % have completed Post Graduation out of the total literate of 49.98 %.

It is also revealed from the above tables that the literacy rate of Muslim women of “Matikumra” and “Rajkuber” are lower as compared to “Simulia” village. The information shows that Simulia village is pretty advanced in education, which is assumed to be due to the availability of local schools and college that exerts a great influence on the education rate.

Education is the chief indicator of “Human Development index”. This is the guiding force in every sphere of life. Accessibility to education determines the development and emancipation of a society. Knowledge gives one power which leads to empowerment. Although recently the Muslim women have made a little progress in their education level, still it is very little compared to the general scenario.

Types of Employment

So far the working condition of Muslim women is of concern in these villages. We found that an average of 60 percent are engaged as house keeping works and remaining segment are involved in different economic activities.

There are three types of works in which Muslim women are engaged in these surveyed areas – non paid work (in their own fields), paid work (agrarian labour) and government jobs (including self-help

group and others), The agrarian work consists of planting paddy and jute saplings and to untie tissues of jute from stems.

Village	House Keeping (%)	Types of Employment			Total (%)
		Agricultural Land (own Land) (%)	Labourer (including Agrl. labourer and others) (%)	Others (Govt. Job, Self Help Group and Others) (%)	
Matikumra	65.33	15.63	11.86	7.18	34.67
Rajkuber	62.21	17.13	11.23	9.43	37.79
Simulia	55.02	18.17	10.04	16.77	44.98

Source : Field Survey

In “Matikumra” village, out of total household surveyed, 65.33 percent women are housewife and maintain house keeping works. Remaining 34.67 percent women are engaged in some kind of other earning work. Out of 34.67 percent, 15.63 per cent are engaged in their own or leasehold agricultural land, 11.86 percent are engaged in agricultural or others types of labourer work and 7.18 percent are engaged in other working sectors like Self Help Group, garment tailoring and few are in Govt. jobs (Table 10)

In “Rajkuber” village, 62.21 percent women are engaged house keeping works and remaining 37.79 percent women are engaged in other working sectors. Out of 37.79 percent, 17.13 per cent are engaged in their own or leasehold agricultural land, 11.23 percent are engaged in agricultural or others types of labourer works and 9.43 per cent are engaged in other working sectors like Self Help Group, garment tailoring and few are in Govt. jobs.

In “Simulia”, 55.02 percent was house wife and are engaged in house keeping works. 44.98 percent are working women. Out of 44.98 percent working women, 18.17 per cent are working in their own or leasehold agricultural land, 10.04 per cent are engaged in agricultural or others types of labourer works and 16.77 per cent are engaged in other working sectors like Self Help Group, garment tailoring, nursing, petty business and some are in Govt. jobs.

It is found on the above analysis that majority Muslim women of three villages are engaged in their household work as house wives. Second majority are engaged in their own agricultural field. The remaining are engaged in other working sectors like Self Help Group, garment tailoring, nursing, petty business and in Govt. jobs.

Here it is an interesting feature that the women of “Simulia” village where 16.77 percent are engaged in Self Help Group, garment tailoring, nursing, petty business or in Govt. jobs in contrast to other two villages like “Matikumra” and “Rajkuber” (7.18% and 9.43%). It is presumed that ‘Simulia’ village being well connected with Barasat Sadar and Berachampa town and with several schools and one college established in this area, so the education level amongst Muslim women is high in this village. During survey questionnaire, it was found that the Muslim women felt the need of some handcraft industry in their villages which would provide them the opportunity of earning.

An ILO study finds that men tend to spend 60 % of their income in their home and 40 per cent on themselves, whereas women spends 90 % of her income on her family and only 10 per cent on herself. Thus, when a woman controls the household’s income the family gets more benefits (Kumar 1995)¹¹.

Table- 11: Household Size in Muslim families

Village	Family Size (%)			
	≤4	4-6	7-8	≥8
Matikumra	10.33	45.11	25.26	19.3
Rajkuber	13.83	43.6	24.73	17.84
Simulia	18.67	42.63	23.34	15.36
Source : Field Survey				

Table- 11 depicts the household size of Muslim families of three surveyed villages. It is found from the table that in “Matikumara” village the household size of Muslim families ≤4 is 10.33%, 4-6 is 45.11%, 7-8 is 25.26% and ≥8 is 19.3% respectively. In “Rajkuber” village it is ≤4 is 13.83%, 4-6 is 43.6%, 7-8 is 24.73% and ≥8 is 17.8% and in “Simulia” village it shows ≤4 is 18.67%, 4-6 is 42.63%, 7-8 is 23.34% and ≥8 is 15.36% respectively.

It is also found from the table that the highest ≥8 family size is found in “Matikumra” village (19.3%) and lowest in “Simulia” village (15.36%). It may be understood that the highest and lowest birth rate depends on level of education. We indicated in the earlier chapter that the education level amongst Muslim women is high in “Simulia” village. So it can be presumed that the low birth rate in ‘Simulia’ village as compared to the other two villages is due to higher number of educated Muslim women. .

Decision Making and Mobility of Women

Education of women and empowerment are essential not only for economic development but also has a transformative effect on the goals of both economic and social development. Education strengthens the power of decision making. Income takes it one step ahead. But due to low literacy rate and in male dominated families, Muslim women are not in the position to take free decision in family and social matters. Women accept the decisions made by male. In Simulia village, where the literacy rate is high among the Muslim women, they feel the freedom of decision making more than the women of other two villages. About 70% respondents of "Simulia" village revealed that they participate in family welfare related decision making. However, Muslim women are still more vulnerable about their equal rights in the families. If someone revolts, the consequence is the physical torture on them. Woman after spending 10-15 years of marital life achieve certain power in expressing her views. Women usually don't go to market for daily shopping. They usually travel with their guardians or husband. Few girls who daily go to college travel alone. Except for a few, marriage does not bring them any radical freedom. Most of the job holders got jobs after their marriage. Of them a few can go alone where ever they desire to go, but most prefer their husband's company.

Education of Girls

Educations of women help in the development of the individual member and hence assist the development of the whole family. During questionnaire session the respondent's view were positive towards their daughter's education. About 75% respondents gave their opinion for equal right to the education of son and daughter and 20% agreed that daughter's education was less than son. They argued that if the girls receive higher education then it would be very difficult to get them married. Instead they preferred the girl to remain within four walls of the house and do the domestic work with low education. Only 5 percent of the respondents agreed for daughter's education more than son because the respondent's married in well-educated and cultured family and they feel if the daughter is educated then she can handle her family easily. These respondents are mostly seen in the Simulia village, where educational level is higher than the other two villages.

Condition of Health

The health condition of Muslim women in the three villages shows high ratio of disease, malnutrition and ill health. Generally health care is almost ignored due to inadequate nutrition, poor health, lack of

maternity centers etc. A house wife who takes the responsibility of health care of the family on her shoulder, there is hardly anyone to take care of her health.

Political Awareness

Here again education plays a vital role for self-awareness and self-confidence about the power of decision making. During the questionnaire session with the women of three villages it was observed that most of them don't have any knowledge about the political parties and their ideologies. Though, in any election they show much enthusiasm in matters of casting vote. In casting vote they feel empowered but to whom they should vote is not decided by them. The family decision (the decision of male) is considered to be the final one. Some women however desire to contest elections (especially in panchayats) as candidates. This prospect is present in "Simulia" village, where education level amongst Muslim women is high but in much subdued form. Some accepts their family decision as final. Although, a lot of women told that they feel independent in this matter. But the tragedy is that they could not realize their power as a potential group that may change the political history of society.

Conclusion

The impoverished status of a large number of Muslim women in West Bengal underlines the urgency for further inquiry in this area and also the need for active intervention by state agencies to implement policies to redress this imbalance and ensure Muslim women's full and equal participation as Indian citizens. So that we can revise many rules for people's needs and now time has come that we shall have to think what steps should be taken to improve their status. Some of these steps are as follows:

- (a) Polygamy should be abolished.
- (b) Education of girls can be made compulsory and they may be permitted to work outside.
- (c) Adoption of equal rule of property distribution for all sections of Muslim.

An educated woman means an educated family and healthy children. Education is needed to secure a job; a working girl means a solvent family and ultimately educated and solvent State. To clean superstition is difficult but many things can be changed through education. We have to do this in order to empower the Muslim women in Bengal.

At last an impressive report 2010-11 made by National University of Education Planning and Administrative (NUEPA) under Ministry of Human Resources Development on West Bengal Muslim education stated that in the years of 2007-08, 2008-09 and 2009-10, respectively 28.13%, 28.28% and 32.30% of every 100 primary school children in West Bengal were Muslims, while 25.25% of the State's population is Muslim. West Bengal's figures for Muslim students' enrolment at the primary level are better than the national average of 10.49% in year 2007-08, 11.03% in 2008-09 and 13.48% in 2009-10 respectively, while Muslims form 13.43% of India's population. West Bengal's record is far better than that of Gujarat. There, Muslim students' enrolment at the primary level was 4.57% in the year of 2007-08, 4.73% in 2008-09 and 6.45% in 2009-10. Among all States and Union Territories, West Bengal ranks 6th in primary school level enrolment among Muslim students.

Suggestions

Over the last two decades, the position of Muslim women in the society has come to the notice of the academicians, policy makers and development authorities of India. It has been considered that the Muslim women are the most deprived segment of the country's population. Muslim women play a crucial role in well being and very survival of the Muslim families. But unfortunately for various reasons the gender disparity is very much conspicuous in Muslim society. The marginalized status of Muslim women is not well documented. Therefore, information on Muslim women, particularly on their social position, problems and prospects is very much needed for the sake of their empowerment, which is one of the priority areas of our national development.

For the overall socio-economic development, women particularly Muslim women should be allowed to pursue their own path in respect of education and employment and should be allowed to participate, particularly in decision making.

Observations

1. Muslim women should be given a required level of skill, education and training not only for their employment, but as necessary requirement for their independence, freedom and to become a fully developed social and cultural being.
2. Women should be paid equal wages for equal work.
3. Skill education should be given to Muslim women in rural areas of West Bengal.
4. Muslim women should be allowed to participate in political, social and economic activities at all level.

5. There is a need for adopting an alternative approach to women's education particularly for Muslim women in the lower socio-economic strata in rural areas.

6. Education is one of the main factors for empowerment and upliftment of Muslim women in the society. We have observed it from our empirical study in the villages where education level of Muslim women is high, the Muslim women are getting a better social status, employment scope and others social related facilities than other sections as is evident in 'Simulia' village. So education facilities should be given to the Muslim community and women in particular on the priority basis and Govt. and other agencies should come forward to provide these opportunities to the Muslim women in West Bengal.

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