



**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**SOCIO-CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS AND DEMOGRAPHIC ATTRIBUTES IN  
CANNING SUBDIVISION OF SOUTH 24 PARGANAS DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL**

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**ABSTRACT**

Socio-cultural characteristics and demographic attributes are two important facets of Human Development. If the society is more cultural and practical minded, the population size would reduce and the resources can be utilized properly and there will be marked development in the society. The Canning Subdivision is located in the South 24 Parganas district of WEST BENGAL. There are four Community Development blocks (C.D.) namely Basanti, Canning I, Canning II and Gosaba under this subdivision. The main objective of the study is to know the relation among socio-cultural characteristics with population change in the study area. In this subdivision, Hindus are the dominant religious group. Most of the people interact with each other in Bengali language. Among four C.D. blocks, Scheduled Caste population is more in Gosaba. The male population is more educated than their female counterparts. Literacy rates are high in Gosaba block.

**INTRODUCTION**

Culture is a total way of a specific social group. Social solidarity goes with cultural integration (Singh, 2009). Demography is the study of population structure and change (Hinde, 1998). Socio-cultural characteristics may vary from region to region, state to state and country to country. Every society has a distinctive cultural activity. In the study, socio – cultural attributes like religion, language, caste, education sanitation health have been taken into consideration. Demographic attributes like sex ratio, household size etc have been studied. Demographic attributes and socio-cultural characteristics are interrelated. Sometimes, demographic change depends upon socio-cultural characteristics. It is seen that if the society is more educated and socially conscious then they take necessary steps to reduce family size. As a result they can lead a healthy life style. In the study area, some religious groups do not take necessary step for birth control due to some religious obligation. As a result, number of family members goes on increasing. Then it seems like a burden to them to maintain proper education, nutritious food etc. for each and every family member. If the family size is minimum and culturally developed then the society would develop.

**Objectives**

**The objectives of this study include**

1. To know the socio- cultural characteristics of the people within the area under study.
2. To study demographic attributes in Canning subdivision

3. To point out the social awareness of the people

**History of the Study Area**

The Canning subdivision was formed on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1996. Earlier it was under the jurisdiction of Alipur subdivision. Canning was a renowned market on the bank of river *Matla*. The islander of the Sundarban region used to come here to sell rice, honey, fish etc. It was familiar to the inhabitant as *Matla* village. In 1853, Canning port was established. During this time siltation load was increasing on the bottom of Bhagirathi Channel. There were five *Jetis* in Canning port. A municipal board was formed in 1862. During 1862-63, a Sealdah-Canning railway was started. But after 1865 to 1866, the water level of Bhagirathi River had increased. The Government had seized all properties of Canning municipality. In 1871, all construction works were resumed. Now it is a backward subdivision in South 24 Parganas District. There are four subdivisions. These are Basanti, CanningI, CanningII, Gosaba. Basanti and Gosaba blocks are dissected by tidal rivers and estuaries of Sundarban region. In recent years these blocks are connected with railways and roads by construction of bridge over these rivers. *Matla* Bridge and *Hogol* Bridge have been constructed over the river *Matla* and river *Hogol* for connectivity by roadways to Canning town and Kolkata city. Canning subdivision is situated in the active deltaic region of the river Ganges. It is surrounded by the Baruiপুর subdivision in the north, Namkhana and Baruiপুর subdivision in the west, neighboring country Bangladesh in the east and Bay of Bengal in the south.

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## MATERIALS AND METHOD

Both primary and secondary have been collected to fulfill this study. Primary data have been generated through questionnaire based survey where the sample size has been selected on the basis of random sampling techniques. Secondary data have been gathered from different Government and non Government sources. At last both data have been computed for cartographic presentation followed by interpretation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Religion:** Religion like language is a symbol of group identity and cultural rallying point. All societies have value system-common beliefs, understandings, expectations and controls that unite their members and set them off from other different cultural groups. Such value system is termed as religion when it involves system of formal or informal worship and faith in the scared and divine (Hussain, 2007). Religion is said to produce a distinct attitude towards life and this orientation affects the further development of the society (Chandna, 2009). There are three dominant religious groups in the study area.

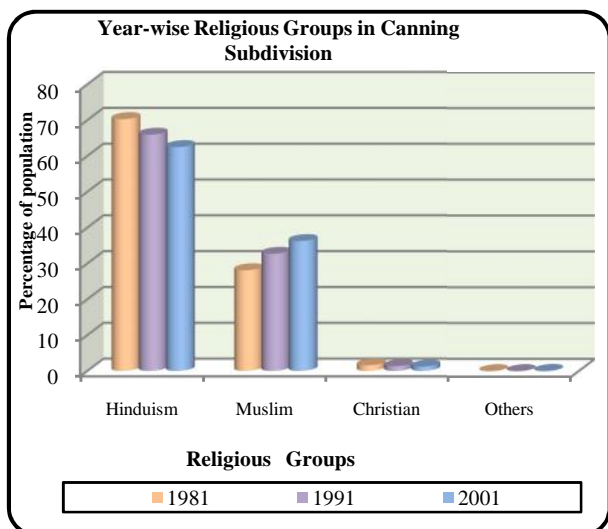


Fig.1 Religious Groups in Canning Subdivision

Data source: Computed by the author

These groups are Hinduism, Muslim and Christians. From the year 19981 to 2001, percentage of Hinduism is more than other religious group in the study area. Muslim is the second dominant religious group in Canning subdivision. Over time it is seen that percentage of Muslim population has increased in the study area (Fig.1).

### Hinduism

Among major religious systems of the world, Hinduism is the most ancient of all. Hinduism is the only major religion in the world, which derives its name from its geographical location, the Indian side of the Indus river system. It has a well defined value system in the form of four basic ideals of life, namely *Kama*, *Artha*, *Dharma* and *Mohsha*. *Kama* refers to the satisfaction of human desires; *Artha* refers to man's urge for material well being and the desire to overcome nature; *Dharma*

refers to righteousness and duties; *Mohsha* refers to attainment of salvation and rebirth (Chandna, 2009).

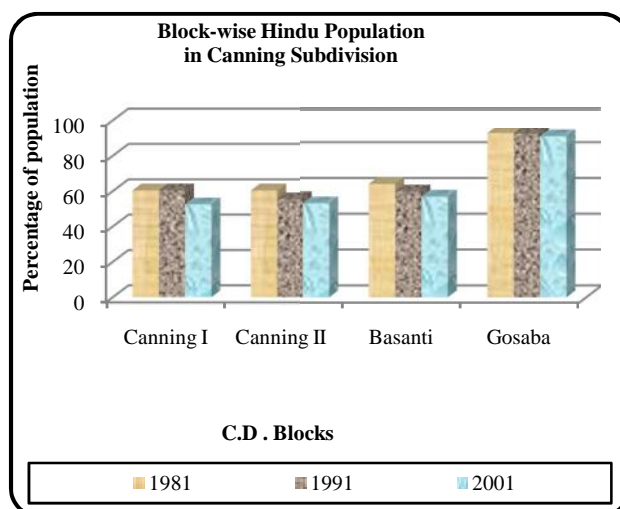


Fig.2 Block-wise Hindu Population in Canning Subdivision

Data source: District Statistical Handbook

The description of Hindu religious group have found in Ramayana, Mahabharat, Chandimangal, Manasamangal, etc. The people in this region, performs various cultural activities like *Banabibi puja*, *Manasa puja* etc. to protect themselves from Royal Bengal tigers and snake bites. There are so many ancient temples located in this area. Hindu religious groups are more in Gosaba block than other three C.D. blocks in the study area. More than 90 percent people follow Hindu religion in Gosaba block. From 19981 to 2001, percentage of Hindus has reduced in Basanti, Canning I and Canning II C.D. blocks (Fig.2).

**Muslim:** Muslim is the group of people belonging from a different religious group. Their religion is known as Islam. Like Judaism, Islam too had its birth in the deserts of Arabia around 600AD when Prophet Mohammed, who lived in Mecca, began his mission. (Chandna, 2009). The *Gazi Saheb Mobarak* was a famous Pir in Canning Subdivision. It was heard that he drove away the wild animal by exorcises. Later, birth place of Pir sahib is known as *Gazi Saheb's*

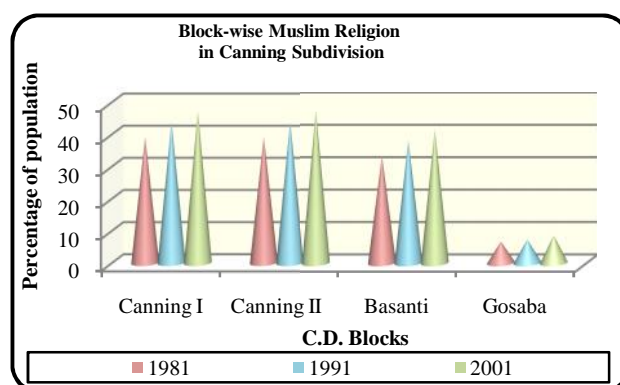


Fig.3 Block-wise Muslim Religion in Canning Subdivision

Data source: District Statistical Handbook

*Mazar* that is located in Ghutiari Sharif of Canning I C.D. block. Now-a-days, many people come here to promise an offering to a deity. The percentage of Muslim population has

increased in the study area. But in Gosaba block, percentage of Muslim followers is below 10 percent. In 2001, percentage of Muslim population was above 40 percent in Basanti, Canning I and Canning II blocks (Fig.3).

**Christian:** The religion with the largest number of adherents and the most pronounced missionary zeal in the world today is Christianity. It was founded in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D. by Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah or Anointed one, by his disciples who were then called Christians (Hussain, 2007).

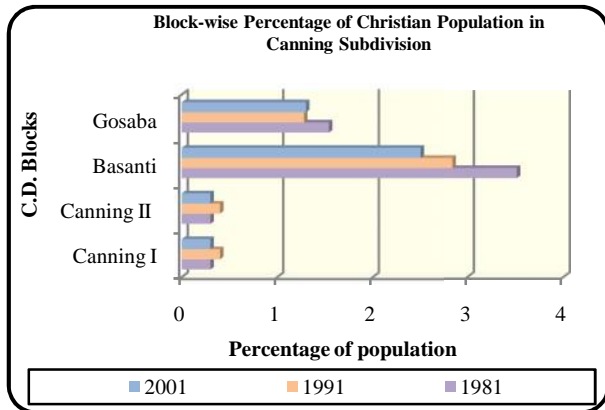


Fig.4 Block-wise Percentage of Christian Population in Canning Subdivision

Data source: District Statistical Handbook

In the study area, the Christian religious followers are rare. Out of four C.D. blocks percentage of Christians are more in Basanti block i.e. two to four percent out of total population. Basanti Church is an evidence of Christianity which is located beside Basanti police station. Number of Christians has decreased in this block over time. Percentage of Christians is less than one in Canning I and Canning II blocks (Fig.4). This religious group had established some schools in the study area.

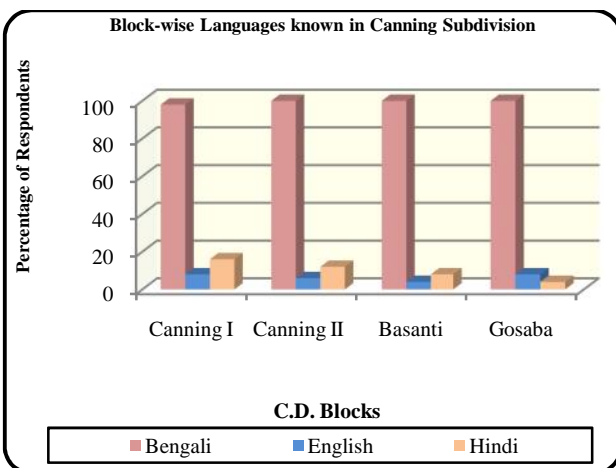


Fig.5 Block-wise Languages known in

Canning Subdivision Source: Primary data

**Language**

language is a cultural form of enduring value in; in fact a culture can hardly survive if it has no language which helps in its cultural accommodation and historical transmission (Singh, 2009). Language is the symbol of communication of mankind. It is an essential element in human geography. It is the

communication that binds member of any group together through a network of interaction. Language promotes the transmission of ideas and the functioning of political, economic, social and religious system (Hussain, 2007). In the study area, Bengali language is the mother tongue. Almost all the people communicate through Bengali language. Some of them know English and Hindi.

Mainly in Canning I block, some people communicate through Hindi language (Fig.5). Very few people who are highly educated can talk in English. From the personal interview it is known that in Canning I and Gosaba block, more than five percent respondent can communicate through English language.

**Cast**

The Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) population are near about half of the total population in Canning subdivision. From 1991 to 2011, percentage of Scheduled Caste population has decreased in the study area. In 1991, percentage of Scheduled Caste population was about 48 percent. And in 2001 it was about 45 percent.

But in 2011 the percentage of Scheduled Caste has decreased to 41 percent. Percentage of Scheduled Tribe population is very low in the study area. It has also been decreased. In 1991, percentage of Scheduled Tribe population was 6.06. But in 2011, percentage of Scheduled Tribe population is about 5.43 (Fig.6).

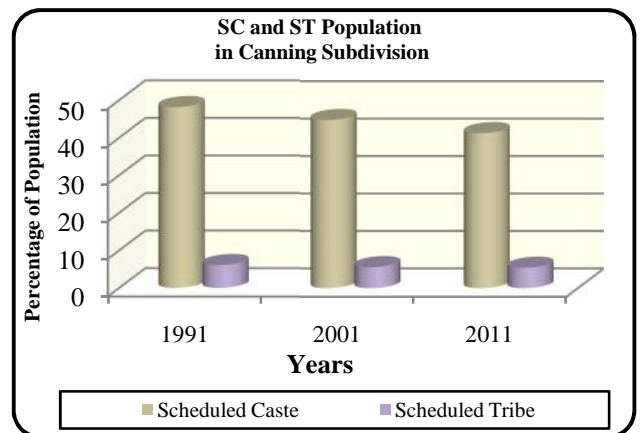


Fig.6 SC and ST Population in Canning Subdivision

Data source: Primary Census Abstract

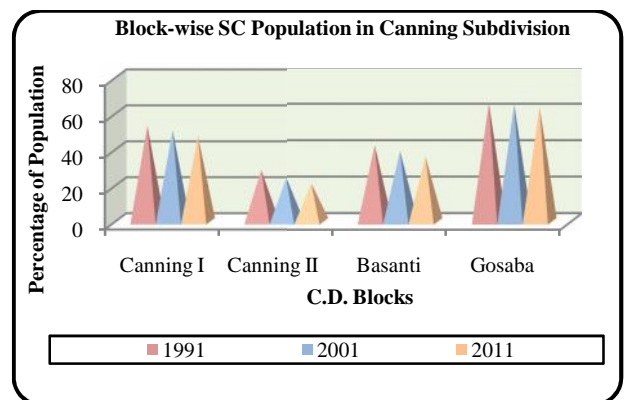


Fig.7 Block-wise SC Population

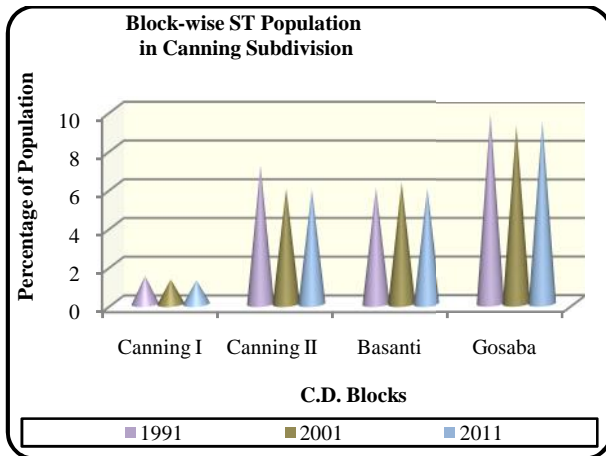


Fig.8 Block-wise ST Population

Data source: District Statistical Handbook

The percentage of Scheduled Caste population is high in Gosaba block than other three C.D. blocks under the study area. Percentage of Scheduled Caste population has decreased in each and every block under the study area over time. Percentage of Scheduled Tribe population is low in Canning I block. Percentage of this population group is more in Gosaba block. In Gosaba block, percentage of Scheduled Tribe population has increased than past years (Fig.7).

**Literacy**

Literacy is an important indicator of socio-economic development. If facilities are the acquisition of specific skills and occupational competence thus accelerates the process of social change (Singh, 2009). Female literacy rate is low than male literacy rate in the study area.

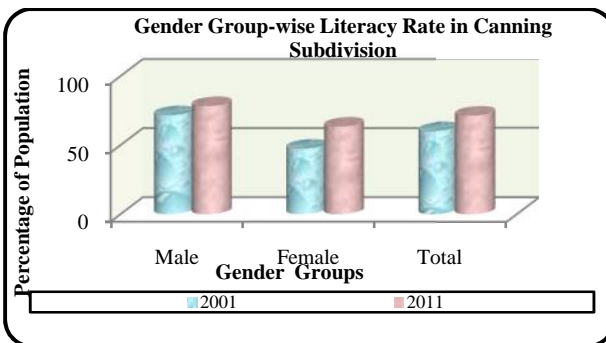


Fig 9 Gender Group –wise Literacy Rate

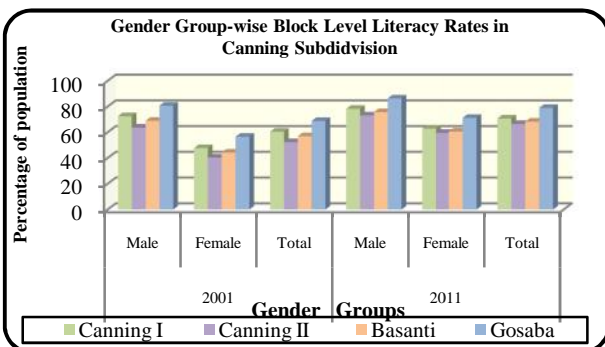


Fig10 Gender Group –wise Block level Literacy Rate

Data source: District Statistical Handbook

Literacy rate have improved in the subdivision. In 2001, total literacy rate was 59.90 percent. In 2011, total literacy rate is 70.98 percent. From the year 2001 to 2011, Male literacy rate have increased about seven percent (Fig.9).

Female literacy rate during this period has increased about 16 percent. So, Female literacy rate have rapidly increased in the study area than that of male literacy rate. From the year 2001 to 2011, total literacy rate of Canning II block have increased more than other C.D. blocks under the study area. The percentage of literate people is high in Gosaba block in Canning subdivision but literacy rate is low in Canning II block (Fig.10).

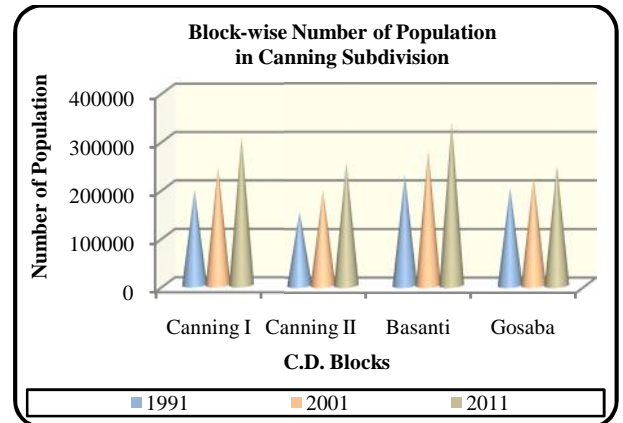


Fig.11 Block-wise Total population

Data source: Primary Census Abstract

**Population**

The size of population has increased in Canning subdivision. In 1991, total population in the study area was 775,418. From 1991 to 2001 it has increased more than 150,000. In 2001, total population was 942,008. According to 2011 census, total number of population is about 1,140,562 in Canning sub division (Primary census abstract, 2011). In 1991, distribution of total population was minimum in Canning II block. Total population was maximum in Basanti block. Growth of population has increased rapidly in Canning I and Basanti blocks. From the year 1991 to 2011, total population is maximum in Basanti block than other three subdivisions (Fig.11).

Table1 Percentage of Total Population to District Population

C.D. Blocks	1991	2001	2011
Canning I	3.43	3.54	3.73
Canning II	2.65	2.84	3.09
Basanti	3.97	4.03	4.13
Gosaba	3.5	3.23	3.02

Source: Primary Census Abstract, 2011

From Table 1, it is observed that percentage of total population to district population is more in Basanti block. From 1991 to 2001, percentage of total population to district population was low in Canning II block. But in 2011, percentage of total population to district population has increased in this C.D. block. The low percentage to total population to district population is in Gosaba block. It is seen that along with increased literacy rate, growth of population has decreased in Gosaba block.

**Sex Ratio**

Sex structure is the most fundamental attribute in demography. It determines the reproductive potential, marital status, work force and socio- economic relationship. The disparity in sex ratio determines the contrasting mortality rates of the two sexes, differential treatment of male children and sex-selective migration as well as education level and awareness. A more balanced sex ratio is desirable for achievement of social progress and healthy community life (Singh, 2009).

From 1991 to 2011, number of female person per thousand male people has increased in the study area. In 2001, the ratio between female per thousand male people had increased than 1991. Due to negligence toward girl child, diagnostic test for sex determination during pregnancy period and abortion the number of female people had reduced. But in recent, Government of India have implemented some rules against diagnostic check up during pregnancy for sex determination and abortion, as a result the number of female people per thousand male have increased the study area. In 1991, the sex ratio was low in Gosaba block but it was high in Canning II block. Sex ratio in Canning II block was low in 2001 than other community development blocks under the study area (Fig.12).

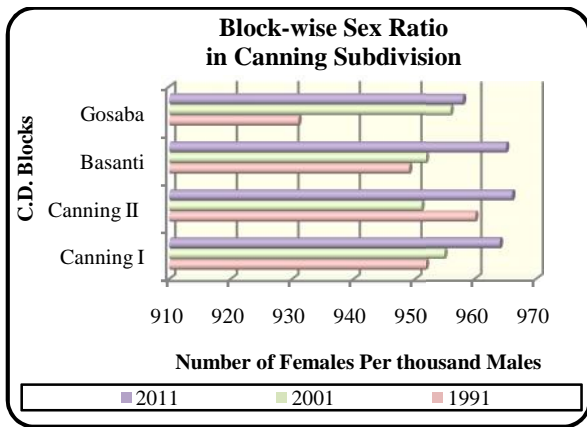


Fig.12 Block-wise Sex Ratio

Data source: computed by the author

According to 2011 census, female population per thousand males is near about same in all four blocks in Canning subdivision.

**House type and House hold size**

Canning subdivision is situated under lower Gangetic plain area. Most of the houses are constructed by earthen material.

Table 2 Household Sizes in Canning Subdivision

C.D. Blocks	1991			2011		
	Households	Population	Number of people per household	Households	Population	Number of people per household
CanningI	35,211	196,295	6	64,041	304,724	4
CanningII	25,854	151,635	6	49,711	252,523	5
Basanti	40,478	226,974	6	70,818	336,717	4
Gosaba	37,042	200,514	5	58,197	246,598	4

Source: Primary Census Abstract, 2011

So, most of the houses are *Kuchha* type house. About 25 percent respondents have *Semi-pucca* type houses. Only very

few people who are economically rich than the other inhabitants in the study area have *Pucca* type houses. In recent years, the Government of India has released fund for the vulnerable section of the society through *Indira Awas Yoyona* to construct *Pucca* type house. In recent years, it can be seen that some poor people made *Pucca* type houses. In 1991, Number of household and number of total population was more in Basanti block (Fig.11). Average household size of Basanti block was six. During this time, average households was less in Gosaba block. The awareness about family planning had increased through health workers, NGOs etc. in the study area.

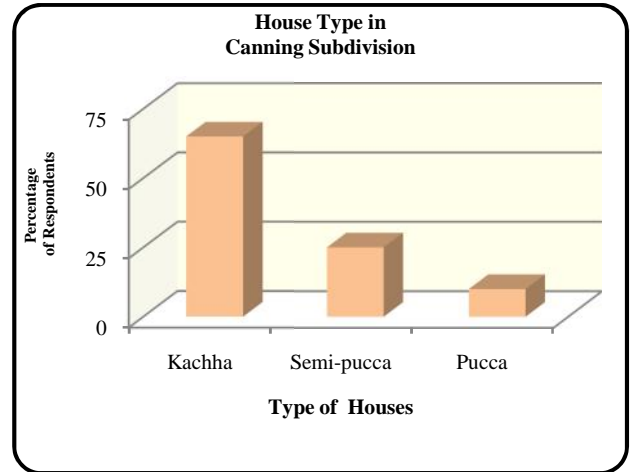


Fig.13 House type

Source: Primary data

People in study area, have adopted various family welfare measures. According to Census 2011, number of households and total population has increased in each and every block in Canning subdivision. But average number of persons household has decreased in these blocks. From 1991 to 2011, in Basanti and Canning I blocks, average number of persons per household have decreased by about two people each household. Average number of persons per household in Canning II and Gosaba blocks has decreased by about one person per household.

**Findings**

Socio- economic characteristics and demographic attributes are related with each other. When family size is less then this family is both socially and culturally developed. If people are more educated then they want to take necessary steps for birth control as well as to reduce family size. In Gosaba block, percentage of literate peoples is more and family size of this block is less than other C.D. blocks. Most of the inhabitants in the study area are followers of Hindu religion. The second

Number of Muslim religious people is less in Gosaba block. From 1991 to 2011, both Muslim and Hindus have slightly

decreased. And number of Christians has slightly increased than the earlier. Now-a-days some Hindu and Muslim religious people have been converted into Christians. Almost all the people under study area communicate through Bengali language. Bengali language is the mother tongue in Canning subdivision. But few people who are highly educated can talk in English language. Near about half of population in Canning subdivision belongs to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled tribe population. Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population is more in Gosaba block than C.D. blocks under the study area. Number of people belonging to Scheduled Caste is less in Canning II block. Scheduled Tribe population is less in Canning I block. In 2011, literacy rate among female have increased in the study area. In case of literacy rate, Gosaba block is advanced than other C.D. blocks in Canning subdivision. According to Census 2011, percentage of total to district population is more in Canning II block. Sex ratio is one of the most important demographic attributes. Number of female people per thousand male people has increased over time. From 1991 to 2011, it is seen that number of female per thousand male population has increased in each block under study area. But during 2001, due to some religious obligation number of female per thousand males had reduced in Canning II block. In 2011, number of female per thousand males people has increased of that block. From 1991 to 2011, average number of people per family has decreased in each block of the study area. Most of the people live in *Kuchha* type houses. Only very few people live in *Pucca* and *Semi pucca* houses which are situated in the notified area. But in recent, Government of India has released fund for housing scheme through *Indira Awas Yoyona*.

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**CONCLUSION**

To build a developed society firstly people of that society should be educated. There is a need to enrich the awareness about family planning through Health Workers, NGOs and Local Authorities. Though down the ages socio-cultural status of the vulnerable section of the people under study area have improved by the initiatives taken by the Government of India. Infrastructural constraints are a major hindrance for development of dissected blocks in Canning subdivision. So, it is essential to improve the level of infrastructure in the study area.

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