



# **SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF MUSLIMS IN WEST BENGAL**

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By

**MD. MAINUDDIN**

Under the Supervision of

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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK

ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY

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Dated. *28<sup>th</sup> August, 08*

## *Certificate*

This is to certify that **Md. Mainuddin** has worked under my supervision for his **M. Phil Dissertation** on “*Social and Economic conditions of Muslims in West Bengal*”. This work is the analysis of available census data and studies on Muslims in West Bengal.

He has completed all prescribed requirements for the submission of M. Phil dissertation. I, therefore recommend for the submission of dissertation which is original in analysis and interpretation.

  
(Dr. Abdul Waheed)  
Supervisor



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# INTRODUCTION

## **Introduction**

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India is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country. People belonging to many religions, such as Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and Christianity live in the country. Muslims constitute the largest minority community with 14 per cent population of this country. They are not only the largest minority community, but their presence is visible in all the states and union territories of the country. West Bengal occupies third position among various states and union territories of the country in terms of percentage of Muslim population (i.e. 25 per cent) after Jammu & Kashmir (67 per cent) and Assam (30 per cent). Muslims of West Bengal and of other parts of the India have contributed largely in the development and transformation of society, culture and civilization of India. Their role in the freedom struggle of the country is unquestionable. Nonetheless, discrimination, social stagnation and educational marginalisation cumulatively resulted in growing economic backwardness of the Muslims in larger parts of the country (Sikand, 2006). This largest minority community has been converted to the lowest socio-economic stratum in post-independent India. They have lagged behind the Schedule Castes in many walks of life. They are educationally most backward, economically poor and politically a powerless community of the country in general and of West Bengal in particular. More often the community became victim of pogrom in which innumerable Muslims are killed; their shops are burned, their women are beaten and raped and



their property is destroyed and looted. As a result, they are compelled to leave their home and property and live in dingy lanes and slums. Constitutional guarantees are distant dream for them. Governmental Plan and Programmes do not reach to the Muslim concentration areas and if reached its implementation is half-hearted by implementing governmental and non-governmental agencies. No political party and religious leaders are known to have taken active interest in the social, economic and educational progress of the community and ensuring them safety and security, but recently government of India has launched many Schemes for the upliftment of the minority community of India especially for the Muslims.

This social and economic backwardness of Muslims is not merely confirmed by the individual researchers and surveys of voluntary organizations but also by Committees of Government. The High Power Panel under the chairmanship of Dr. Gopal Singh, set up by the Ministry of Home Affairs in the early 1980 to enquire into social and economic conditions of the Indian minorities, they found Muslims are backward. After 23 years, again this is evident from the findings of the Prime Minister's High Level Committee under the chairmanship of Justice Rajinder Sachar, constituted to enquire into socio-economic and educational status of Muslims on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2005.

On this poor socio-economic background of Muslims the present work has been conceived. The present work is an attempt to highlight the social and economic conditions of Muslims in West Bengal. It also aims in generating data

about socio-economic and educational conditions of Bengali Muslims. Their socio-economic condition can be assessed by examining the indicators like population and sex ratio, literacy and education level, economy and land ownership, occupation, work participation rate, levels of living, political representation among the people of the said community. The factors creating hindrance towards socio-economic development of Muslims will also be highlighted and analyzed in this discussion. It is necessary that relevant facts and figures found in the official and academic records and publications are put together for an objective assessment of reality.

This work is primarily based on the secondary sources. Hence, no empirical or primary data has been used for the completion of this work. It is also based on the survey of available literature related to the topic. The data collected from secondary sources like various census reports of India, sociological and anthropological studies, published and unpublished governmental reports, reports of various non-governmental organisations and literature published in various newspapers and journals.

This work is mainly deals with Muslims of West Bengal. Hence their district-wise population, sex-ratio and child sex ratio, socio-economic conditions of Muslim communities in West Bengal, literacy rate and educational level, economy and political representation are presented in Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively. Muslims of West Bengal constitute 25 per cent of state total

population. With this it occupies third position among all the states and union territories. It means that nearly one-fourth of the population of the state is Muslims. They are unevenly distributed in the entire length and breadth of the state. However, their major concentration is in 10 districts of the state. They form 20 to 60% population of these districts. Demographic profile of Muslims is an important indicator for measuring their socio-economic and educational development within a region. At national level, Muslims are a highly urbanized community. Their national average of urbanization is 35%, which is quite higher than the national average of 27%. In contrary only 16% Muslims of West Bengal live in urban areas. Hence, their rate of urbanisation is 29 percentage points less than that of Indian Muslims. In other words, we can say that Bengali Muslims are largely rural community as 83% Muslims live in villages. Being, a rural community they are poor, landless and educationally backward. Thus, they are not in a position to avail the benefits of developmental programmes. Despite their abject poverty and illiteracy, Muslims women have been given great respect and honour by the male members in the state, as both sex ratio and child sex ratio is more as compare to the majority community i.e. Hindus. As per 2001 census there are 934 females per thousand male in the state. While Muslims have 933 females per thousand males as compare to Hindus 932 females. At district level also, Muslims have higher sex ratio than Hindus in 12 districts out of 18 districts of the state. Child sex ratio (CSR) shows more favourable for Muslims in the state. The state average of CSR is 960. While Muslims have 968 CSR which is 8 percentage

points more than the state average and 12 percentage points more than Hindus (956). Also, district level analysis shows that out of 18 districts in 16 districts Muslims have higher CSR in the state (see Chapter 1). Besides census of India 2001, Poverty and illiteracy among Muslims of the state is shown by qualitative studies of Muslim communities/castes. Anthropological Survey of India under its People of India Project (POI) has studied communities and castes of India, including that of Muslims. It has identified and studied 21 communities/castes of Muslims in W.B. In Chapter 2, we have delineated detail account of socio-economic and educational conditions of Muslim communities from the accounts of POI. Most of the communities are poor and landless. They are mainly engaged in menial occupation like begging, fish mongers, churiwala, snake charmer, cotton-carder etc. Few of them are associated with agriculture and petty business. Almost all the communities belong to lower social strata of the society. They are the most educationally backward community and few communities do not send their children to school due to their poverty despite the fact that the state average literacy rate in West Bengal (68.64%) is more than the national level (64.85%). Though the high literacy rate at state level, only 57% Muslims are literate which is lowest of all religious communities of the state. District-wise analysis shows that higher the concentration of Muslims in the district, lower is their literacy rate. For example, in Murshidabad more than 60% population is Muslim but only 48% are literate. Though literacy rate is an important indicator for measuring educational level but not sufficient. Educational attainment is another indicator for evaluation

of educational level of any community. As far as educational attainment is concerned Muslim performs badly. State level figure reveals that as the level of education increases the educational attainment of Muslims decreases which has been discussed in Chapter 3.

Economy and political representation of Muslim in West Bengal are presented in Chapter 4. Bengali Muslims are economically poor. In urban areas they are largely engaged in low economic activities like rickshawpuller, fruit seller, carpenter, servants, skilled and unskilled labour in industries etc. While in rural areas they are landless and work as day labourer in other's field. The analysed data shows that share of Muslim in Cultivators and Agricultural Workers and Household Industry Workers of the state are low while it is high in Other Workers. This implies that the economic condition of Muslim in rural economy of the state is uncertain. From the high share of Muslims in Other Workers one may say that in urban areas Muslims are economically sound. But it is not true. For most of the Muslims in Household Industry are daily wage workers. While high share of Muslims in Other Workers is because of larger number of Muslims of the state are in informal sector of the economy and generally engaged in menial occupations. Lack of adequate political leadership increases their misery many folds. Muslims of West Bengal are politically under-represented. In spite of the strong secular traditions of politics in the state, the numerical deprivation of

Muslims being 43% should make those committed to the ideal of inclusive democracy realize that the electoral system needs to be reviewed.

This work would fill up a gap in the literature on Muslims of West Bengal and contribute in generating data related with their socio-economic, educational and political conditions. It could be useful to students of minority studies in their researches as well as to policy makers and voluntary organisations in framing viable action plans for the development of Muslims



# CHAPTER 1



## **Muslims of West Bengal: population and Sex Ratio**

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Bengal of pre- Independent India or undivided Bengal was large in size containing the divisions of Burdwan, Presidency, Rajshahi (including Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling), Dacca and Chitagong. The region has rich and long history and is famous for its art and crafts, culture and commerce. Many people from different parts of India and abroad came to Bengal and made it their homeland right from ancient period. Bengal was the attraction of traders, due to its close proximity to sea, fertile land and commercial towns.

Britishers, who ruled over India for about 200 years, first established their trading company 'East India Company' in Calcutta in the year 1690. Before Britishers, Bengal was ruled over by kings and chiefs who belong to different religion, caste, tribes and races. The Aryans inhabited Bengal during post Vedic period. Then it was ruled by Palas, Pundras and Sen. They were overthrown by Muslims in 13<sup>th</sup> century. Muslims rule influenced profoundly socio-religious structure of the Bengali people. Britishers gradually came in conflicts with Nawab in Bengal and with diplomatic efforts and series of conspiracies captured power in Bengal. In 1905 the British for the first time partitioned Bengal on the basis of religion into two parts i.e. West Bengal and East Bengal. Again in 1947 at the time of Independence the province had been divided into two halves between India and Pakistan on the basis of same religious considerations. The Hindu-majority West Bengal remained in India while Muslim-majority East Bengal went to Pakistan



which later emerged as a sovereign independent state of Bangladesh in 1971. In post-Independent India, West Bengal grew in size due to merger of French enclave of Chandanagor (1954), Coch Behar (1956), Purulia and some parts of Bihar.

Situated in the eastern part of the country West Bengal is one of the 28<sup>th</sup> medium-sized states in India. It is surrounded by three international borders in the North namely Bhutan and Nepal and Bangladesh in the East. On its north-east lies green valley of Assam. The Bihar and Jharkhand lies on the western side, while to the south-west lies the state Orrisa. The deep blue Bay of Bengal lies on its South. West Bengal has been divided into 3 sub-divisions which included 19 districts.

Census of India 2001 reports 80, 22,171 million population and area of 88, 752 sq. km of West Bengal. Thus the population density in the state is 904 persons per sq. km. Out of its total population 41,465,985 (51.72%) million are male and 38,710,212 (48.28%) are female. Hence the average sex ratio of the state is 934, one point more than national average. West Bengal is predominantly a state of villages since 57,748,946 (71.98%) million population is living in rural areas whereas remaining dwell in cities and towns.

### **Religion Wise Distribution of Population in West Bengal**

Out of the total state population, 5,81,04,835 (72.47%) million are Hindus; While Muslims constitutes 2,02,40,543 (25.24%) million population of the state. Hence, remaining population of 18,30,819 million is constituted by other religious

communities like Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Others and Religion not stated.

West Bengal occupies third position among various states and union territories of the country in terms of percentage of Muslim population. The largest percentage of Muslim population is found in Jammu and Kashmir (67%) followed by Assam (30%). However, Muslims are not evenly distributed in all the districts of the state. There are ten districts of state in which Muslims have million plus population. Districts of the state are arranged in descending order in terms of the percentage of Muslim population. This is presented in the following table 1.1.

**Table: 1.1**  
**Districts are arranged in Terms of Descending Order of Muslim Population in West Bengal**

| S.No | Districts                 | Total Population       | Muslim                | Per cent (%)        |
|------|---------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
|      | <b><i>West Bengal</i></b> | <b><i>80176197</i></b> | <b><i>2021171</i></b> | <b><i>25.23</i></b> |
| 1.   | Murshidabad               | 5866569                | 3735380               | 63.67               |
| 2.   | Maldah                    | 3290468                | 1636171               | 49.72               |
| 3.   | Uttar Dinajpur            | 2441794                | 1156503               | 47.36               |
| 4.   | Birbhum                   | 3015422                | 1057861               | 35.08               |
| 5.   | South 24 parganas         | 6906689                | 2295967               | 33.24               |
| 6.   | Nadia                     | 4604827                | 1170282               | 25.41               |
| 7.   | Haora                     | 4273099                | 1044383               | 24.44               |
| 8.   | Koch Bihar                | 2479155                | 600911                | 24.23               |
| 9.   | Noth 24 parganas          | 8934286                | 2164058               | 24.22               |
| 10.  | Dakshin Dinajpur          | 1503178                | 361047                | 23.93               |
| 11.  | Kolkata                   | 4572876                | 926769                | 20.05               |
| 12.  | Bardhaman                 | 6895514                | 1364133               | 19.78               |
| 13.  | Hugli                     | 5041976                | 763471                | 15.14               |
| 14.  | Medinipur                 | 9610788                | 1088618               | 11.35               |
| 15.  | Jalpaiguri                | 3401173                | 369195                | 10.85               |
| 16.  | Bankura                   | 3192695                | 239722                | 7.50                |
| 17.  | Purulia                   | 2536516                | 180694                | 7.12                |
| 18.  | Darjeeling                | 1609172                | 85378                 | 5.30                |

Source: Census of India, 2001

It is evident from the above table that highest concentration of Muslim population is found in the district of Murshidabad and their lowest percentage in the district of Darjeeling. Out of 18 districts (19<sup>th</sup> district was created after census of India 2001 i.e., Mednipur was divided into two districts East Mednipur and West Mednipur) there are six districts in which percentage of Muslim population is more than the state average. These districts are Murshidabad, Malda, Uttar Dinajpur, Birbhum, South 24 Parganas and Nadia. In rest of the districts where Muslims form 5% or more but less than the state average (25.24%) are Haora, Kuch Bihar, North 24 Parganas, Dakshin Dinajpur, Kolkata, Bardhaman, Hugli, Mednipur, Jalpaiguri, Bankura, Purulia and Darjeeling. The table also indicate that there are three districts namely Murshidabad, Malda and Uttar Dinajpur may be called 'Muslim Concentration District' as they constitute about half of the Muslim population of the districts.

## **RURAL-URBAN POPULATION**

Unlike other parts of the country percentage of Muslim population is more in villages than towns and cities. Of the total Muslim population in the state 83.22% are living in villages. If we compare percentage of rural Muslims with that of Hindus in the state we find Hindus are more urbanized or less rural than Muslims. Because of 67.82% Hindu population of the state are living in rural areas.

Distribution of rural-urban Muslim population in the district of W.B is presented in the following table 1.2.

**Table: 1.2**  
**District Wise Distribution of Rural/Urban Muslim population in West Bengal**

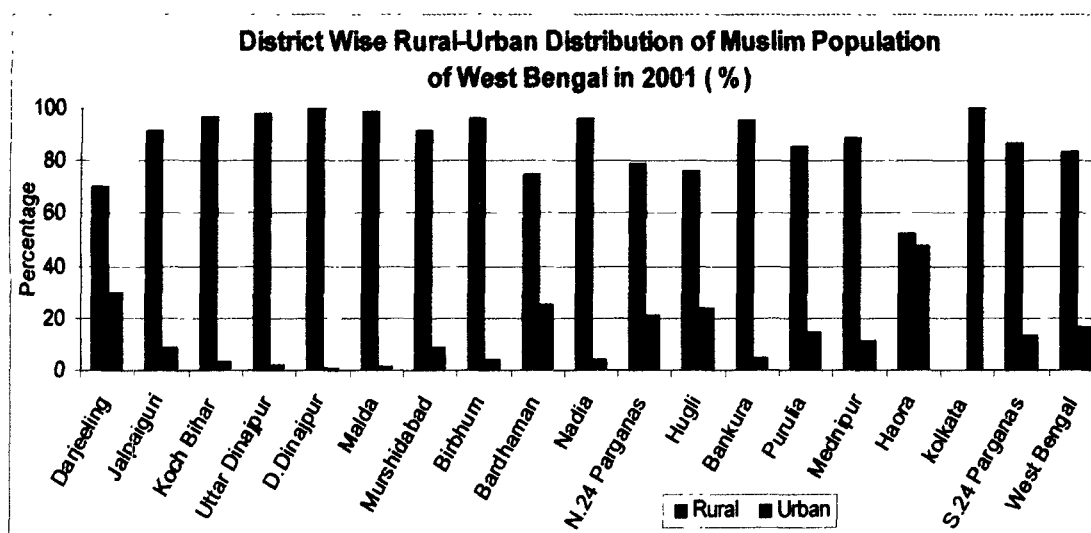
| S.No | State/Districts    | Rural           | Percentage   | Urban          | Percentage   | Total           |
|------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------|
|      | <b>West Bengal</b> | <b>16845034</b> | <b>83.22</b> | <b>3395509</b> | <b>16.78</b> | <b>20240543</b> |
| 1    | Darjeeling         | 59808           | 70.05        | 25570          | 29.95        | 85378           |
| 2    | Jalpaiguri         | 337324          | 91.37        | 31871          | 8.63         | 369195          |
| 3    | Koch Bihar         | 580777          | 96.65        | 20134          | 3.35         | 600911          |
| 4    | Uttar Dinajpur     | 1132025         | 97.88        | 24478          | 2.12         | 1156503         |
| 5    | Dakshin Dinajpur   | 359482          | 99.57        | 1565           | 0.43         | 361047          |
| 6    | Malda              | 1609596         | 98.38        | 26575          | 1.62         | 1636171         |
| 7    | Murshidabad        | 3424659         | 91.68        | 310721         | 8.32         | 3735380         |
| 8    | Birbhum            | 1012468         | 95.71        | 45393          | 4.29         | 1057861         |
| 9    | Bardhaman          | 1019138         | 74.71        | 344995         | 25.29        | 1364133         |
| 10   | Nadia              | 1124308         | 96.07        | 45974          | 3.93         | 1170282         |
| 11   | North 24 Parganas  | 1711861         | 79.10        | 452197         | 20.90        | 2164058         |
| 12   | Hugli              | 582518          | 76.30        | 180953         | 23.70        | 763471          |
| 13   | Bankura            | 228827          | 95.46        | 10895          | 4.54         | 239722          |
| 14   | Purulia            | 154137          | 85.30        | 26557          | 14.70        | 180694          |
| 15   | Mednipur           | 964441          | 88.59        | 124177         | 11.41        | 1088618         |
| 16   | Haora              | 549687          | 52.63        | 494696         | 47.37        | 1044383         |
| 17   | kolkata            | 0               | 0.00         | 926769         | 100.00       | 926769          |
| 18   | South 24 Parganas  | 1993978         | 86.85        | 301989         | 13.15        | 2295967         |

Source: Census of India, 2001

The above table reveals that there are nine districts where the highest concentration of rural Muslim is found and its percentage lies in between 90-100%. These districts are Jalpaiguri, Koch Bihar, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Malda, Murshidabad, Birbhum, Nadia and Bankura. Out of remaining 12 districts, there are three districts having rural Muslim population in between 80-90% and these districts are South 24 Parganas, Mednipur and Purulia. Another four districts where the rural population constitutes in ranges between 70-80% and these districts are Darjeeling, Bardhaman, North 24 Parganas and Hugli. In one

district the percentage of rural Muslim population is 52%. Whereas the percentage of rural population in Kolkata is 0% as it is a metropolitan city of the state.

Of the total Muslim population 33, 95,509 lakh or 16.78% lives in urban areas. While 18,697,851 lakh or 32.18% Hindus are living in urban areas. It is also evident from the above table that out of 18 districts they have not significant urban population in any one of these districts. In all districts their urban percentage is less than 30%. The highest urban concentration of Muslims is in the district of Kolkata i.e. 100% and lowest in Dakshin Dinajpur i.e. 0.43%. There are four districts in which their percentage lies in between 20-30%. In remaining twelve districts their urban population is less than 20% and these districts are Jalpaiguri, Koch Bihar, Uttar Dinajpur, Malda, Murshidabad, Birbhum, Nadia, Bankura, Purulia, Medinipur and South 24 Parganas.



**Fig: 1a**

Though Muslims constitute 16% population in urban areas of West Bengal they are largely concentrated in slums areas and engaged in menial works. In this

regard M.K.A. Siddiqui notes that “ a comparatively higher percentage of Muslims in urban areas may be explained on the basis of their culture allowing mobility and less inhibited contact as also the ‘push’ factor, but despite the fact that they constitute the back bone of urban economy, their share in prosperity remains marginal”(Siddiqi 1998:1)

This is not at all a positive indicator for the proper presentation of rural-urban Muslims in West Bengal. It can be inferred from the preceding discussion that urbanization rate of Muslims in West Bengal is very low. This is contrary to the trend which is found among Muslims in other parts of the country. Since the rural areas of West Bengal are not properly developed socio-economic condition of Muslims in West Bengal is bound to be poor.

### **Sex-Ratio**

Sex-ratio is an important social indicator; demographers generally use to depict the proportionate share of female in the population sample. Sex ratio is defined as number of females per thousand males. The sex ratio of population of a country or a community is an important indicator for measuring the extent of prevailing equality between males and females at a given point of time.

Declining sex ratio is one of the serious problem for a country or a community. At present, India is one of the country, is facing the problem of declining sex ratio. The reasons for declining sex ratio lie within a society or a

community. There are many reasons for declining sex ratio but some of the important reasons are

- a) Practicing female infanticide
- b) Taking less care of the female child and of lactating mothers
- c) Due to poor availability of nutritious food
- d) The high rate of child mortality
- e) Preference of male child over female child because girl child is regarded as liability
- f) Easier availability of sex determination tools
- g) Religious preference for sons

(Jawid 2007:33)

Sex ratio in India from 1901 to 2001 is presented in the following table 1.3.

**Table: 1.3**

**Sex Ratio in India, 1901-2001**

| Census Years | 1901 | 1911 | 1921 | 1931 | 1941 | 1951 | 1961 | 1971 | 1981 | 1991 | 2001 |
|--------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Sex Ratio    | 972  | 964  | 955  | 950  | 945  | 946  | 941  | 930  | 934  | 927  | 933  |

**Source:** Census of India, (2001:85)

The census has counted 531 million males and 496 million females giving rise to overall sex-ratio of 933 females per thousand males; registering an improvement of six points on the 1991 sex-ratio of 927 females for every thousand males, which is a matter of some satisfaction. This improvement in the overall sex-ratio has come the second time in the past 30 years, the first one was observed between 1971 and 1981 and second one between 1991 and 2001. But the matter of deep concern is the decline in sex-ratio of population in 0-6 age group (henceforth called child sex ratio) from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001.

### Sex Ratio in West Bengal

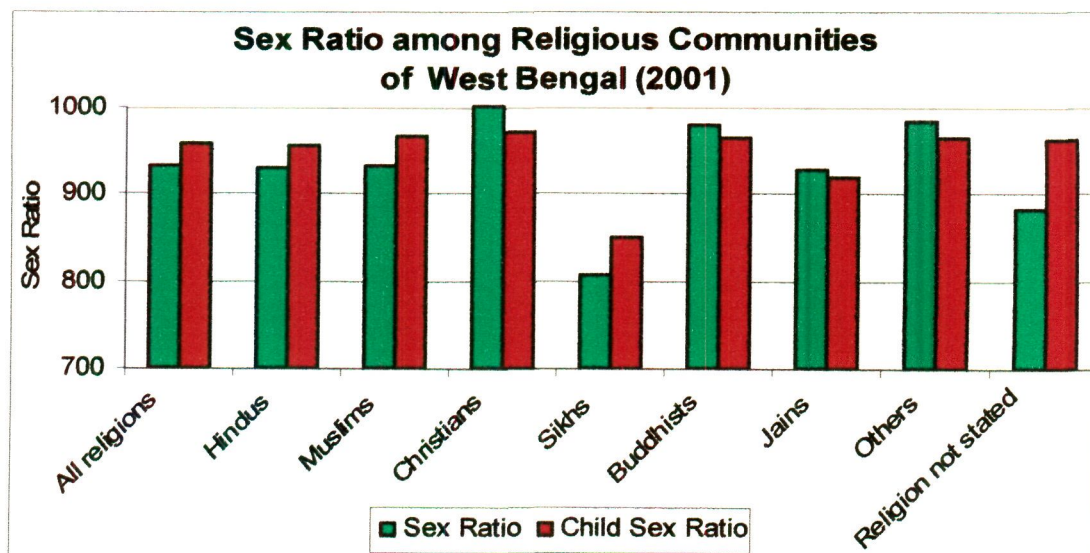
The trend of sex ratio in W.B is an exception as it shows a continuous trend of increasing sex ratio from 865 in 1951 to 934 in 2001. Average sex ratio in West Bengal is 934 i.e., one point more than national average as per census 2001. The following table 1.4 presented the community wise sex ratio in W.B.

**Table: 1.4**  
**Sex Ratio among the Religious Communities in West Bengal, 2001**

| Religious Communities | Sex Ratio | Child Sex Ratio |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------------|
| All religions         | 934       | 960             |
| Hindus                | 932       | 956             |
| Muslims               | 933       | 968             |
| Christians            | 1002      | 973             |
| Sikhs                 | 807       | 852             |
| Buddhists             | 981       | 965             |
| Jains                 | 929       | 920             |
| Others                | 985       | 965             |
| Religion not stated   | 883       | 963             |

Source: Census of India, 2001

The table shows, while the Muslim sex ratio is 933 which is one point more than the Hindus (i.e., 932). The most unfavorable sex ratio is among Sikhs (807).



**Fig: 1 b**



While sex ratio among other religious groups are 981 for Buddhists, 929 for Jains. Only Christians, having favourable sex ratio of 1002 females per 1000 males. This trend is somewhat similar to the national scenario for sex ratio among various religious groups.

But the sex ratio is not uniform as it varies from one district to another and from one community to another. Hence, District wise sex ratio of Hindus and Muslims is presented in the following table 1.5. It varies from one district to another. It also varies religion wise in different districts. There are two districts which have same and highest sex ratio of 958 among the Muslims is Murshidabad and Hugli.

**Table: 1.5**

**District Wise Sex Ratio in West Bengal**

| S. No | Name of the Districts | Muslims    | Hindus     | Difference |
|-------|-----------------------|------------|------------|------------|
|       | <i>West Bengal</i>    | <b>933</b> | <b>932</b> | <b>+1</b>  |
| 1.    | Darjeeling            | 868        | 930        | - 62       |
| 2.    | Jalpaiguri            | 941        | 939        | +2         |
| 3.    | Koch Bihar            | 954        | 947        | +7         |
| 4.    | Uttar dinajpur        | 950        | 927        | +23        |
| 5.    | Dakshin Dinajpur      | 956        | 951        | +5         |
| 6.    | Maldah                | 950        | 944        | +6         |
| 7.    | Murshidabad           | 958        | 943        | +15        |
| 8.    | Birbhum               | 952        | 948        | +4         |
| 9.    | Bardhaman             | 920        | 921        | -1         |
| 10.   | Nadia                 | 938        | 947        | -9         |
| 11.   | North 24 parganas     | 929        | 925        | +4         |
| 12.   | Hugli                 | 958        | 944        | +14        |
| 13.   | Bankura               | 924        | 951        | -27        |
| 14.   | Purulia               | 935        | 953        | +2         |
| 15.   | Medinipur             | 953        | 954        | -1         |
| 16.   | Haora                 | 910        | 905        | +5         |
| 17.   | South 24 parganas     | 948        | 932        | +16        |
| 18.   | Kolkata               | 739        | 852        | -113       |

**Source:** Census of India, 2001

While among the Hindus the highest sex ratio prevail in the district Medinipur (i.e., 954). There are 8 districts in which the sex ratio of Muslims are higher than

the Hindus and ranges between (2 to 10) and these districts are Jalpaiguri, Koch Bihar, Dakshin Dinajpur, Birbhum, North 24 Parganas, Purulia, Haora, Malda. While there are three districts namely Murshidabad, Hugli and South 24 Parganas in which sex ratio of Muslims are more than Hindus and it lies between (10 to 18). There is only one district in which Muslims sex ratio increased by 23 points i.e., Uttar Dinajpur. In total there are six districts in which the Muslims sex ratio is less than Hindus. There are two districts namely Bardhaman, Mednipur in which Muslims sex ratio are less than Hindus by 1 points. In two districts Nadia and Bankura the Muslims sex ratio is less than Hindus by 9 points and 27 points respectively. Darjeeling shows the 62 points less sex ratio among the Muslims. The highest difference is in Kolkata which indicate Muslim sex ratio is 113 points less than the Hindus.

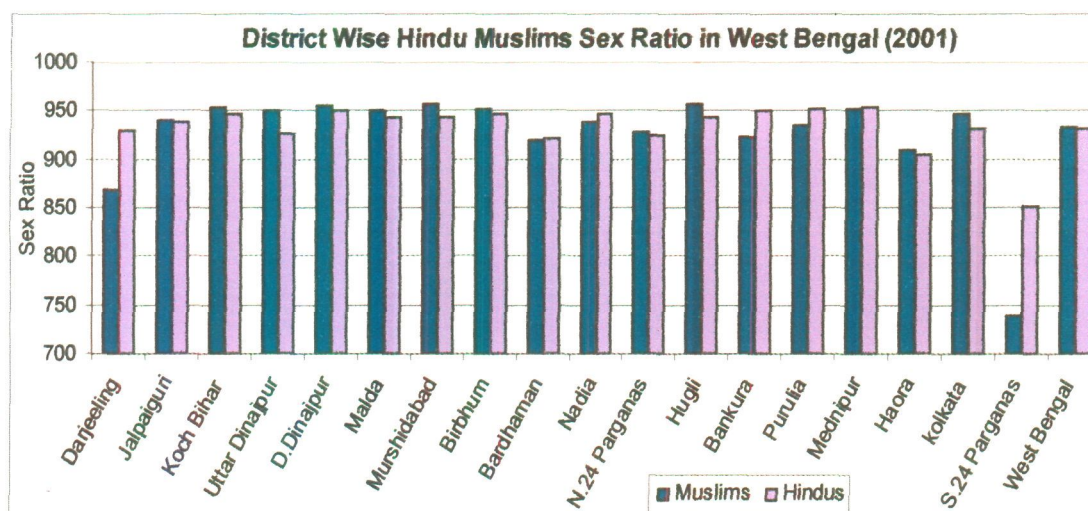


Fig: 1c

From the above discussion we can say that like the national level, also the sex ratio among Muslims in West Bengal show an edge over Hindus. It indicates

that factors like infanticide, foeticide, child mortality rate and practice of child preference are less prevalent among Muslims than the Hindus.

### **CHILD SEX RATIO**

Among the various indicators of showing status of girl child in Indian society, Child sex ratio is one of the important. Census of India calculates child sex ratio in age group 0-6 whereas NFHS computes it in the age group 0-5. Child sex ratio has recently attracted attention of demographers since it has sharply declined recently in India. Using the data of NFHS Prime Minister High Level Committee explains scenario of child sex ratio in Indian society. It states “India is one of the few countries in the world to have a child sex ratio that is less than 1,000. In addition, the overall child sex ratio in the country has been declining steadily during the last half century. It has declined from 976 in 1961 to 964 in 1971, 962 in 1981, 953 in 1991, and 927 in 2001. The low and falling child sex ratio is the result of two factors: excess female infant mortality (relative to male infant mortality) and female foeticide. Both in turn reflect parental discrimination against girls.

The NFHS data indicate that Muslims have the highest child sex ratio of any social groups in the country (Figure 3.5). For instance, the child sex ratio among Muslims was 986 girls per 1000 boys in the age group 0-5 in 1998-99, significantly higher than the ratio of 931 among SCs/STs, 914 among other Hindus, and 859 among other groups”(GOI 2006: 33-34).



In W.B the average child sex ratio is 960 as per census 2001. As sex ratio, child sex ratio is not also uniform among the various religious communities. There are three religious communities in the state which show lower sex ratio than the state average in this age group. These religious communities are Hindus having sex ratio 956, 4 points lower than the state average though the largest religious community in the state, Jains 920 and Sikhs have the lowest sex ratio 852 in the state. Among other three religious communities Christians show the highest child sex ratio, though it should be more than sex ratio but it decline (1002:973). This lead us to draw a question that instead of its high overall sex ratio of 1002, Why they show a trend of declining child sex ratio though they are the most educated community in West Bengal? Is they follow female foeticide or give less priority to female child? Muslims which is the largest minority community having higher child sex ratio of 968 which is 8 point more than the state average. But this does not mean that they are prosperous community instead they are the most socially, economically and educationally backward community in the state as well as in this country. Buddhists also show the greater sex ratio of 965 which is 5 point more than state average (see table 1.6).

**Table: 1.6**

**Child Sex Ratio among the Religious Communities in West Bengal, 2001**

| Religious Communities | All Religions | Hindus | Muslims | Christians | Sikhs | Buddhists | Jains | Others | Religion not stated |
|-----------------------|---------------|--------|---------|------------|-------|-----------|-------|--------|---------------------|
| Child Sex Ratio       | 960           | 956    | 968     | 973        | 852   | 965       | 920   | 965    | 963                 |

**Source:** Census of India, 2001

Like sex ratio Child sex ratio is also varies from one district to another and from one community to another. District wise child sex ratio of Hindus and Muslims are presented in the following table 1.7.

**Table: 1.7**  
**District Wise Child Sex Ratio (CSR) in West Bengal**

| S.No | State/Districts    | Muslims    | Hindus     | Difference |
|------|--------------------|------------|------------|------------|
|      | <i>West Bengal</i> | <i>968</i> | <i>956</i> | <i>+12</i> |
| 1    | Darjeeling         | 987        | 956        | +31        |
| 2    | Jalpaiguri         | 973        | 968        | +5         |
| 3    | Koch Bihar         | 969        | 962        | +7         |
| 4    | Uttar Dinajpur     | 972        | 958        | +14        |
| 5    | Dakshin Dinajpur   | 967        | 966        | +1         |
| 6    | Malda              | 965        | 961        | +4         |
| 7    | Murshidabad        | 976        | 961        | +15        |
| 8    | Birbhum            | 968        | 960        | +8         |
| 9    | Bardhaman          | 961        | 955        | +6         |
| 10   | Nadia              | 971        | 968        | +3         |
| 11   | North 24 Parganas  | 968        | 952        | +16        |
| 12   | Hugli              | 955        | 950        | +5         |
| 13   | Bankura            | 952        | 953        | -1         |
| 14   | Purulia            | 966        | 963        | +3         |
| 15   | Mednipur           | 965        | 948        | +17        |
| 16   | Haora              | 958        | 955        | +3         |
| 17   | Kolkata            | 918        | 931        | -13        |
| 18   | South 24 Parganas  | 971        | 959        | +12        |

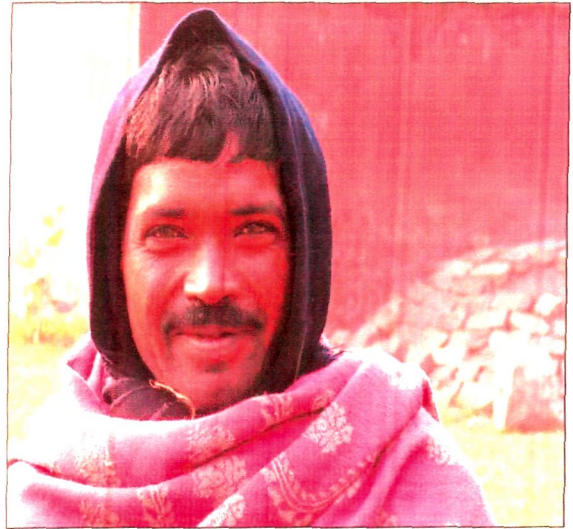
**Source:** Census of India 2001

From the above table it is evident that CSR among Muslims is better than Hindus in most of the districts. Out of 18 districts there are only two districts namely Kolkata and Bankura where CSR of Muslims is less than Hindus by 13 and 1 points respectively. While in Darjeeling the CSR of Muslims is more than the Hindus by 31 points. In remaining 15 districts Muslims CSR is greater than Hindus and it differs in the ranges between 1-17 points.

## Conclusion

It is evident from preceding analysis that  $\frac{1}{4}$ <sup>th</sup> population of West Bengal is constituted by Muslims. Further more there are some districts of the state in which they comprise more than half of the district population. Muslims of the country have 35 per cent rate of urbanization on the contrary Muslims of the West Bengal are highly rural community as 83 per cent of them are living in villages. Sex ratio which has recently emerged as the major socio-economic and demographic problem of the country does not appear problem as the state has 1 point more sex ratio than the national average of 933. Within the state sex ratio differs from one religious community to another. Like another parts of the country Muslims have more sex ratio than Hindus but less than Christians in the state. What is more important is the fact that performance of Muslims on the front of Child sex ratio is further improves. Here, their position is better than Hindus.





## CHAPTER 2



## **Muslim Communities of West Bengal**

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Contrary to popular belief, Muslims of West Bengal (W.B), like their co-religionists in other parts of India, are a heterogenous community. They belong to various social groups and therefore, display enormous variety of social organizations, customs and traditions. Each social group of Muslims has a distinct identity and status in the local social structure. Many sociologists and social anthropologists have underscored plural characteristics of Indian Muslims in their researches. Siddiqi (1973) and Bhattacharya (1973) identified many *Biradris* (Caste like groups) among Muslims of W.B. from the information contained in Gazetteers, Field Survey and Census of British period.

### **Islam and Muslim Communities in West Bengal**

Muslims conquest Bengal in 13<sup>th</sup> century, but Bengal's contact with Islam and foreign Muslims for trade and missionary works, began much earlier. It is believed that many Muslim scholars and saints (*Sufis*) have come even before the conquerors. The role of both the Muslim scholars and saints were equally significant to spread Islam in Bengal. In Bengal Islam spread mostly in rural areas. There are number of social, political and religious factors are considered for growth and spread of Islam in Bengal.

During the propagation of Islam in Bengal, a large number Hindus converted to Islam. Some Buddhists of Bengal also accepted Islam. Those who embraced Islam came from various strata of society. In this phase of conversion the lower castes came forward in a large number than the higher castes. The lower castes adopted Islam for various social reasons in traditional Hindu society. Eaton



believed that “Islam arrived in the Indian sub-continent carrying a liberating message of social equality as preached by the *Sufis*, some oppressed castes, in order to escape the yoke of Brahmanic oppression were converted to Islam en mass” (Eaton 1993). Some higher castes Hindus also converted to Islam for material advantage and for obtaining political power under the Muslim administration.

Most of the *Sufis* who spread Islam in Bengal, were of foreign origin. A large number of *Sufis* belonging to various thoughts came to Bengal from time to time. Of these *Sufi* thoughts few important were chistia, qadiria and naqshbandia. Consequently they able to increase the number of Muslims of their respective *orders* in Bengal and influenced their socio-religious life.

In the beginning, those who accepted Islam did not inculcate the real Islamic knowledge. There were many reasons. But the most important was that the Islamic scriptures were in Arabic, which was not translated into Bengali. The Muslim masses who did not know Arabic and even Persian, thus failed to inculcate the real Islamic knowledge or spirit. Moreover, Islamic knowledge was wrongly propagated and influenced the socio-cultural life of Muslim people. This was the main barricade to the Bengali Muslims to understand the real spirit of Islam. As a result, Bengali Muslims knew only Bengali, practiced local customs similar to their adjacent to non-Muslim members of the society and participate in the Hindu festivals. They also followed the caste system like Hindus.

Islam is based on the principle of egalitarianism. But in practice there is a difference among the Muslims. The social structure of Bengali Muslim society has been constituted by the relationship between many groups and sub groups like Muslims in other parts of the country. They have unequal social status.

The distinction that emerged among the Bengal Muslims on the basis of social honour was first between the foreigners (non-Bengali Muslims who traced their origin from outside the country) who claimed themselves as *Ashrafs* or *Sharifs* or *Khas* and the indigenous elements who were referred by the former as *Ajlafs* or *Atrap* or *Aam*.

At the bottom of the social ladder there were those Muslims who were the converts from the lowest Hindu caste and associated with the unclean jobs. They were called as *Arzals* or *Raizals* or *Ardals*.

The *Ashrafs* as well as the *Atrafs* were again divided among themselves on the basis of their ethnicity, occupation and social backgrounds. Owing to the notion of nobility, social honour and foreign ancestry among *Ashrafs* and Hindu caste background among the *Atrap* the social segments among the Bengali Muslims were roughly arranged in stratified order.

Those who claimed themselves as *Ashrafs* were the landed gentry. They claimed themselves as descendents of distinguished foreign ancestors. They were the landowners, the civic and religious leaders and wealthier. They considered manual services as degrading and untouchable. The Muslims who were converted

from the high castes of Hindu society also belonged to *Ashraf* category. In imitation of the four main Hindu varna divisions there also existed a four-fold classification of the Muslims of *Ashraf* category viz., *Sayyad*, *Shaikh*, *Mughal* and *Pathan*. Among the *Ashrafs*, *Sayyads* claimed the highest rank as they believed to have originated from the daughter of the prophet and her husband Ali- the fourth *Caliph* of Islam. Next is the *Shaikh* (Chief) who believed to have descendent from Arab ancestors, who were among the first followers of the Prophet. *Mughals* and *Pathans* constituted the third and fourth blocks of the *Ashraf* category who claimed to have descended from Mughal and Afgan conquerors in India.

The *Ajlaf* (people) were the toiling masses and peasant proprietors, who could not lay any such claim of noble ancestry. There were social gradations among the *Ajlafs* or indigenous converts on the basis of their past social and occupational (caste) backgrounds. The bulk of the Muslim population in Bengal belongs to *Ajlaf* category. They were basically engaged in agriculture and service-cum-craft work. A noble example of the first category was the agricultural Shaikhs, while the second category included a variety of occupational or functional groups such as Julha (weaver), Dhunia (cotton crusher), Nikari (fisherman), Hajam (barber), Kasai (butcher), Gharami (house thatcher), Gayan (singer), Bapari (hawker), Sarang (steamer driver), Darzi (tailor) etc. These Muslims, like the functional groups, had their family names handed down from generation to generation. Among these *Ajlaf* Muslim groups, occupation was the chief criterion for social differentiation and stratification. There was general

tendency amongst them like that of Hindu castes to differentiate between the 'honoured' and the 'despised' professions, and the status of a group depended much on the type of occupation followed by its member.

The Muslims of *Arzal* or *Rizwal* (worthless) category was mostly associated with the unclean jobs like scavenging, sweeping and other occupations of similar nature. Within this category there were the groups like Halalkhor, Lalbegi, Abdal, Bedia etc. with whom no other Muslims would associate and were forbidden to enter into the Mosque or to use the public burial-ground (Mondal 1994: 153-59).

Anthropological survey of India under its People of India Project (POI) recorded socio-economic and ethnographic profile of innumerable castes/communities of India, including those of Muslims.

POI, largest ethnographic project in India and the world, was launched on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1985.

"The objective of the project was to generate a brief, descriptive anthropological profile of all communities of India, the impact on them of change and the development process, and the linkages that bring them together. The project was started with exploring the least known communities and then move on to the field study of the lesser known and better known ones" (Singh 1992). The word Community is defined as a group of people who are "endogamous, have a traditional occupation and perception of being a distinct community". Initially 6748 communities were listed. Out of which 4635 communities were

located and studied in different parts of India. Out of 4635, 584 Muslim communities have been studied. (Ibid)

POI (Singh, 2008) has identified and studied a total of 203 communities in West Bengal. Of these, 203 communities 161 communities profess Hinduism followed by tribal/folk religion; 21 communities are Muslims , 10 communities Christians, 7 communities Buddhist, 2 communities Sikh and one Jain community and a Jewish community.

Though, POI project which claims is one of the largest project in India and Asia, it fails to include all the Muslim communities in West Bengal. Siddiqui (2004) listed 15 Muslim communities in Bengal. But few Muslim communities like Bedia, Lodha Muslims, Nepali Muslims and Nashyas are not included in POI of West Bengal.

Out of 21 Muslim communities some of them are distinctively Muslims while others are common to both Hindus and Muslims.

Excerpts from POI's ethnographic account of Muslim communities of W.B are presented in following pages in order to show their socio-economic and educational condition.

### **ABDALS**

Abdal is Muslim community with neither synonym, nor a special title- sometimes, mispronounced as 'Abder'. The etymology of the name is not known. The neighbouring erudite Muslims find two probable two etymological

connections: ‘Abdal’, in Arabic, means ‘change’; and ‘Abdal’ is also the name of a Turkish town. Unlike certain Muslim communities – the Sheikh, Pathans and Sayyads- Abdals do not claim an outright Arabian, or West Asian, ancestry. In the past, they used Abdal as a surname, but now, they use Sheikh and Biswas. They say they have been living near Hindu communities from times long past. They also claim they were converted from Hinduism, probably during the reign of King Ballal Sen. They are mainly found in Murshidabad, Birbhum, Bardhaman, the 24 Parganas and elsewhere.

Though the Abdals are landless, they consider land as a major economic resource. A few however, are individual proprietors of land and, so, have full control over their land- holding. The Abdals’ main traditional occupation for *upajibya* (a livelihood) is *chasbas*, or *krishi-karma* (cultivation). In rural areas, they still pursue their traditional occupation as a primary means of livelihood. They have taken up several subsidiary occupations, too, such as those of itinerant grocers, non-agricultural daily-wage laborers for earth –moving, roof-thatching, road construction and *paikari* (wholesale) business in cattle.

The literacy and education among Abdals is very poor. There are many drop-outs at school level, and only few have completed their school education. The state of their poverty and backwardness in education appear to put a brake on their aspirations. Their socio-economic backwardness and quality of living put them in a lower position of which they are sufficiently aware. Neighbouring

Muslims consider them low on account of their extra-Islamic activities and not in terms of economic backwardness.

### **BAJKAR**

The Bajkar are semi nomadic community and they are called Gangulia by the local people. The word 'Bajkar' was derived from *baji* which means acrobatic work. But the Bajkar people deny this etymology. They say that their caste profession is to make tattoo marks and it is done by women folk. Their clients are mainly females belonging to tribal communities living in the area and because of this profession those tribal people call them Bajkar. In West Bengal They are found in Purulia, Bankura, Mednipur and Burdwan districts. They speak Bengali and some of them also know Hindi and Urdu.

Most of them are landless. The male members of this community are generally engaged in repairing and making or hawking of stationary goods. Some of them are also engaged as labourers under contractors or in petty service. Besides making tattoo marks, they also work as agricultural labourers in sowing and harvesting seasons.

Bajkar are endogamous community but at present a few cases of exogamy marriage with the Ansari and the Pathan have been reported. They are aware about the Islamic rule. But due to their nomadic life they participate in *jumma namaj* on Friday only.

*Gram panchayat* is the statutory council of the area. The members of the *panchayat* work for the welfare of the community as a whole. They have a council with three persons of different localities and each of them is known as *malik*.

Bajkar are educationally backward community. Instead of primary schools in the localities where the Bajkars live, but due to their nomadic life they can not send their children to those schools. Hence most of them are illiterate. Most of the members of the community depend on daily wages except few. Hence, saving is distant dream. They have to take loans from money lenders for medical treatment and for their business of Umbrella and stationary goods.

## **BOHRA**

The Bohra are a Muslim community with a Gujrati background. 'Bohra' is a Gujrati word, possibly derived from the Arabic 'Bowahar', meaning trader. So the Bohras are considered one of the early traders who came from Gujrat. The Bohras have two sectarian divisions- the Ismaili Shia, popularly known as the Dawoodi Bohra who follow the Shia sect of Islam; and the Sunni Bohra, who follow Sunni-ism. Both groups comprise several regional units, with minor variations. For instance, the Sidhupuris are from Sidhpur, Kathiawadis from Kathiawad, Suratis from Surat and Lunawadis from Lunawad.

The Bohras are traditionally a trading community. They deal in general merchandise and are engaged in wholesale trading in cloth and hardware goods. A few Dawoodi Bohras have become exporters, importers, or industrialists of



considerable repute. They are also engaged in various private services. There is a Dawoodi Bohra Merchants' Association in the city which promotes trade and industry and gives *karzan hasanat* to conduct saving schemes and provide scholarship to the members. The Bohras have direct links with the local daily market.

The Bohras have good performance in education. Both boys and girls now avail of opportunities in education. The Dawoodi Bohras set up the Saif-e-Golden Jubilee English Public School open to all. For religious teaching the Dawoodi Bohras have established a parent body, the Madrasa Taiyabiyah, under which there are several *madrasa* schools in the state.

### **CHURIHARA**

The Churiharas are a small Muslim community with synonyms, Churihar and Churiwala. Traditionally, they were traders in glass bangles, from where their name has been derived. Risley (1891: 208) and Siddiqi (1974) refer to them as makers of glass bracelets, forming an endogamous group. They came from Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh and settled in West Bengal. They are found mostly in Hugli, Bardhaman, 24 Parganas district and in Kolkata city. They speak in Hindi and Urdu among themselves and in Hindi and Bengali with others. They use the Devangari script. They are classified under Other Backward Classes (OBC).

The churihara women look after domestic work. They paddle glass bangles, cosmetics and dolls on the village streets, but not until they become a mother. Women share the economic burden equally with their husbands; in some cases,

they shoulder a greater burden than the men. But, in spite of this, they have a low status in the family.

Most of the members of Churihara community are landless. Their main traditional occupation is trading in glass bangles and cosmetics. Many Churiharas also work in factories or as agricultural labourers and tailors. They buy what they need for their businesses from the urban markets and sell their products at different villages, fairs and daily and weekly markets. There are no bonded labourers or child labourers among them. Earlier, they were experts in making glass bengales, but, now, these are made in Firozabad and sent to Calcutta. The Churiharas buy these bangles from Calcutta and sell them at the rural, or sub urban markets.

The Churiharas are so poor that saving becomes near impossible. They, sometimes, take loans from the moneylenders and shop keepers for their business. Due to their abject poverty the Churihara boys and girls, normally, study up to primary level.

## **DHAWA**

The Dhawas, the class of Mohammedan palanquin bearers and fish-mongers of Bengal (Risley 1891: 224), with synonymys, Mallick and Kahar. They have no tittle or sub-groups. They have believed that Fatimabibi (a women saint) had once made four palanquin bearers out of her body to her father's house. They were known as the Dahawas. In West Bengal they scattered mainly in Hugli, Bardhaman and Nadia district. They speak and write in Bengali.

The Dhawas women have the right to inherit their father's property as per *Shariat*. They take care of goats and poultry birds, gathered dry leaves as fuel, fetch water do domestic chores. They work as maids to, in neighbouring houses. Womens share the economic burden with their male partners but still have low status.

Traditionally, the Dhawas were palanquin bearers, but now some carry the *Tajia* during Muharram. Most of them now work as rickshawpullers, agricultural labourers or chowkidars for the *gram panchayat*. Some collect the juice of the palm trees and sell it, or sometimes, molasses to sell at the daily and weekly markets for cash. The number of agricultural and casual labourers has increased. Since palanquins are not used any more in most villages, they have moved to other miscellenous jobs. They work as agricultural labourers in the field of Hindu or other rich Muslims.

Educationally, they are a backward community. Boys study upto primary level and Girls do not go to school at all.

## **DHUNIA**

The Dhunia are cotton-carders. Dhunia in Hindi means 'to card', while in Sanskrit, *dhui* means 'to agitate' (Crooke 1896: 297). They are also known as Monsooris, since they claim they have originated from an ancestor named Monsoor. The name of the Monsoor was referred to by Crooke (1896: 297-301).

The legendary account of the Monsoori's origin is as follows: Monsoor and Anal were brother and sister. Anal used to go away at the night to meditate. One

day Monsoor, in suspicion, secretly followed Anal and found Anal preaching to four followers while they were all having a delicious drink. When monsoor reached them, he too, was offered the drink. After having the drink, he began saying, 'Anal haq' (Anal is Correct). But 'Anal haq', in Urdu, means "I am the God". Now, for a Muslim, it is a sin to say the word, 'God', and so, he was hanged. But the sound, "Anal haq" came out of his body even after his death. His body was burnt to ashes, which were later thrown into the water, but the same words came out of the bubbles in the water too.

Once, when a *qazi* came to fetch water, he heard the sound. He collected some water in a jar from the spot where the bubbles were rising and the sound stopped. He came home and asked her daughter not to use the water. Out of curiosity, the qazi's daughter dranked the whole water from the jar and conceived. The child born was known as the Monssori.

There is another legend on their origin. A man called mansoor was the descendent of Hasan and Hussain. He too used to work at cotton carding. His descendents were known as the Moonsooris. Siddiqi (1974: 50) said they were engaged mainly in cotton carding and making bedding material.

The Dhunias have sub-groups. They have come from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh states. In West Bengal, they live mostly in plains. They speak Hindi and Urdu with their family, kin and relatives and in Hindi, Bengali and Urdu with others. They belong to the Other Backward Classes (OBC). They have a low status in the local society hierarchy.

Crooke (1896: 298) said the “primary business of the Dhunia is carding of cotton. This is done by subjecting it to the vibration produced by a bow string (*dhanohi*, *Sanskrit dhanus*)”. Many of them have shops where they sell bedding material. They buy cotton from others. Quite a few work as labourers, or as helpers in masonry work. They have no agricultural land in West Bengal but some own residential houses. They depend upon the daily market. Their children begin work as a labourer at about 12 years of age.

Dhunis religious beliefs are the same as those of other Muslims. The aged go to Mecca and madina on pilgrimage, *moulavis* and *mullas* from other Muslim communities or from among themselves, are their religious experts. A *moulavi* teaches religious lesson, while both he and the mullah served them at life cycle rituals.

In general, boys study upto secondary level, and girls end their education with the learning of Arabic script and the Urdu language at the madrassas. A few stray cases of boys studying upto the college level and girl upto the secondary level are reported.

## **HAJJAM**

The Hajjam in West Bengal are a Muslim barbar community. Nai, Nauwa, and Jarrah are their synonyms. The community does not have any title. ‘Hajjam’ means who performs ‘hajamat’, i.e. hair cutting. The name Nai/Nauwa comes from the word Napit and Jarrah performs circumcision in addition to hair dressing. Risley (1891: 306-9) writes, “Hajam, Nai, Nau, Naua, the barber caste of Behar

(are) popularly supposed to have been specially created by Viswakarma for the convenience of Mahadeva. There are seven sub-castes- Awadhia, Kanaujia, or Biahut, Tirhutia, Srivastab or Bastar, Magahiya, Bengali and turk-Nauwa". "According to risley all these sub-castes are Hindus except the Turk Nauwa, which he has considered as Muslims. They are found all over India. The hajjam of West Bengal mostly have come from Chappra, Gazipur, Balia etc. of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Their relatives are found in 24 Parganas (Both North and South), Hugli, Bardhaman and Calcutta. They live in West Bengal mostly in urban areas. They use Bhojpuri dialect and Arabic script within their families and kin groups whereas they speak with others in Bhojpuri as well as in Bengali and use Devangiri and Bengali scripts for written correspondence with others. They are categorized as OBC.

Dhunia women contribute in the family income more than men. Some of them make bidis, some work as nurses or as teachers. The hajjam women generally control the family expenditure but in some cases famil expenditure is also controlled by mens. Inspite of the fact, they enjoy a low status in family.

The hajjam do not depend on any natural resources for their subsistence. Majority of them are landless in West Bengal but some of them have agricultural lands still in Bihar. Shaving is their traditional occupation. But many of them are engaged as industrial workers, carpenter, masons, hawkers of readymade garment, cloth, toys, and slippers or are owners of stationary shops. Any type of business is the primary occupation of the community. They sell their merchandise in daily

markets for cash. Child labour does not exist among them. Gradual shifting from their traditional occupation to various activities due to the increasing pressure on their traditional vocation is the major change in the occupational pattern of the community. The numbers of industrial labour among them has also increased. Many of the urban dwellers have received loans from Government through S.R.E.P (Special rural Employment Programme) scheme for tailoring and various other businesses.

The community members are holding white collar jobs. They have teachers, engineers, doctors among them; their members are engaged in different services; they have members in *gram panchayat*, and some of them are directly involved in political activities.

The Hajjam have become aware of the necessity of educating for their children. Many of their boys and girls read up to secondary level.

## **JOLA**

The Jola are a Mohammedan weaver community. They also known by synonyms like Momin, Julaha, Karikar, Ansari, Jolha, and Jolaha. Sarkar, Mandal and Karikar are their titles. The word 'Jola' means foolish. They are autochthons of the area. Risley (1891:348-50) gave a short account about their origin, manners, customs and social status. They are found in the districts of Howrah, Hugli, Burdwan and Mednipur etc. Total population of Jola in undivided Bengal was 2,70,292 according to census of 1931. The Jola belong to OBC category. They

think themselves to be higher than Muslim communities like Nikari, Dhawa, etc., but the Hindus think them to be of low status.

For major economic pursuits the Jola are dependent on natural resources to a larger extent. Although a few own agricultural land, most of them are landless. Weaving is their traditional occupation. But now most of them are engaged in making *bidis*, keeping poultry flocks and goats, running grocery shops, etc., and are engaged in different services, industry or as agricultural labourers. Some of them are entrepreneurs in *bidi* industry (a household or small scale industry). Some of them have taken loans through IRDP scheme to run *bidi* industries or for weaving.

The community have become aware about education. Now, many of their boys and girls study up to secondary level, and a few have passed the college level also.

## **KALAL**

The kalal are a Muslim community which came from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and settled in West Bengal. Their synonyms are Raki and Iraque and sub-groups Iraque and kalal. The word Kalal is derived from kalali-unrecognized work. The legend on their origin says that while migrating from Iraq to trade they passed through heavy rain, which melted all their sugar. After a few days the wet sugar fermented and they found it intoxicating. This gave them the idea to start a liquor business- Kalali in Hindi. Some who deny the truth of this legend say the



name, Iraque or Raki, comes from Urdu *araq* (juice). Since they are engaged as distillers and liquor-sellers, they are known as Kalal.

Risley (1891: 384-87) refers to kalals as kalwars. But these people do not agree with him. Informants say the kalals are found in most districts headquarters of West Bengal. They speak in Urdu and Hindi and write in Arabic to kin groups. They speak in Bengali and Hindi and write in Bengali and Devanagari with others.

Of the two social divisions, the Iraquies think of themselves as socially higher, but the kalals think they are equal. Those who started business in opium and liquor after migrating are kalals, while those in other businesses are Iraques. Many Kalals however now say, they are Iraques, since they feel 'kalal' is derogatory. They feel they are on the middle rungs in the local social hierarchy, while Hindus think of them as socially inferior.

The Kalals are mainly involved in the business of alcohol and *ganja* (marijuana). Many have set up hotels, or shops in foot wear and clothes. Some are also homeopathic doctors. Those in rural areas depend upon agriculture. They have to depend on the daily market. Boys join business when they grow up, usually after finishing schools.

The kalals were educationally backward in the early twentieth century. But, now about 90 per cent get educated. The boys are usually graduates, and girls study upto secondary level.

## KELA

The Kela are a Muslim community of West Bengal. The word Kela has been derived from 'Kala' which means unclean. They are also referred to as Kharia and Musalman by the neighbouring Hindus. The Kelas claim to be Pathans and trace their origin to the *biyalisa qalender*. 'Kha' is their popular surname. Kelas belong to Sunni sect. Before 1274 (Bengali qalander) they maintained semi-nomadic life but later due to some natural calamities like drought, flood, famine etc. they permanently settled in the different parts of Midnapur district. They probably got converted to Islam from *Sabar* who still maintain semi-nomadic life and follow their traditional occupation i.e. hunting and gathering for their livelihood. The constitutional status of the community is that of OBC.

Though the Kelas land as their economic resource, most of them belong to landless category. Those possess little plots of land, have proprietorship. Their traditional occupation is confined to the catching snakes, toads and birds, a profession considered derogatory by neighbouring communities. But they did not practice their traditional occupation at present time. Now, their primary occupation is repairing of broken locks and keys, suitcase, torches, umbrellas, household utensils, etc. Agriculture, cultivation, day labour are their subsidiary resource of income. Besides, a few women earn a little amount of money by selling bead bangles, swing thread, fishing hooks, combs, mirrors etc., from door to door in the nearby villages. This may be considered a tertiary resource of income.

The younger generation dislikes their traditional occupation and think that any job is better than their traditional profession. This attitude driven them to opt for any profession that has handy to them.

Literacy and education among theKelas is very poor. The poor economic condition does not motivate them to take advantage of educational facilities.

### **KAN OR KHALIFA**

Khalifa are a Muslim community of West Bengal, with the synonym Ostagar. Other Muslim calls them Hajam though none of them work as *hajamats*. Respondents says Ibrahim Khalil-Ullah is their first ancestor, was ordered by the Prophet to perform circumscision. The Kans is *Sunni* Muslims and belong to Hanafi sub-sect. The Khalifas live mostly in Hugli district, and also in Bardhaman, the 24 parganas, Bakura and Nadia district. They speak and write in Bengali.

Khalifas are endogamous community. The Khalifas have no social division, they consider neighbouring Shaikh as higher, and other Muslim communities such as the Dhawas and Churiharas as lower than themselves.

The Khalfa's main economic resource is agricultural land and many own small plots. Cultivation and selling of fish are secondary occupation. They work as agricultural labourers, share-croppers and rickshawpullers. Performing circumscision is their traditional occupation. But now, many Kans have given up their traditional occupation and adopted modern jobs. Some Khalifas hold jobs or own small businesses nowadays. They carry fish to the *aratdhars* at the daily and

bi-weekly markets. Agricultural land owned by Khalifa has decreased. As result the number of Khalifa agricultural labourers has increased. The community also has child labourers. Besides this some Khalifas are work as teachers, or in white collar jobs, helping them establish modern inter-community links.

Kans are socio-economically and educationally very backward. The Khalifa boys and girls study upto secondary level, and few have gone to college.

### **KUNJRA**

The Kunjras of West Bengal are a Muslim community; its synonyms are Subzifrosh and Rai. Many of them believ that they are the people who used to live at Kunj – a place in Arabia – and grow vegetables and fruits to sell according to the Prophet's instruction were known as Kunjras. Risley (1891: 527) referred to the Kunjra as “a greengrocer who sells *tarkari* and *sabji*, an occupation usually, but not exclusively, followed by Mohammedans in Behar”. They came from Arabia and settled first in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh. They came to West Bengal from Gaya or Patna, Bihar, and settled down mostly in the urban areas of Hugli and 24 parganas to avail the market facilities.

The Kunjras have no social division. Siddiqi (1974: 100) refers to Kunjras or Rais as occuppaying an intermediate position within the third block among four block of the Muslims hierarchical order. The Kunjras are lower in social status than the Mansooris, Ansaris or Momins- their neighbouring communities.

In West Bengal Kunjaras are mostly landless communities. They are mainly vegetable and fruit sellers. Now, some are in the business of selling

utensils and fish, or hold jobs. The Kunjaras generally live in towns or cities, so that they are close to daily markets where they can sell their vegetables, fruits and fish. They also enter into contracts with different hotels for supplying vegetables. Kunjra boys help their father in business from the age of thirteen or fourteen years.

The Kunjra shows positive attitude towards education as compare to other Muslim community. Boys and girls, usually, study upto primary level, and most girls drop out after that. Some boys studied upto the high school and only a few upto colleges.

### **MIRSHIKAR**

The name of the community is Mirshikar. The name of the community is also pronounced as Mirshikar. Etymologically Mirshikar means *mir* (head) and *shikari* (hunter). Risley (1891, Vol. II, 92) observe: "Mirshikar, a chief hunts man; a low class of Mohammedans who live by snaring birds". Its synonyms are Misikari and Sheikh. They migrated from Gaya, Dumka and Jamaui areas to Punchakot Raj state before the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny and help the members of the Royal family during their hunting expedition by providing them with gunpowder.

They are distributed in different villages of erstwhile Manbhum district and Santhal Parganas and Bardhaman district. They speak in Manbhuinya Bangala and Bengali and Hindi within the family and with outsiders. They write in Bengali, Urdu and Devangari scripts. They are considered educationally backward community.

The major social division among the Mohammedan are Sayyad, Pathans, Mughals and Sheiks. Mirshikars believe they belong to the Sheikh genre and consider the other three groups higher in status. There is no religious differentiation between them but their economic and social status is identifiable. They use Sheikh as prefix to their name.

Mirshikars are mainly landless. They work as tailors and a small businessman. Some work as masons and in other kind of casual labours. In the agricultural season they work as agricultural labourers. They work as bidi binders and vegetable vendors too, and own chicken and mutton shop.

*Moulavis*, or religious priest, are much respected people and are consulted on various socio-religious matters. But the Mir of the Mirshikars is the traditional social head. The *mir* (headman), with a help of other elderly people and with the *moulavis* sanction, controls the social mechanism or social norms of the community.

They prefer Islamic education and get *dini talim* (education) through the Koran. There is not a single matriculate among them and no body holds a government job, except a peon in the settlement departments. Also, they are self employed.

Mirshikars are now well aware of Muslim fundamentalism. Every Mirshikar now visit a Mosque and listen to the speeches of *moulavis*. In the name of Islam, they are now organizing themselves and they identify themselves as Sheikhs. They are very vigorously asserting themselves and use special kind of

typically Muslim *kurta, topi and pyjamas*. They prefer the Urdu and Arabic language to the local language as a medium of instructions.

## NIKARI

The Nikaris are a Muslim community. The word Nikari is derived from the Persian word *nek* means God. Thus, *nek* and *kari* i.e. Nekari stands for ‘doer of good work’. They prefer to introduce themselves Dalasayad or Dafadar. People of the other communities call them as Nikari or Nikiri. Dafadar, sarkar, etc., are their titles. They have a belief that they have been born of Soleman Paigamber the Badshah of Jins and a daughter of a fisherman. Risley (1891: 133) and Siddiqi (1974: 50) have noted them as fish mongers. They are mostly concentrated in the district of Bardhaman, Hugli, Haora, Murshidabad, 24 parganas and in Calcutta. The Nikari people speak and write in Bengali.

The Nikaris sell fish. They also depend on fruit gardening (especially mango gardens). They take ponds (to cultivate fish), and gardens on lease from others. Most of them are landless. Only a few possess land of their own. Some are service holders or agricultural labourers. They take fish or mangoes to the daily or weekly markets and sell them. It is reported that the number of leasers among them has increased.

The Nikaris have a folk tale about their origin which is: “Soleman Paigamber was the emperor of the *jins* (fairies). One of the Jins was his personal servant. Soleman used to go for nature’s call keeping his ring in the custody of that servant. One day the servant wore Soleman’s ring and got the appearance of



Soleman. Then Soleman went to his hundred wives and asked them not to allow the servant into the Begam Mahal, and went away. On his way he saw a fisherman trying to catch fish in vain. He stopped there and consequently the fisherman could catch a lot of fish. The fisherman asked his identity. He replied that he was a common man. The fisherman took him to his house, and thus he prospered in his fish business. The fisherman was then converted to Islam, and he gave his daughter in marriage to Soleman. The issues of that pair become Nikaris and Dalasayad”.

The Nikari is the educationally backward community. The boys study upto secondary level; whereas girls study upto primary level only at *madrasas*.

## **PATHAN**

The Pathan community has neither a synonym nor a title. The etymology of the name Pathan is traced from the word *fatehan* meaning to win victory. The Pathans think that their ancestors won victory in wars and thus came to be known as Pathan. The Pathans maintain that like any *jat*, they are divided into four *thaks*. However, while naming the *thak*, they mention five names, viz, 1. Niaji Pathan, 2. Sud Pathan, 3. Jilam Pathan or Zalem Pathan, 4. Guria or Garia Pathan and 5. Beteli Pathan. The Pathans, as Muslims traced their history from Arabia. They maintained that the first ever Muslim were from Arabia whence this faith originated and was propagated. They consider Afghanistan as the original native of the Pathans and trace their ancestry from there. They use Khan as their surname.

In West Bengal they are found in the district of Malda, Murshidabad, and in the north western part of Birbhum district. They are found in almost all districts of West Bengal.

The major economic resource is land for the Pathan inhabitants of the pre eminently agricultural district of the state. The community is a combination of both land owning and landless categories. The rich Pathans who form a small section of community, have land on which they can subsist. The poor Pathans constitute another section not very small in size like the former, are either completely landless or very little land holding. These middle class cultivators have taken up a number of non agricultural occupations. Those who possesses land exercise control over it. For generations Pathan are known to be cultivators. They claim that in the distant past they were soldiers. At present the Pathan living in the rural areas of the state are primarily a community of agriculturists. As subsidiary means of livelihood they have gone in for a number of occupations such as *paikari* (trade in cattle), pisciculture and business in fish, and petty businesses, namely, grocery, tailoring, etc. the community is dependents on markets. There are no bonded labourers among them. But child labour is observed among the poor Pathans who sent their young boys to be work as *bagal* (cow herd) or domestic agricultural servants (i.e. *mahendar*) in the homes of the rich. Pathan women are engaged in embroidery.

Literacy is fairly high among the Pathans belonging to the richer section of their community. There are however, very few cases where the Pathans have

succeeded in achieving higher education. The poorer section in general lags behind in literacy and education.

### **PUNJABI**

The Punjabis are a linguistic minority group in West Bengal. The Punjabis took their name from their habitat Punjab. The Punjab is made up of two Persian word *Punj* (five) and *aab* (water, the 5 rivers namely Jhelam, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej). In the Vedic ages it was called “Sapta Sindhu” i.e. land of seven rivers. The word Punjabi generally conveys the impression of the community, having beard and wearing a big turban on the head, commonly known as Sikh. It is easy to define Sikh as a religious community. The Sikhs though form the bulk of the Punjabi population. However, also there are Hindu and Muslim Punjabis.

The Punjabis in West Bengal are mainly landless. They are engaged in business and Government service. They also work in industries, textile (weaving and dyeing) mills, and wood, priests, skilled and unskilled labourers. They are also self employed in general as well as are in transport, business etc.

The Punjabi Muslims profess Islam and observe Muharram, Idul Fitr, Idul Zuha and so on like their coreligionists.

They prefer higher education for boys, but general education for all. Boys study up to postgraduate level and girls up to graduate level. They have comfortably adjusted themselves to the modern lifestyle.

## RANGREZ

The Rangrez are little known community of West Bengal. The group identified mainly in the city of Calcutta, belongs to the Muslim *Sunni* sect and came from Rajasthan about 50 to 60 year ago and for this they are also called Marwari Rangrez. They have synonym like Rangrez, Rangarej, Rangraj, Ramgri, Ran gredh, Bhawas, Ramjari etc. They are also called lilgar. The name of the community has been derived from *rang* or colour, and rez or rekhtam or pouring. The community has several surnames like Lodhi, Chaohan, Solarki, Gori etc. the community states that they are called Rangrez due to their engagement in the occupation of using *rang* or colour. They are distributed in many places of Calcutta like Barabazar, Baubazar, Jorasanko, Park street, Collin Street, Sagar Dutta lane etc. as well as in Rajasthan and Bihar. Though the exact figure of their population is not available but according to a rough estimate about eight thousand of them are living in Calcutta. The language or dialect they use at home and with the Kin group is Rajasthani. The script used by them is Urdu. They also use Hindi, Bengali and English language when they speak to others.

As the community is named *rang* (colour) *raj*, the community maintains its livelihood on occupation which have something to do with colour. They have shops of varieties of chemical colours and other chemical ingredients necessary for colouring. They bring colours and chemicals from Delhi and Madras. They dyes variety of clothes. They also dye threads and printing *sari*.

Generally, the Rangrez do not go to law courts. When there is a dispute in the community, they call five or six elderly and knowledgeable persons to form a court of their own and the case is placed before them for arbitration.

Literacy rate among them is not as low as compare to other Muslim community like Abdals, Kela etc., the standard of education is not at all high. One or two holders of C.A or L.L.B. degrees may be found among them. But women are rarely study beyond the primary standard.

### **SAYYAD**

Sayyad is the term used strictly *for* those communities, individuals or group of individuals who claim their descent *from* the last Prophet Muhammad, and his family members (*ahle-bait*), viz., his daughter Fatima and his cousin and son-in-law Ali. In West Bengal they are mainly found in the districts of 24 Parganas, Hugli, Bardhaman, Birbhum and Murshidabad. The Sayyad are divided into two religious sects of Shia and Sunni. The Sayyad of Shia sect in Murshidabad use Meerza (not Mirza) as their surname. The Sayyads of Sunni sects use infact no surname, rather they use Sayyad as a title and prefix it to their names. They speak Benagli both at home and at outside. But some section of the community feels proud and honour to speak and write in Urdu.

The Sayyads' major economic resource is land. They exercise control over the land that they possesses. The community is mainly land owning. Ownership of land among the Sayyads is on the basis of individual proprietorship. The Sayyads claim no hereditary or traditional occupation. In rural West Bengal they live

mainly on agriculture. Educated sections among them have gone in for various white collar jobs and profession like teaching or jobs in bank. As subsidiary occupation they have taken up business and trade. Non among them work as labourer. The community is wholly dependent on market. There are no bonded labourers in the community. There is no child labourer either. However, children from other neighbouring communities are employed by the rich Sayyad. However, the *kisan* or agricultural labour on annual cotract is paid in kind (a share of produce) along. Since independence a number of educated Sayyads (including women) have gone in for jobs in tertiary sectors.

Sayyads maintain no commensal relation with certain Muslim communities of lower social order such as Patuas, the Momin and the Abdal. As regards connubial norms, the Sayyads repudiate ideally any restriction of inter community marital excahange among various Muslim communities. But, in practice they marry their daughters within their own community. Hoewevr, Sayyad male are found to marry non-sayyad women of so called upper Muslim *jat* (community).

The literacy among the Sayyads is high compared to that among any other Muslim community of the state. A small section of them have gone in for college and higher education.

### **SAVARA/SABAR**

The sabar are a community of snake charmers in West Bengal. In Sanskrit, the 'Savara'/'Sabar'/Savar' simply means a 'corpse'. Roy mentions that "from Herodotus, however, we learn the Scythetian word for 'axe' was 'sagaris'

and as 'g' and 'v' are interchangeable letters. Savara is the same word as 'Sagar'. It seems therefore unreasonable to infer that the tribes who were so called took their name from their habit to carrying axes. Now it is one of the striking peculiarities of the Savaras that they are rarely seen without an axe in their hand. But at present the Savara are found to carry a spade (*khanta*). Perhaps the spade has replace the tradition axe" (Roy 1986:20). Savara are divided into four groups placed in hierarchy, these are 'Basu', 'Angada', 'Kalketu' and 'Jara' Savara. Some of the informants say that they are divided into five groups viz. Basu Sabar, Muslim Sabar, Lodha Sabar, Mahato Sabar and Akoti Sabar.

The Muslim savaras are distributed mainly in the Police station of Bhagwanpur, Nandigram and Khejuria in Medinipur district. They are mainly dependent on agriculture, day labour, etc. Besides, they also catch non-poisonous snake like water vapour (*Natrix piscator*), *dhamna* (*Ptyas mucosus*) and go-sap (*Varanus flaviscene*). Skins of these snakes are stripped and are sold to the agent who come to them of and on and buy these snake skins in cash. Not only they catch snake but they also catch birds by harpoon, locally called *nala*. Varieties of birds like heron, dove, skylark, etc. are caught and used as food. Sometimes they sell these to neighbouring poor communities. Women also contribute to the family income. Women make mats from date-leaves and sell some stationary goods like soaps, bangle, red thread, comb, vermilion, lac dye, etc. to the womenfolk of neighbouring villages and earn a little money.



The socio-religious life of this community is, however, similar to that of the Muslims community. They profess Muslim religious faith and go to the mosque and other shrines for prayer like other Muslim communities.

Literacy among Savaras is poor. Poverty is one of the reason for not having progressive outlook towards education, health etc.

### **SHAH FAQIR**

Though there is no available etymological account of name Shah, expect that the Shahs are themselves mentioned two kinds of Shahs viz. Badshahs (emperors) and Faqir Shahs or Fakir Shahs (Darvesh) meaning Muslim religious men vowed to poverty and austerity. But Siddiqui in his book gave a detail account of this community in West Bengal which is discussed in preceeding pages (Siddiqui 2004: 399-403). The Faqir trace their origin from Barepir, Hazrat Abdul Qadir Jilani (R) of Bhagdad. They are also known as '*darvesh*'. Risley stated that 'Faqir', an Arabic word, properly denoting a Mohammedan religious mendicant, but vaguly used to denote beggar of all kinds (1891: 262). The principle orders of the Faqir are the Qadria, Chistia, Madaria, Mojadidia and Naqsh Bandia.

They claim that they are direct descendents or the servants of the pir. They were assigned to serve the pir and asked to dedicate their lives to worship of Allah and were called Faqir. There is another anecdote about their origin. It is said that some 8-9 hundred years ago a few religious mendicants came to Bengal to spread Islam. They preached peace and universal brotherhood. A few low caste Hindu

mendicants were impressed by the teachings of the Muslim Faqir. This group accepted Islam and offered to serve as the servants of pir.

Another belief is that during 16<sup>th</sup> century, the first Faqir Moulana Sher Ali Shajia came here from what is now Bangladesh. Here in Atlia he established his *astana* and Mesher Faqir was first disciple. Gradually around the *astana* a community of Faqirs grew up. They believe and practice a distorted form of Islam, which they understood through teachings.

The major economic resources are land as well as water. Quite a few among the Shahs own land and thus are privileged to exercise control over land. Some of them also own ponds, but often jointly with others. The shahs are a combination of both land owning and landless categories. Traditional occupation of the community is begging, or in refined terms religious mendicancy. At present the primary occupation for this community is cultivation either as owners or as labourers, and as subsidiary they have a number of occupation, viz., *paikari* (dealers in cattle), pisciculture and trade in fish, business like grocery, singing and playing musical instruments as bandsmen of the locally organized body of musicians within the community, or jobs of repairing umbrellas or of locksmith etc.

Literacy and education among the shahs is poor. Poverty seems to be one of the main reasons for the poor literacy and education. Those who have become well-off, endeavour to get their children educated. Children are taught elementary

Arabic in *maktab*. But these leave no impact on them, as they hardly keep themselves in touch with the language when they grow up.

## **SHEIKH**

The Sheikh is used as both title and surname. The word 'sheikh', is derived from an Arabic word meaning an 'elder' or 'chief' or 'venerable'. Etymologically, they claim descent from the Arabs but when pressurized to give exact details; they admit their origins as converts from Hindu low caste.

According to the Sheikh respondents their distribution is not only pan-Indian but pan-world, i.e. they are distributed all over the world. In West Bengal Sheikh are distributed in Hugli, Birbhum and Murshidabad districts in large numbers.

The major sector of economic activity of the Shaikh is agriculture, but not all own land. Those owning land consider themselves as peasants and involve in primary sector. Some land owning people have also taken fishing as secondary source of income. Some others are engaged in small business like grocers shops, tea stall, etc. Now educated persons are engaged in different white-collar jobs. The community has businessmen, scholars, teachers, advocates, doctors and engineers and political leaders as well.

Attitudes on the whole towards literacy and education are positive. Muslims girls usually do not go beyond the primary school level but well to do

families try to send them on for further education. The Muslim boys are encouraged to continue their education.

### **Conclusion**

From the above detail account about the Muslim communities in West Bengal, we can say that they are distributed in all the districts off the state. Few communities of them came from out side India for trade and preaching Islam and settled permanently in West Bengal. But most of them are converts from lower caste local people or migrated from various parts of the country from time to time. Members of most of the communities are not well aware about their origin except few older or knowlegable person within the community. Muslims are socially, economically and educationally more backward in the state as compare to their co-religionists in other parts of the country. Muslims are landless community except few. In rural areas they are largely agricultural labourer, day labourer, bidi binders and servants in other's house. While in urban areas mostly they are rickshaw puller, street vendor, fruit seller, unskilled and skilled worker in industries, shop keeper, masons, etc. Their literacy level and education is very low. Generally, they send their children to *maktabs* for religious education only. Some children continue their study upto primary level in the local schools and then they drop-out. Though the parents are aware about the fact that the education is necessary for boys and girls in present society for their development but their low social status is the major impediment in pursuing higher education. They follow the religious

obligation like their co-religionists in other parts of the country. There is social stratification exists within the community but it is not sharp. They are also aware about their abject poverty and in a hope that only some government affirmative action can help to elevate their socio-economic condition.



# CHAPTER 3





## **Literacy and Education among Muslims of West Bengal**

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Since education is like oxygen for multidimensional development for both individual and society. Article 26, of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 unambiguously states that “Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory... Education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”. Similarly, National Human Development Report 2001 spells out importance of education. It states that “Education, in the present day context, is perhaps the single most important means for individuals to improve personal endowments, build capability levels, overcome constraints and, in the process, enlarge their available set of opportunities and choices for a sustained improvement in well-being. It is not only a means to enhance human capital, productivity and, hence, the compensation to labour, but it is equally important for enabling the process of acquisition, assimilation and communication of information and knowledge, all of which augments a person’s quality of life. Education is important not merely as means to other ends, but it is an attribute that is valued in itself, by most individuals. More importantly, it is a critical invasive instrument for bringing about social, economic and political inclusion and a durable integration of people, particularly those ‘excluded’, from the mainstream of any society” (NHDR 2001: 48).

Constitution of India gives priority to education and enjoins on the governments to take necessary steps for Universalisation of education in the country. The constitution of India makes provision for free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of fourteen years. The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act 2002 made education in India a Fundamental Right for children in the age group of 6-14 years by providing that “*the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine*”. The 86th Amendment also modified Article 45 which now reads as “The state shall endeavor to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of 6 years”. Instead of all these provision, large numbers of children are still out of school (Government of India 2006: 49).

The educational level among the people of all sections is not equal. There is a remarkable gap in education among various groups in Indian society. Muslims of India is most educationally backward community and it has been analyzed by various commission formed by the government of India from time to time. In 1980s a high powered panel headed by Dr. Gopal Singh was appointed by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India to look into the conditions of the minorities, schedule castes and schedule tribes. The panel reported that two of the religious groups of the country i.e. Muslims and Neo-Buddhists are found most educationally backward at national level (GOI 1983). Educational condition of Muslims has not improved in comparison to other minority groups despite the fact



that the flagship government policy namely *Area Intensive and Madarasa Modernization Programme* (1992) was launched for their uplift in the wake of the findings of Dr. Gopal Singh Committee. After 25 years Muslims are again found to be the most educationally backward community of the country by the Prime Minister's High Level Committee under the chairmanship of Justice Rajinder Sachar. Few findings of the Committee are worth important to be quoted here:

“Muslims are at a double disadvantage with low levels of education combined with low quality education; their deprivation increases manifold as the level of education rises. In some instances the relative share for Muslims is lower than even the SCs who are victims of a long standing caste system. Such relative deprivation calls for a significant policy shift, in the recognition of the problem and in devising corrective measures, as well as in the allocation of resources” (GOI 2006).

Out of the several indicators used to see the level of educational development of any area or any group of population, the literacy rate (the Census measures literacy rates in terms of the percentage of persons aged 7 years and above, who can read and write) is the most basic indicator. Since religion wise data on any other educational indicator are not available, so it is the literacy rate that has been widely used to see the level of educational development of Muslims in India.

At the national level also the literacy rate across community, gender and rural-urban is not uniform. The percentage of literates belonging to all religious

communities is 64.85% as per census 2001 at national level. The literacy level is higher for males i.e. 75.3% as compare to females i.e. 53.7%. In urban areas also literacy level is higher than rural areas i.e. 79.9% against 58.7%. After more than 60 years of independence of India still we can't minimize the gap across gender and rural and urban areas. These gaps are still constantt at national level as well as in state level. In this regard

Zaidi analyzed literacy figures of Census 2001 and reached to conclusion that in most of the states and districts Muslims are educationally most backward and it varies from one state to another and from one district to another excepting few states. Muslims are educationally most backward in Haryana, Punjab and Assam. However Muslims' literacy is a serious concern in Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Jammu and Kashmir and Bihar (Zaidi 2007: 19).

### **Literacy in West Bengal**

Literacy rate in West Bengal is not so bad and it is higher than the national average. Moreover, according to 2001 census West Bengal ranked 12<sup>th</sup> position in literacy rate among various states in India. The literacy rate in West Bengal is 68.64% against the national average 64.85%. Male literacy rate is 77.02% against national average 76% and female literacy rate is 51.61% against national average 54%. Gender gap is still significant but this gap is less than national level. Rural literacy rate in West Bengal is 63.42% and rural male literacy rate is 73.13% and female literacy rate is 53.16% respectively. In rural areas there is sizeable gender gap of 20 point. While in Urban part of the West Bengal literacy rate is 81.25%

and urban Male literacy rate is 86.13% which is 11 per cent point higher than urban female literacy rate i.e. 75.74%. In urban areas the gender gap has restricted only to 11 percentage points. This implies that in rural areas female are more deprived of education as compare to urban areas.

There is also inter-religious inequality in literacy level. Hence, it would be apt to examine where the different minority group stand in terms of literacy. (Waheed 2007: 45; Jawaid 2007:36). The following table 3 presented literacy rate of various religious communities in West Bengal.

**TABLE: 3.1**

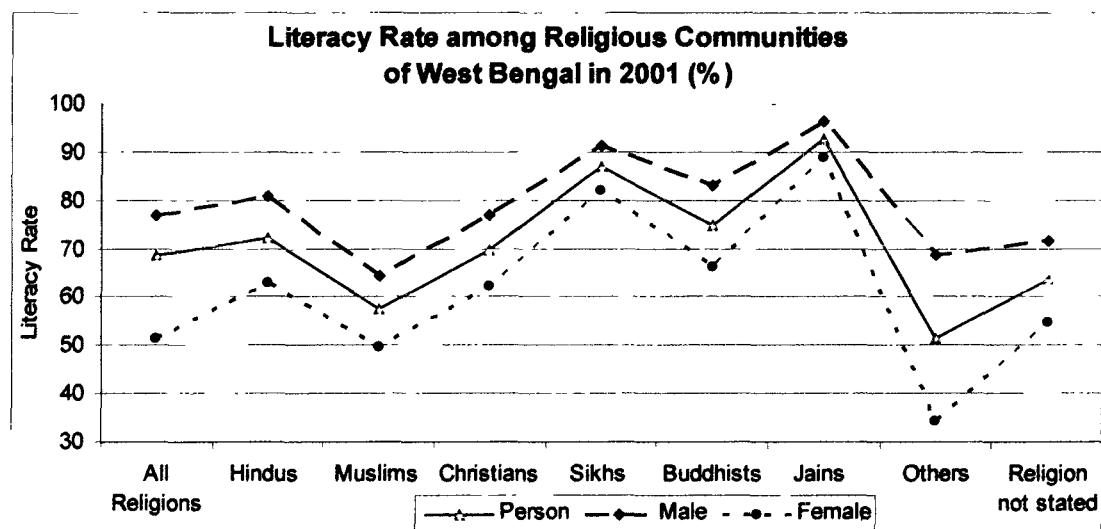
**Literacy Rate among the various Religious communities in West Bengal**

| Religious Communities | Persons | Male  | Female |
|-----------------------|---------|-------|--------|
| All Religions         | 68.64   | 77.02 | 51.61  |
| Hindus                | 72.44   | 81.12 | 63.09  |
| Muslims               | 57.47   | 64.61 | 49.75  |
| Christians            | 69.72   | 77.20 | 62.30  |
| Sikhs                 | 87.19   | 91.37 | 81.98  |
| Buddhists             | 74.73   | 83.09 | 66.22  |
| Jains                 | 92.81   | 96.46 | 88.87  |
| Others                | 51.53   | 68.63 | 34.24  |
| Religion not stated   | 63.75   | 71.52 | 54.82  |

**Source:** Census of India 2001

The data presented in table 3.1 shows that the literacy rate of Muslims is the lowest (i.e. 57.47%) among the six religious groups in West Bengal while that of the Jains the highest i.e. 92.81%. Sikhs occupy the second position with literacy rate of 87.19% and third position by Buddhists with literacy rate of 74.73%. Christians occupy the fifth position with literacy rate of 69.72%, more than state average. From the above discussion it is very clear that Muslims are the most educationally backward community in the state. Another dimension of the literacy

rate of Muslims must be mentioned here. The gap in literacy level between males and females is lowest among Muslims than among the Hindus where the gap is sizeable.



**Fig: 3 a**

Literacy rate among Muslims differs from one district to another. The following table 3.2 presented the district wise literacy rate of Muslims in West Bengal in descending order.

The table shows that Muslims have lower literacy rate than the state average in most of the districts. In Hugli there is highest level of literacy rate i.e. 73.50% and lowest literacy rate is found in the district of Uttar Dinajpur i.e. 36.04%. While Bardhaman occupies the second highest position in terms of literacy rate. In both the districts Hugli and Bardhaman the Muslims literacy rate is higher than the state average. In remaining districts the literacy rate of Muslims is less than the state average 68.64%.

**TABLE: 3.2**  
**District Wise Literacy Rate of Muslims in W.B**

| S.No | Districts         | Literacy Rate (%) |
|------|-------------------|-------------------|
|      | <i>W.B</i>        | <i>57.47</i>      |
| 1    | Hugli             | 73.50             |
| 2    | Bardhaman         | 68.79             |
| 3    | Kolkata           | 68.06             |
| 4    | Haora             | 67.80             |
| 5    | Dakshin Dinajpur  | 67.21             |
| 6    | Noth 24 parganas  | 65.05             |
| 7    | Medinipur         | 64.97             |
| 8    | Bankura           | 59.91             |
| 9    | Birbhum           | 59.86             |
| 10   | South 24 parganas | 59.83             |
| 11   | Koch Bihar        | 56.07             |
| 12   | Jalpaiguri        | 55.34             |
| 13   | Purulia           | 53.44             |
| 14   | Darjeeling        | 50.38             |
| 15   | Nadia             | 49.41             |
| 16   | Murshidabad       | 48.63             |
| 17   | Maldah            | 45.30             |
| 18   | Uttar Dinajpur    | 36.04             |

Source: Census of India 2001

The districts like Kolkata, Haora, Dakshin Dinajpur, North 24 Parganas and Mednipur have literacy rate less than state average but more than 60%. In above mentioned districts the literacy rate of Muslims is though more than 60% but the important dimension is that in Hugli which have the highest literacy rate of Muslims constitute only 15.08% of Muslim population and Haora with 24.34% of Muslim population show literacy rate little less than state average. While in rest of the districts the literacy rate is not so good and these districts are Bankura, Birbhum, Koch Bihar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, South 24 Parganas and Purulia with literacy rate in between 50-60%. The literacy rate in three districts namely Nadia, Murshidabad and Malda is low and it lies between 40 to 50%. Out of these three districts two districts that is Murshidabad and Malda constituted more than 50%

Muslim population but lowest literacy rate. It is because of this unique combination (of high Muslims population and low Muslims literacy rate), we can conclude that as the concentration of Muslim population increases in the districts, the literacy rate decreases. This is one of the negative capabilities for the socio-economic development of any community as emphasized in Human Development Report, 2004 (Human Development Report 2004: 127; Barthwal, 2006: 170)

Literacy rate of Muslims in comparison to Hindus is presented in the following table 3.3.

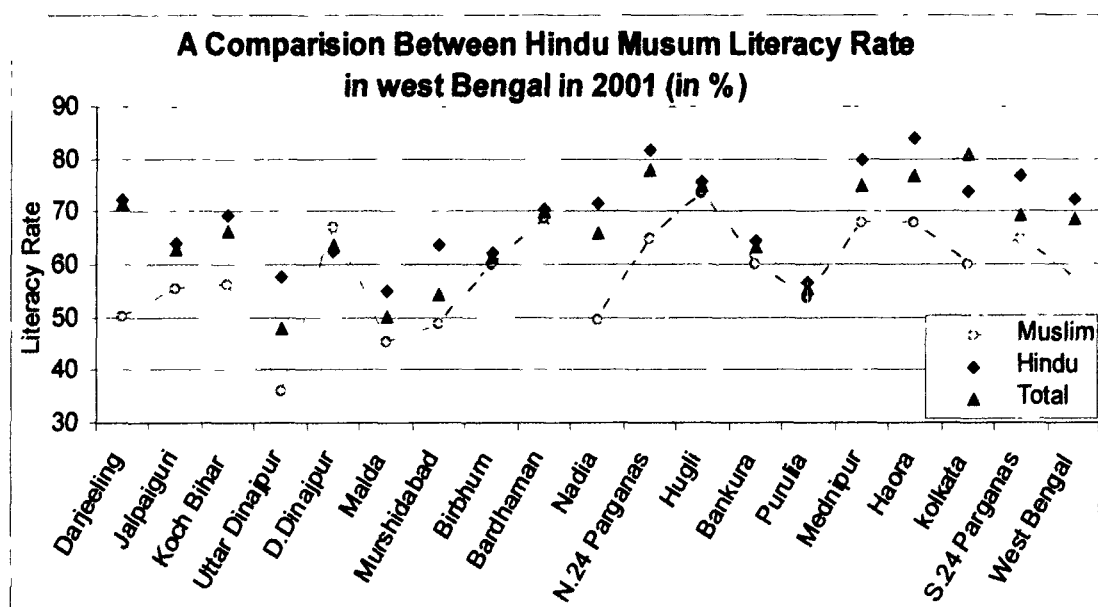
**TABLE 3.3**  
**Literacy Rate of Muslims in Comparison to Hindu**

| S.No | Districts         | Muslims      | Hindus       | Difference    |
|------|-------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
|      | <i>W.B</i>        | <i>57.47</i> | <i>72.44</i> | <i>-14.97</i> |
| 1    | Darjeeling        | 50.38        | 72.55        | - 22.17       |
| 2    | Jalpaiguri        | 55.34        | 64.17        | -8.83         |
| 3    | Koch Bihar        | 56.07        | 69.34        | -13.27        |
| 4    | Uttar dinajpur    | 36.04        | 57.74        | -21.70        |
| 5    | Dakshin Dinajpur  | 67.21        | 62.66        | +4.55         |
| 6    | Maldah            | 45.30        | 55.23        | -9.93         |
| 7    | Murshidabad       | 48.63        | 63.78        | -15.15        |
| 8    | Birbhum           | 59.86        | 62.34        | -2.48         |
| 9    | Bardhaman         | 68.79        | 70.60        | -1.81         |
| 10   | Nadia             | 49.41        | 71.49        | -22.08        |
| 11   | Noth 24 parganas  | 65.05        | 81.90        | -16.85        |
| 12   | Hugli             | 73.50        | 75.63        | -2.13         |
| 13   | Bankura           | 59.91        | 64.54        | -4.63         |
| 14   | Purulia           | 53.44        | 56.59        | -3.15         |
| 15   | Haora             | 67.80        | 79.70        | -11.90        |
| 16   | Kolkata           | 68.06        | 83.85        | -15.79        |
| 17   | South 24 parganas | 59.83        | 73.81        | -13.98        |
| 18   | Medinipur         | 64.97        | 76.69        | -11.92        |
|      |                   |              |              |               |

**Source:** Census of India 2001

Like district wise variation of literacy rate, there are disparities across religious communities also. In India as well as in most of the state, Hindus and

Muslims are two major religious communities. Both the communities in W.B constitute approximately 97.66% to the total population. So it is necessary to find out the difference between the literacy rates of both the communities to compare how far Muslims are lagging behind the Hindu community within the state.



**Fig: 3b**

The above table reveals that the literacy levels of Muslims are not as good as Hindus. It is clear from the table that out of 18 districts there are only one district, Dakshin Dinajpur where the Muslims literacy is more than Hindus by 4 points. In remaining 17 districts Muslims literacy level are less than Hindus. The difference between Hindus and Muslims in level of literacy is highest in the district of Darjeeling (22.17%) and lowest in Bardhaman with difference of (1.81%). The districts have been divided into groups on the basis of 10 percentage point difference in which Muslims literacy levels are less than Hindus. There are 7 districts namely Birbhum, Bardhaman, Hugli, Bankura, Purulia, Jalpaiguri and

Malda where the literacy rate of Muslims is less than Hindus and the difference persists between them is of 0 to 10 percentage points. While there are another 7 districts where Muslims are lagging behind the Hindus with a difference of 10 to 20 percentage point and these districts are Koch Bihar, Haora, South 24 Parganas, Medinipur, Murshidabad, North 24 Parganas and Kolkata. In last 3 districts namely Uttar Dinajpur, Nadia and Darjeeling in which Muslims are less literate than their Hindu counterpart and the existing difference between them is of more than 20 to 30 percentage points.

### **Female Literacy**

Abject illiteracy for various reasons among Muslim women lies at the root of the endemic backwardness of the community. In the state, the literacy level of women is about 51.61% which is 26 percentage points less than male literacy. This indicates that there is a large gap between male and female in terms of literacy. The literacy rate of male and female of various religious communities varies from one religion to another and from one district to another. In the following table 3.4 sex wise literacy of Muslim and Hindu is presented.

The following table shows that at state level, literacy rate of Muslim women is 49.75% and the male literacy is 64.61% which results in 14.86 percentage point difference between both the sexes. Among Hindu female literacy rate is about 63.09% against the male literacy rate of 81.12% and it creates a gap of 18.09 percentage points. From this it is clear that the gap is less among Muslim community as compare to Hindus in terms of literacy rate.



Table: 3.4

## District Wise Difference in Literacy Rate by Sex and Religion

| Districts/State   | Religion       | Male         | Female       | Difference    |
|-------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| <b>WB</b>         | <b>Muslims</b> | <b>64.61</b> | <b>49.75</b> | <b>-14.86</b> |
|                   | <b>Hindus</b>  | <b>81.12</b> | <b>63.09</b> | <b>18.09</b>  |
| Darjeeling        | Muslims        | 60.86        | 37.92        | +22.92        |
|                   | Hindus         | 80.78        | 63.67        | 17.11         |
| Jalpaiguri        | Muslims        | 64.98        | 45.01        | -19.97        |
|                   | Hindus         | 74.14        | 53.50        | 20.64         |
| Koch Bihar        | Muslims        | 64.59        | 47.11        | -17.87        |
|                   | Hindus         | 79.30        | 58.79        | 20.51         |
| Uttar Dinajpur    | Muslims        | 45.98        | 25.50        | -20.48        |
|                   | Hindus         | 68.76        | 45.77        | 22.99         |
| Dakshin Dinajpur  | Muslims        | 72.81        | 61.33        | -11.48        |
|                   | Hindus         | 72.42        | 52.34        | 20.08         |
| Malda             | Muslims        | 51.56        | 38.68        | -12.88        |
|                   | Hindus         | 65.80        | 44.00        | 21.80         |
| Murshidabad       | Muslims        | 54.21        | 42.76        | -11.45        |
|                   | Hindus         | 71.36        | 55.72        | 15.64         |
| Birbhum           | Muslims        | 68.28        | 50.97        | -17.31        |
|                   | Hindus         | 72.24        | 51.88        | 20.36         |
| Bardhaman         | Muslims        | 75.54        | 61.39        | -14.15        |
|                   | Hindus         | 79.43        | 60.97        | 18.46         |
| Nadia             | Muslims        | 54.42        | 44.03        | -10.39        |
|                   | Hindus         | 78.13        | 64.46        | 13.67         |
| North 24 Parganas | Muslims        | 71.41        | 58.13        | +13.28        |
|                   | Hindus         | 87.62        | 75.71        | 11.91         |
| Hugli             | Muslims        | 79.43        | 67.31        | -12.12        |
|                   | Hindus         | 83.29        | 67.51        | 15.78         |
| Bankura           | Muslims        | 71.81        | 46.96        | -24.85        |
|                   | Hindus         | 77.53        | 50.88        | 26.65         |
| Puruliya          | Muslims        | 71.32        | 34.14        | =37.18        |
|                   | Hindus         | 74.69        | 37.56        | 37.13         |
| Mednipur          | Muslims        | 75.05        | 54.36        | =20.69        |
|                   | Hindus         | 86.51        | 66.41        | 20.10         |
| Haora             | Muslims        | 74.13        | 60.78        | =13.35        |
|                   | Hindus         | 85.90        | 72.82        | 13.08         |
| Kolkata           | Muslims        | 71.25        | 63.61        | +7.64         |
|                   | Hindus         | 86.97        | 80.15        | 6.82          |
| South 24 Parganas | Muslims        | 68.84        | 50.27        | -18.57        |
|                   | Hindus         | 83.90        | 62.94        | 20.96         |

Source: Census of India, 2001

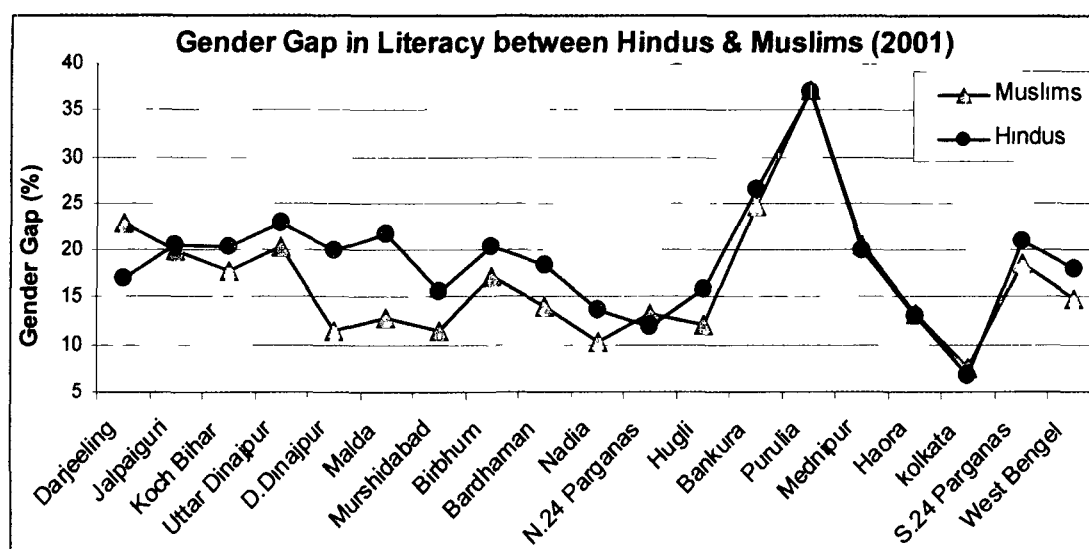


Fig: 3 c

This gender gap of both the community varies from one district to another district. Out of 18 districts there are 12 districts in which Muslim gender gap is less than Hindus in the state. These districts are Jalpaiguri, Koch Bihar, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Malda, Murshidabad, Birbhum, Bardhaman, Nadia, Hugli, Bankura, and South 24 Parganas. While there are three districts in which the gap between Muslim male and female literacy is more than the Hindus and these districts are Darjeeling, North 24 Parganas and Kolkata. While there are three districts having equal literacy rate among both sexes and between both Muslims and Hindus and these districts are Purulia, Mednipur and Haora. This indicate that the perception among the general public that Muslim women were deprived of education by the male member of the family and by religious obligations. But what we analyze above does not support the above perception. This also supports the above finding that the gap in literacy level between males

and females is lowest among Muslims than among the Hindus where the gap is significant.

## RURAL-URBAN LITERACY

As Bengali Muslims are largely rural, they are also illiterate community as compare to the other religious community and that of Hindu majority in the state.

In rural areas literacy rate of Muslims are 55.59% and that of Hindus 66.79% that is 11.20% less than the majority community. This gap between Muslims and Hindus in terms of literacy signifies that rural Muslims are educationally backward. Like other socio-economic variable discussed in earlier chapter, literacy is also varies from one district to another and from one community to another. The rural literacy rate of Muslims and Hindus is presented in the following table 3.5.

**Table: 3.5**  
**Literacy Rate of Muslims and Hindus in Rural West Bengal**

| S.No | Districts         | Muslims      | Hindus       | Difference    |
|------|-------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
|      | <i>W.B</i>        | <i>55.59</i> | <i>66.79</i> | <i>-11.20</i> |
| 1    | Darjeeling        | 44.46        | 66.34        | -21.88        |
| 2    | Jalpaiguri        | 55.83        | 59.64        | -3.81         |
| 3    | Koch Bihar        | 55.70        | 67.08        | -11.38        |
| 4    | Uttar dinajpur    | 35.72        | 50.33        | -14.61        |
| 5    | Dakshin Dinajpur  | 67.13        | 58.03        | +9.10         |
| 6    | Maldah            | 44.78        | 51.22        | -6.44         |
| 7    | Murshidabad       | 48.35        | 59.82        | -11.47        |
| 8    | Birbhum           | 59.49        | 60.13        | -0.64         |
| 9    | Bardhaman         | 67.82        | 65.45        | +2.37         |
| 10   | Nadia             | 48.92        | 67.29        | -18.37        |
| 11   | Noth 24 parganas  | 64.73        | 72.02        | -7.29         |
| 12   | Hugli             | 75.35        | 70.48        | +4.87         |
| 13   | Bankura           | 59.69        | 63.00        | -3.31         |
| 14   | Purulia           | 50.46        | 54.22        | -3.76         |
| 15   | Medinipur         | 64.47        | 75.73        | -11.26        |
| 16   | Haora             | 67.11        | 74.66        | -7.55         |
| 17   | Kolkata           | -            | -            | -             |
| 18   | South 24 parganas | 58.93        | 71.40        | -12.47        |

Source: Census of India 2001

It is evident from the above table that there are only three districts where Muslim literacy rate is more than Hindus in rural areas of West Bengal. These districts are Dakshin Dinajpur, Hugli and Bardhaman. While out of the 15 districts in 14 districts the literacy rate is less than Hindus and in one district i.e. Kolkata does not have rural population. The highest difference in terms of literacy rate is found in the district of Darjeeling with 21.88 percentage points and lowest in Birbhum with 0.64 percentage points.

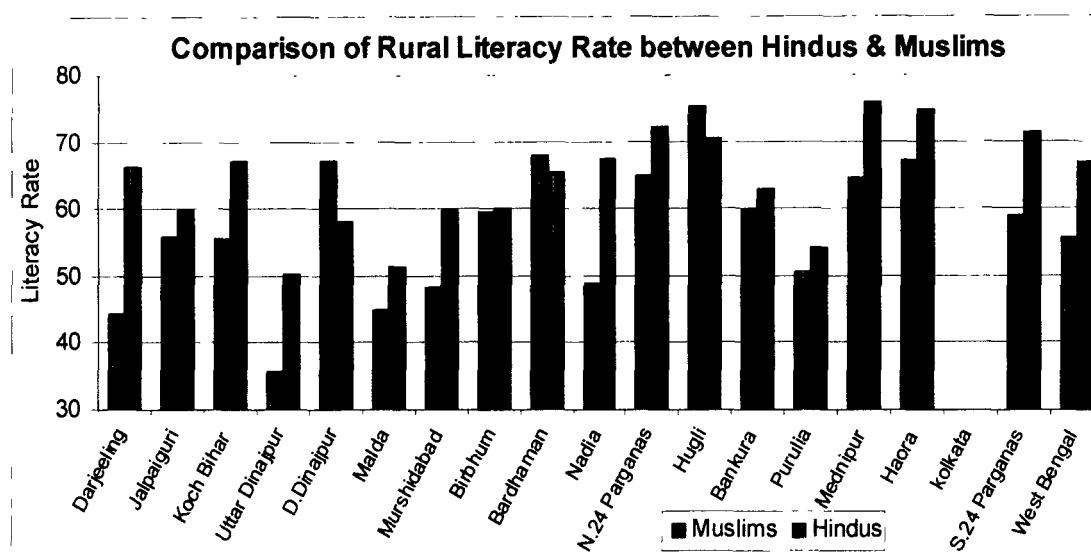


Fig: 3 d

Though, the literacy rate of urban Muslims is somewhat better than their co-religionist in rural areas but poor than the Hindus. In urban areas the literacy rate of Muslims is 66.25% and of Hindus 83.71%. This shows that Muslims in urban areas of W.B are 17.46 percentage points backward than Hindus. Thus the gap of literacy rate is sharp between both the communities in urban areas as compare to rural areas. The literacy rate of Muslims in W.B is worse in urban

areas than the rural areas. It also varies from one district to another. The following table 3.6 presented the urban literacy rate of Muslims and Hindus.

**Table: 3.6**  
**Literacy Rate of Muslims and Hindus in Urban West Bengal**

| S.No | Districts         | Muslims      | Hindus       | Difference    |
|------|-------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
|      | <b>W.B</b>        | <b>66.25</b> | <b>83.71</b> | <b>-17.46</b> |
| 1    | Darjeeling        | 62.98        | 83.74        | -20.76        |
| 2    | Jalpaiguri        | 50.23        | 81.64        | -31.41        |
| 3    | Koch Bihar        | 66.20        | 86.83        | -20.63        |
| 4    | Uttar dinajpur    | 49.99        | 82.97        | -32.98        |
| 5    | Dakshin Dinajpur  | 85.14        | 83.26        | +1.88         |
| 6    | Maldah            | 73.68        | 79.92        | -6.24         |
| 7    | Murshidabad       | 51.75        | 79.14        | -27.39        |
| 8    | Birbhum           | 67.61        | 79.60        | -11.99        |
| 9    | Bardhaman         | 71.59        | 78.20        | -6.61         |
| 10   | Nadia             | 61.18        | 82.35        | -21.17        |
| 11   | Noth 24 parganas  | 66.18        | 87.03        | -20.85        |
| 12   | Hugli             | 67.66        | 84.66        | -17           |
| 13   | Bankura           | 64.49        | 80.86        | -16.37        |
| 14   | Purulia           | 69.49        | 75.80        | -6.31         |
| 15   | Medinipur         | 68.72        | 84.81        | -16.09        |
| 16   | Haora             | 68.55        | 84.41        | -15.86        |
| 17   | Kolkata           | 68.06        | 83.85        | -15.79        |
| 18   | South 24 parganas | 65.43        | 84.97        | -19.54        |

Source: Census of India 2001

The above table reveals that there is only one district Dakshin Dinajpur where the literacy rate of Muslims is higher than Hindus. In 17 districts the literacy rates is less than Hindus. The highest difference is found in the districts of Uttar Dinajpur with 32.98 percentage point and Jalpaiguri shows the second highest difference with 31.41 percentage points. There are five districts where literacy rate of Muslims is less than Hindus and it lies in ranges between 20 to 30 percentage points and these districts are Darjeeling, Koch Bihar, Murshidabad,

Nadia, North 24 Parganas. While in seven districts the difference lies in ranges between 10 to 20 percentage points and these districts are Birbhum, Hugli, Bankura, Mednipur, Haora, Kolkata and South 24 Parganas. In remaining three districts namely Purulia, Malda and Jalpaiguri where the difference of literacy rate of Muslim with Hindus in between 5 to 10 percentage points.

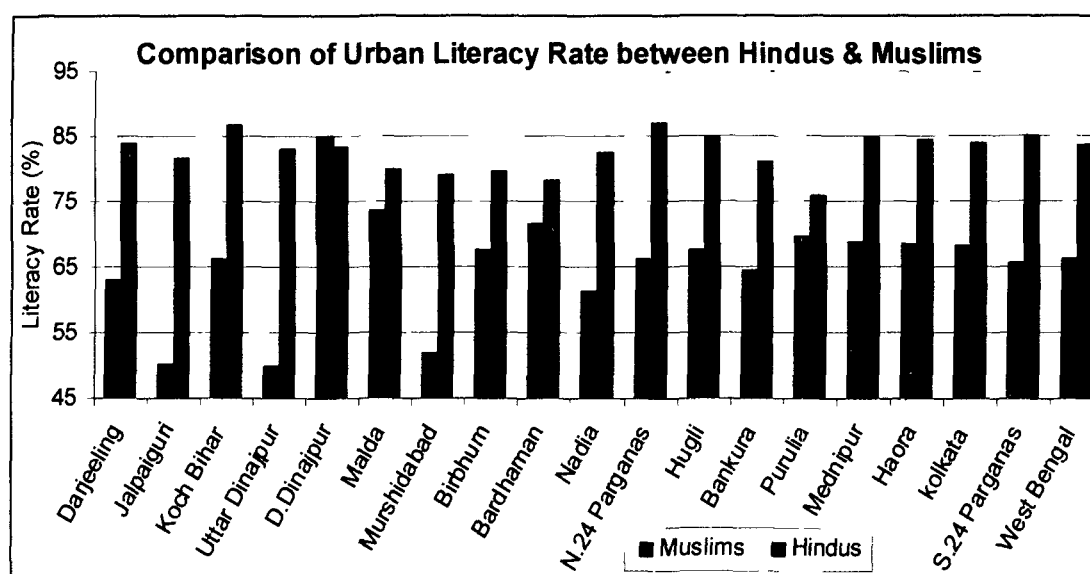


Fig: 3e

At all levels of literacy, Muslims lag behind the Hindus and the gap is accentuated at the urban level. For both rural and urban Muslims, the situation is somewhat more discouraging.

### Educational Level

Educational level of a society or a community within a society can not be judge from its literacy rate, though it is important indicator for making a distinction between literate and non-literate. A literate person is not define on the basis of his/her educational attainment but only on the basis of knowledge of reading or writing any of the language. Observed Prime Minister High Level

Committee “External evaluations indicate that many so-called literates did not have the ability to apply their reading and writing skills to real-life situations, and often a substantial proportion reverted to illiteracy within 4-5 years after leaving school”. This aspect is not taken into account by the Census definition. In contrast, the definition of the National Literacy Mission focuses on acquiring the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic *and the ability to apply them to one’s day-to-day life*” (GOI 2006: 50-51).

Thus, it is important to analyze educational attainment of population. Educational attainment refers to acquiring education in a systematic way through formal and informal education. There are various levels of education like below primary, Primary, Middle, Matric, Higher secondary, Technical, Non-Technical, Graduate and above. These levels of education are analysed in following pages in order to know educational condition of Muslims in West Bengal.

Though census of India 2001 for the first time after Independence provides age wise educational level data of religious communities, we have analysed, above mentioned educational level in the age group 7 and above. For example, percentage of below primary level education is computed with total population of the state or a community. This is presented in the following table 3.7.

It must be noted here that total population of the state in the age group of 7 and above is 6,87,61,975. Hindus comprises 5,07,29,812 crore while Muslims constitute 1,64,64,543 crore.

**Table 3.7**  
**Distribution of Literates by Educational Level, Religious Community**

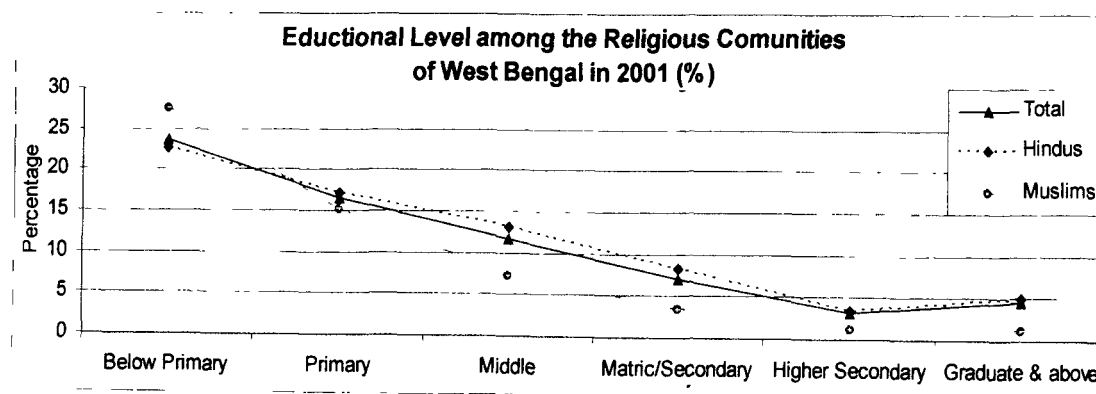
| Religion | Below primary | Primary  | Middle  | Matric/Secondary | Higher Secondary | Graduate & above | Non-Technical Diploma | Technical Diploma |
|----------|---------------|----------|---------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Total**  | 16347698      | 11449999 | 8050643 | 4859685          | 2287115          | 3186374          | 5196                  | 95799             |
| Hindus   | 11470789      | 8719791  | 6671953 | 4181271          | 2048622          | 2932968          | 3435                  | 90024             |
| Muslims  | 4541597       | 2494842  | 1198591 | 570473           | 192216           | 195192           | 1628                  | 4145              |
| Total**  | 23.77         | 16.65    | 11.71   | 7.07             | 3.33             | 4.63             | 0.01                  | 0.14              |
| Hindus   | 22.61         | 17.19    | 13.15   | 8.24             | 3.53             | 5.05             | 0.01                  | 0.18              |
| Muslims  | 27.58         | 15.15    | 7.28    | 3.46             | 1.17             | 1.19             | 0.01                  | 0.03              |

Note: \*Literate includes unclassified educational levels

\*\*Total (All religious communities) includes 'Religion not stated'.

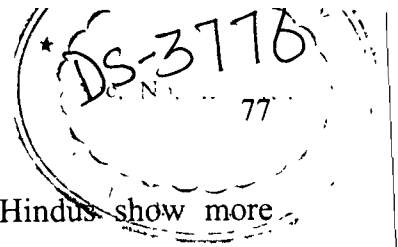
Source: Census of India, 2001

It is evident from the above table that the average state percentage of people who have attained below primary level education is 23.77% and Hindus having 1 percentage points less than state level. While Muslims show 27.58% share in this category which is higher than state and Hindus. In below primary school education Muslims's share is not higher only in West Bengal. Many studies reveal that in this category Madrasa and Maktabas are included and Muslims are used to prefer to send their children in these institutions.



**Fig: 3 f**





At primary level the state average is 16.65% and Hindus show more proportion than the state level with 17.19% share. While Muslims are less (15.15%) than Hindus.

At middle level, the state average is 11.71% and Hindus having 13.15% which is more than state level. Muslims share in middle level education is 7.28% which is just half of Hindus.

At matric level, state average is 7.07%. Comparing to state level Hindus having higher percentage i.e. 8.24%. Muslims show much lower percentage with only 3.46% in this category.

At higher secondary level the state average is 3.33%. Here also Hindus share is 3.53% which is higher than state average. While Muslims show poor share with only 1.17%.

The proportion of non- technical graduates is insignificant in the state. While technical graduates is important as it indicates the stock of technical skills available in the community/nation. While the pool of technical graduates is even lower with only about 0.14%, the performance of Muslims (0.03%) is worse than Hindus (0.18%), with a sharp differential existing between them. In graduate level, the state average is 4.63 per cent. Hindus having 5.05% which is more than state level and also 4 percentage points higher than Muslims (1.19%). From the above discussion it is clear that as the education level increases the educational attainment of Muslims decreases. While Hindus have higher educational

achievement as compare to state as well as Muslims in all educational level except below primary level.

It is pertinent to note here that Muslims are educationally most backward community in West Bengal and far behind the other religious group. This empirical finding of Muslims educational backwardness was supported in pre-independent India and also after 60 years of independence it is still supported by the various research studies by sociologists, political scientist, educationists, individual researcher and government reports from time to time. Therefore, it is noteworthy here to quote some major finding and observation.

In pre independent India (1857-1947) Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and other protagonists found that educationally Muslims sharply lag behind the other community. Later on, "Revisionist scholarship on education in colonial India has demonstrated that Muslims did not lag behind other communities as sharply as was maintained by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and other protagonists of Aligarh movement. In the light of quantitative and qualitative data gathered by scholars like Anil Seal, Aparna Basu, Paul Brass, David Lelyved, and Hafiz Malik it can be generalized that the Muslim student population in modern high school was generally proportionate to the Muslim numerical strength in the provinces of India, except Bengal". This means that in pre-independence period, Muslims were educationally in Bengal. This was also supported by an important work about Muslims by William Wilson Hunter's famous book, *The Indian Musalmans*,

published in 1871 whose findings about Muslims educational lag was true only for Bengal (Khalidi 1995: 108).

After independence various Census reports, government findings and many research paper confirms popular impressions about Muslim lag in education in West Bengal. The notably feature of the Bengal Muslim educational problem is their abnormally low share at higher levels of education. The higher the education the rare is the share of Muslims (Mondal 1994: 152). This backwardness of the Muslims and their continued downwards mobility in the field of education, particularly in a great metropolis like Calcutta, an important centre of learning, would, perhaps, appear paradoxical (Siddiqui 1998). There are various factors those are responsible for Muslims educational backwardness in West Bengal. Generally, Very high rural poverty and high concentration of Muslims in rural areas is an important factor in the low educational status of Muslims. The situation has been exacerbated with the steady decline of industry in West Bengal, but continued migration into it from east UP and Bihar. Thus, Muslims are almost totally dependent on the state for education, and this has made for some unexpected and poignant outcomes (Hasan & Menon 2005).

Besides these studies a notable historian Soumitra Sinha found that Bengali Muslims are illiterates and ignorant community. He found that unwillingness and / or inability of the Muslims to take modern education imparted through the medium of English is true to some extent. But he found the problem has two

dimension- economic and cultural which are not always take into consideration.(Sinha 1995:38). Dr Safiuddin Joardar has further elaborated it by saying, “it is possible that the poverty of the Bengali Muslims militated against their taking to modern education which was quite expensive. It should also be remembered that the Muslims of Bengal were predominantly rural, and it was not easy for them to send their sons to culcutta to receive modern education” (Joardar 1980: 9).

The above findings of census data, sociologists, social anthropologists and historians proved the educational backwardness of Muslims in the state and their low level of educational attainment in higher education.

### **Conclusion:**

From the foregoing analysis one may conclude that the literacy and educational attainment differentials between Hindus and Muslims is large. One needs to ask the question – what is it that keeps the Muslims behind the Hindus on literacy and educational attainment as an important indicators of human development.

Muslims are most educationally backward community as compare to other religious communities in the state. Though they constitute more than 25% of state population their literacy rate are 57% only which is 11 percentage points less than state average (68.64%) and 15 percentage points lower than Hindus (72.44%). Their condition in rural areas is more worse as large number of Muslims live in rural areas. Though the difference in literacy rate between Hindus and Muslims in

rural areas is less but this difference in urban areas is sharp. Educational condition of Muslim women is a serious concern within the state. Muslims women are 14 percentage point lag behind the male member within the community which show better position as compare to Hindus female literacy rate which is 18 percentage points less than male literacy. The gap in literacy level between males and females is lowest among Muslims than among the Hindus where the gap is significant. From this we can say that women status in Muslim community is higher than Hindus. The fact also denies the general perception that male member of the family restricts their girl member to go to school.

With regard to educational achievement, the condition of Muslims is one of grave concern. The data clearly indicates that while the overall levels of education in West Bengal measured through various indicators, is still below universally acceptable standards, the educational status of the Muslim community in particular is a matter of great concern. For example, in graduation level only 1 per cent of Muslim student are present. Attainments at the graduation level and in technical education are low for state, Muslims and Hindus. Even at these low levels differences exist, Muslims lag behind in comparison to both the state average and Hindus. Further more we can say that as the level of education increases the rate of participation of Muslims in education decreases sharply.

## **Economy and Political Representation of Muslims in West Bengal**

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Economic condition is one of the important indicator of Human Development. The economic condition of people, play crucial role in determining their life standard and opportunities of participating in collective life. Poor economic condition prevents people from their access to facilities like employment, education, health, hygiene etc. Hence inquiry into economic condition of a community is inevitable for social analysis.

Any empirical attempt of analyzing economy of Indian Muslims is impeded by a dearth of data both in volume and nature. Neither individual social scientist paid sufficient attention to study Indian Muslims nor Government of India has provided any statistical data related with economic condition of Indian Muslims. The practice of publishing community wise data of census, except schedule caste (SCs) and schedule tribe (STs) showing differential development pattern of the various segments of the country has been discontinued by the state in post independent India. It has deprived Muslims of knowing their exact economic condition as well as social scientist of analyzing economic backwardness (Khalidi 1995:53-54).

In the absence of primary empirical data, the foregoing discussion of the economic condition of Muslim is based on information in census reports, sociological studies and economic studies of Indian Muslims done by academics, Muslim voluntary organization and journalist.





# CHAPTER 4



### **Economic Condition of Indian Muslims: An Over View**

Muslims have negligible influence on the process of economic development (Beg 1989: 116). “There is widely held belief that Muslims have remained largely unaffected by the process of economic development and social change that have been taking place in the country and their general economic condition has been deteriorating progressively. The explanation offered for the economic backwardness of Indian Muslims and their failure to derive benefits from development programmes however varies” (Ahmed, 1975: 231). Also, in the early 1980s the Government of India appointed a High Power Panel for Minorities and Scheduled castes under the chairmanship of Dr. Gopal Singh to study their economic plight and suggest means to improve their conditions. The panel was found that the economic condition of Muslims was even worse compared with the socially deprived schedule caste (GOI 1983; Shariff 2004: 27).

This depressed economic condition of Indian Muslims can be more supported by other explanation. Thus, to see the economic condition of Muslims in a systematic way we have classify the various sectors of economy and see the presence of their share in these economic sectors. Hence, we divide the economy into three sectors: agricultural sector, industrial sector and tertiary sector to explore the economic condition of Muslims in Indian economy (Beg 1989: 117; khalidi 1995: 54).



## **Agricultural Sector**

As a rural community, Muslims are mainly engaged in agriculture and allied activities. Not all Muslims living in the rural areas are necessarily agriculturists. A large number are artisans and menials who do participate in agriculture activities during the busy portion of agriculture season and occasionally they own land which they cultivate but their main occupation is nonagricultural. So far one can generalize about a group so vast and disperse; it does not seem that the economic condition of the Muslim peasantry has improved greatly during the last four decades or so over. Though due to introduction of new mechanized tools for agriculture and the Green Revolution in agricultural field which brought a radical change in agricultural productivity and transformed the peasants into capitalist farmer. However, the Green Revolution has had little impact on Muslim peasantry except in western Uttar Pradesh. Because the economic prosperity generated by the Green Revolution is limited to the wheat growing areas like U.P, Punjab and Haryana etc. While the Muslims pesantry concentrated mainly in rice growing areas like Assam, West Bengal and Bihar etc remain largely unaffected by the impact of green revolution. In addition to this, abolition of landlordism as a measure of land reforms in India after independence seems to have drastically reduced Muslim participation in agriculture.

## **Industrial Sector**

Apart from the merchantile groups of Indian Muslims, the generality of Muslims in Hindustan and the Deccan kept away from trade and commerce, at least until the independence. After independence also their presence in this sector is not significant and their presence is countable. It is reported in "A State-wise picture of large-scale industrial Activity" compiled by the Economic Intelligence Service of the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, Bombay, in July 1981, provides data for 2832 industrial establishments owned by 1109 large corporates units each with a sale of Rs. 50 million and above. These industrial establishments are engaged in mining and manufacturing activities. In this listing of 2832 industrial establishments, only four units are owned by Muslims". In large scale industries Muslims are primarily engaged as unskilled, semi skilled and skilled labourers.

Compared to the dismal picture in the big business, Muslims fare somewhat better in ownership and workforce of the small scale industries. This indicates that Muslims employment in the large industries and small scale industries is not much satisfactory.

## **Tertiary Sector**

The economic backwardness of the Muslims is clearly reflected in their employment pattern in Central and State Governments, as well as in public and private sectors. In the year 1981, among the officers of the Indian Administrative

Services only 3% were Muslims. In the same year only 2.9% of all the Indian Police Service Officers in the country were Muslims. About 3.1% of income tax officers recruited during the period 1971-80 were Muslims. For the same period, of the officers recruited to Railway Traffic and Accounts Services only 2.7% were Muslims. In Banks, Muslim officers constituted only 2.2%. In Central and State Government offices, the Muslim employees were 4.4% and 6% respectively. While the representation of the Muslims in public sector undertakings was 10.8% (1983). The study conducted by Gopal Krishna under the auspices of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies at Delhi, for the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, revealed that the poor were more and the rich were fewer among the Muslims (Beg 1989: 116-129; Khalidi 1995: 54-91).

Analyzing the available survey figure of Muslim employment in various sector Beg has drawn up the following characteristic features:

- (a) Muslims have negligible presence in the public and private corporate sector – both as managers and workers and also as capital subscriber.
- (b) Muslims have nominal presence in the small scale and cottage organized sector, though they have been pioneers in handicrafts and artisanship.
- (c) In agriculture proper and allied activities Muslims have very nominal presence.
- (d) So far as the tertiary public sector is concerned, Muslims have nominal presence in government administrative, police and defence service, and

more or less no share in financial and banking institutions. However, in the private services sector, such as transportation, repairing and other community services, Muslims have unduly high percentage share (Beg 1989: 124).

### **Economic Condition of Muslims in West Bengal**

It has been already mentioned in the preceding chapter that 83 per cent of Muslims in West Bengal living in villages. They are mainly dependent upon agricultural economy for their sustenance.

No substantial study about the economic condition has so far been conducted. However, census of India 2001, for the first time in post-independent India provides limited community wise data. It relates with work participation rate and Workers apart from literacy rate, sex ratio and population. Therefore, we first of all explain economic condition of Muslims in West Bengal through census data.

### **Muslim Work participation rate in West Bengal (WPR)**

Work participation Rate (WPR) is an important indicator of development. It provides an idea of the extent of people's participation in economic activity or their rate of employment. Availability of employment provides an individual and his family with many economic and non-economic benefits and opportunities. In short, the more is WPR of the population, the greater would be its development. WPR of the population is not determined by single factor but by multiple factors. Ownership of physical assets, human capital, and location of individuals/family in

a given socio-economic structure, availability of work opportunities and other such factors play important role in determining WPR. Indeed, one could gauge holistic development of the population through its WPR. The following table 4.1 presents the WPR in West Bengal for across gender and religion in rural and urban areas.

**Table: 4.1**

**WPR in West Bengal for Hindus and Muslims by sex and residence**

|               | Total |       |        | Rural |       |        | Urban |       |        |
|---------------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|--------|
| Religion      | Total | Male  | Female | Total | Male  | Female | Total | Male  | Female |
| All Religions | 36.77 | 53.99 | 18.32  | 37.90 | 54.09 | 20.86  | 33.85 | 53.74 | 11.57  |
| Hindus        | 37.87 | 55.26 | 19.21  | 39.63 | 55.70 | 22.68  | 34.14 | 54.35 | 11.71  |
| Muslims       | 32.89 | 50.52 | 13.99  | 32.98 | 50.44 | 14.66  | 32.40 | 50.88 | 10.48  |

Source: Census of India, 2001

From the above table it is clear that average WPR of West Bengal is 36.77%. In comparison, Hindus have 1.10 percentage points higher WPR than state average. Whereas the condition of Muslims is a cause of concern as they have 4 percentage points less WPR than state average and 5 percentage points less than Hindus.

Similar condition prevails in urban areas where average state WPR is 33.85%. Hindus have advantage over state average by 1 percentage points. Whereas Muslims are lagging behind average state WPR by 1 percentage point and average Hindus WPR by 2 percentage points.

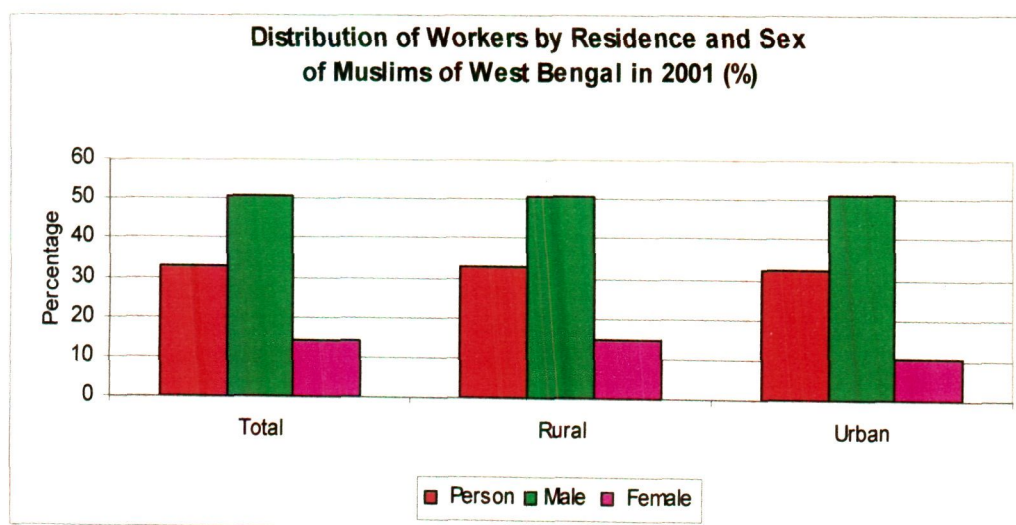
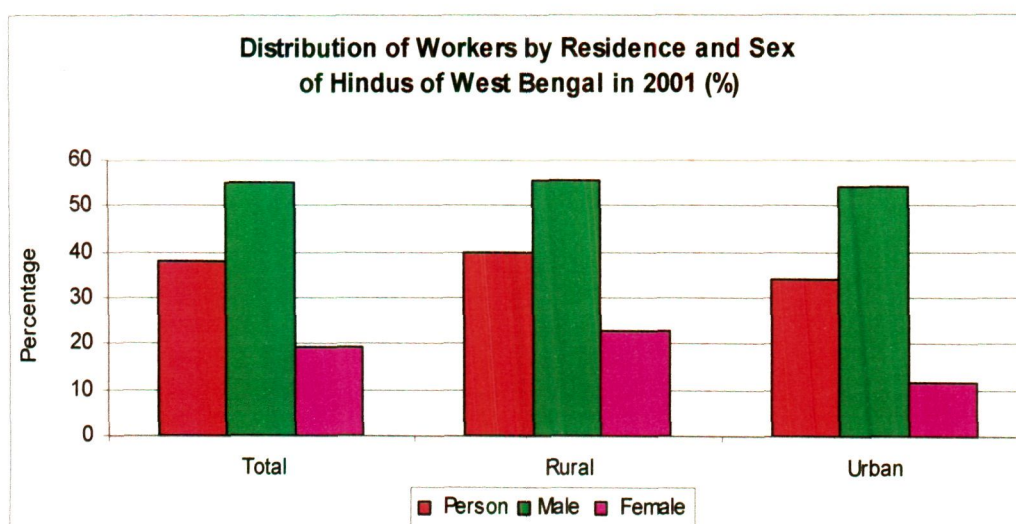
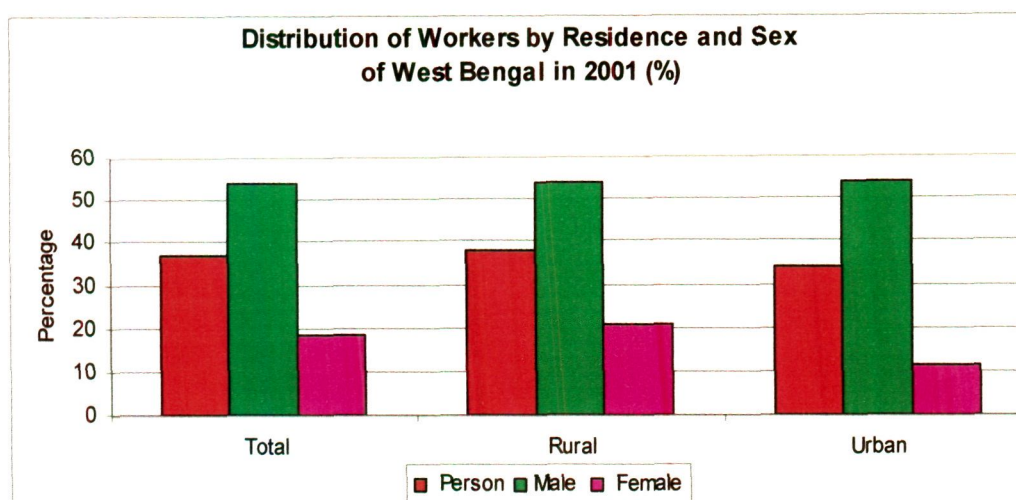


Fig: 4 a

In rural areas the state average of WPR is 37.90%. In rural areas also the Hindus have 2 percentage points more WPR than state average. Whereas Muslims having 5 percentage points less WPR and 7 percentage point less than Hindus. WPR of Muslims is much lower than state level and Hindus which indicate their poor economic condition in the state. It is also evident from the table that WPRs of Hindus in rural and urban areas are higher than state as well as Muslims.

Another important fact is that WPRs for male in both rural and urban areas for Hindus and Muslims are fairly high. Also the differential between Hindus and Muslims for males is marginal. While female WPRs are substantially lower at state level and in both rural and urban areas. For example, the WPR among rural Muslim females is as low as 14.66% while this rate is 22.68% for Hindus and 20.86% at state level. Similarly, the urban WPR for females is only 10.48% for Muslims, while it is 11.71% for Hindus. Though this gap is not wide but female WPR for Muslims is less than Hindus. The low aggregate work participation rate for Muslims are essentially due to much lower participation in economic activity by women in the community; while they do not differ much for males in between Hindus and Muslims (GOI 2006: 89). Apart from this the lack of work opportunities for females, the cultural factors such as the practice of seclusion might have affected the female WPRs at state level (Khalidi 1995: 67)

Although WPR is an important indicator it does not provide exact economic situation of a community. Because a rickshawpuller and an

administrator, a vendor and a trader are included for computation of WPR. In short WPR does not provide information regarding nature of work. Therefore, classification of worker is important.

Census of India broadly categories, workers into four categories

- a) Cultivators
- b) Agriculture Workers
- c) Household Industry Workers
- d) Other Workers

#### **a) Cultivators**

Cultivators are first category of workers may provide some information about their presence in rural economy. A person is classified as a cultivator, “if he or she is engaged in cultivation of land owned or held from Government or held from private persons or institutions for payment in money, kind or share. Cultivation includes effective supervision or direction in cultivation.

A person who has given out her/his land to another person or persons or institution(s) for cultivation for money, kind or share of crop and who does not even supervise or direct cultivation in exchange of land, is not treated as cultivator. Similarly, a person working on another person's land for wages in cash or kind or a combination of both (agricultural labourer) are not treated as cultivator”.

In this way, a cultivator is a person who produces either from land, which he owns, or the land, which he has taken on lease for earning his livelihood.



Cultivators may be classified as owners of large, medium and small landholdings. A fourth category of cultivators is of those people who do not have their own land but take the land of others on lease. Classification of cultivators on the basis of landholdings is important for knowing their economic condition. But Census does not provide such a data. Hence, we could simply know from this data how many Muslims are classified as cultivators and their distribution in different districts of the state. The percentage of Muslim cultivators is presented in the following table 4.2.

Table: 4.2  
District-wise Percentage of Muslim Cultivators

| S.No | State /Districts          | Cultivator          |
|------|---------------------------|---------------------|
|      | <b><i>West Bengal</i></b> | <b><i>20.30</i></b> |
| 1    | Dakshin Dinajpur          | 46.12               |
| 2    | Koch Bihar                | 37.71               |
| 3    | Uttar dinajpur            | 36.37               |
| 4    | Nadia                     | 28.85               |
| 5    | Bankura                   | 28.44               |
| 6    | Birbhum                   | 26.06               |
| 7    | Jalpaiguri                | 23.50               |
| 8    | Bardhaman                 | 23.44               |
| 9    | Maldah                    | 19.47               |
| 10   | Noth 24 parganas          | 19.33               |
| 11   | Murshidabad               | 19.32               |
| 12   | Hugli                     | 18.69               |
| 13   | Purulia                   | 17.28               |
| 14   | Medinipur                 | 16.16               |
| 15   | South 24 parganas         | 12.39               |
| 16   | Darjeeling                | 11.90               |
| 17   | Haora                     | 2.45                |
| 18   | Kolkata                   | 0.42                |

Source: Census of India, 2001

The table reveals that the percentage of cultivators varies from one district to another. The state average of cultivators is 20.30%. There are 8 districts where percentage of cultivators is more than state average. The highest percentage (46.12%) of cultivators among Muslims is found in the district of Dakshin Dinajpur while Kolkata have lowest percentage (0.42%). In 8 districts where the Muslims cultivators is more than state average, are Dakshin Dinajpur (46.12%), Kuch Bihar (37.71%), Uttar Dinajpur (36.37%), Nadia (28.85%), Bankura (28.44%), Birbhum (26.06%), Jalpaiguri (23.50%), Bardhaman (23.44%). In remaining 10 districts where Muslims percentage is less than state average, and these districts are Maldah (19.47%), North 24 Parganas (19.33%), Murshidabad (19.32%), Hugli (18.69%), Purulia (17.28%), Mednipur (16.16%), Soth 24 Parganas (12.39%), Darjeeling (11.90%), Haora (2.45%) and Kolkata (0.42%). From this table it is evident that the percentage of Muslim cultivator is not significant in various districts in the state. For example, Musrhidabad and Malda having more than fifty per cent Muslim population but their percent as a cultivator is less despite the fact that in these two district percentage of Muslims living in rural areas is roughly 52 and 66 per cent respectively. This shows their poor participation as a cultivator and hence poor economic condition in different districts of West Bengal.

## b) Agricultural Worker

“A person who works on another person's land for wages in money or kind or share is regarded as an agricultural labourer (worker). (S)he has no risk in the cultivation, but merely works on another person's land for wages. An agricultural labourer has no right of lease or contract on land on which (s)he works” (Census of India). Percentage of district wise agricultural worker is presented in the following table 4.3.

**Table: 4.3**  
**District-wise Percentage of Muslim Agriculture Workers**

| S.No | Districts          | Agriculture Workers |
|------|--------------------|---------------------|
|      | <i>West Bengal</i> | <i>26.59</i>        |
| 1    | Uttar dinajpur     | 42.58               |
| 2    | Koch Bihar         | 37.52               |
| 3    | Dakshin Dinajpur   | 36.15               |
| 4    | Jalpaiguri         | 30.35               |
| 5    | Murshidabad        | 29.59               |
| 6    | Birbhum            | 29.52               |
| 7    | Purulia            | 29.48               |
| 8    | Maldah             | 27.60               |
| 9    | South 24 parganas  | 26.78               |
| 10   | Bardhaman          | 26.50               |
| 11   | Nadia              | 26.50               |
| 12   | Noth 24 parganas   | 25.15               |
| 13   | Medinipur          | 24.17               |
| 14   | Bankura            | 24.15               |
| 15   | Darjeeling         | 22.18               |
| 16   | Hugli              | 14.76               |
| 17   | Haora              | 6.25                |
| 18   | Kolkata            | 0.20                |

**Source:** Census of India, 2001

The above table reveals that Muslim agricultural workers are found in most of the district of the state but their percentage differs from one district to another.

At the state level the average percentage of agriculture workers is about 26.59%. The highest percentage of Muslim agricultural workers is found in the district of Uttar Dinajpur i.e. 42.58% and like cultivator the lowest agricultur workers are present in Kolkata i.e. 0.20%. One of the reasons of lowest cultivator and agriculture worker in the Kokata is that it is a metropolitan city and included into urban list and hence the number of rural population is insignificant. There are nine districts where Muslim agricultural worker is more than state average. These districts are Uttar Dinajpur is followed by Koch Bihar (37.52%), Dakshin Dinajpur (36.15%), Jalpaiguri (30.35%), Murshidabad (29.59%), Birbhum (29.52%), Purulia (29.48%), Maldah (27.60%), South 24 Parganas (26.78%). In remaining 9 districts percentage of agriculture worker is less than state average and these districts are Bardhaman and Nadia (26.50%), North 24 Parganas (25.15%), Mednipur (24.17%), Bankura (24.15%), Darjeeling (22.18%), Hugli (14.76%), Haora (6.25%) and Kolkata with lowest percentage of agriculture workers i.e. 0.20%.

### **c) Household Industry Worker**

Census of India defines Household Industry as an industry conducted by one or more members of the household at home or within the village in rural areas and only within the precincts of the house where the household lives in urban areas. The larger proportion of workers in the household industry consists of

members of the household. The industry is not run on the scale of a registered factory which would qualify or has to be registered under the Indian Factories Act.

The main criterion of a Household industry even in urban areas is the participation of one or more members of a household. Even if the industry is not actually located at home in rural areas there is a greater possibility of the members of the household participating, even if it is located anywhere within the village limits. District-wise Percentage of Muslim Household Industry Workers is presented in the following table 4.4.

**Table: 4.4**

**District-wise Percentage of Muslim Household Industry Workers**

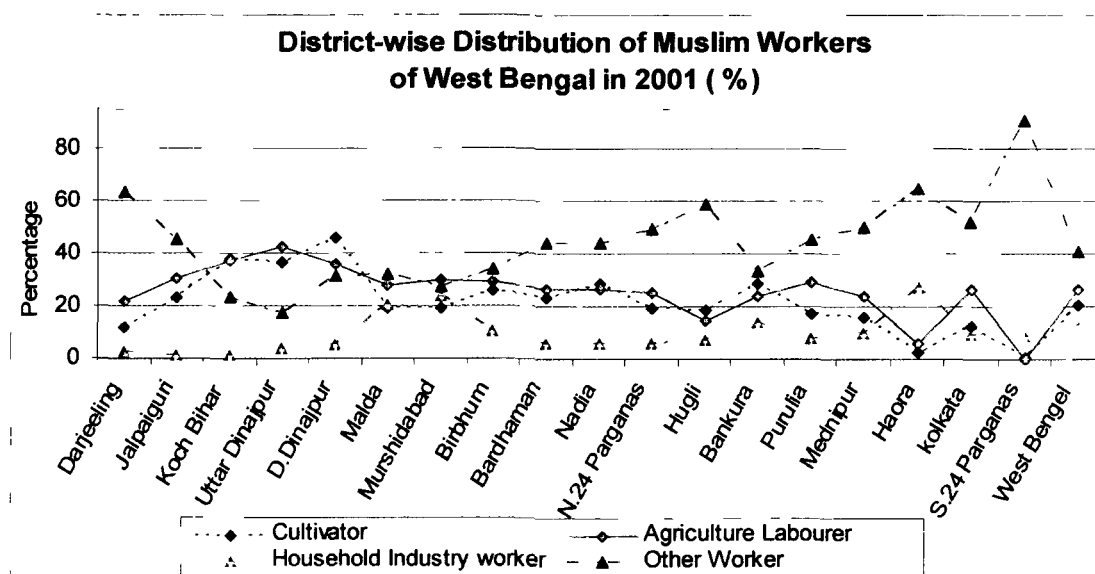
| S.No | Districts          | Household<br>Industry worker |
|------|--------------------|------------------------------|
|      | <i>West Bengal</i> | <i>12.60</i>                 |
| 1    | Haora              | 27.19                        |
| 2    | Murshidabad        | 24.12                        |
| 3    | Maldah             | 20.91                        |
| 4    | Bankura            | 13.87                        |
| 5    | Birbhum            | 10.47                        |
| 6    | Medinipur          | 10.14                        |
| 7    | South 24 parganas  | 9.13                         |
| 8    | Kolkata            | 8.74                         |
| 9    | Purulia            | 8.16                         |
| 10   | Hugli              | 7.60                         |
| 11   | Noth 24 parganas   | 6.14                         |
| 12   | Bardhaman          | 6.05                         |
| 13   | Nadia              | 6.05                         |
| 14   | Dakshin Dinajpur   | 5.60                         |
| 15   | Uttar dinajpur     | 3.92                         |
| 16   | Darjeeling         | 2.88                         |
| 17   | Koch Bihar         | 1.47                         |
| 18   | Jalpaiguri         | 1.29                         |

**Source:** Census of India, 2001

Household Industry relates to production, processing, servicing, repairing or making and selling (but not merely selling) of goods. It does not include professions such as a Pleader, Doctor, Musician, Dancer, Waterman, Astrologer, Dhobi, Barber, etc., or merely trade or business, even if such professions, trade or services are run at home by members of the household. The above table reveals that the average percentage of household industry at state level is 12.06. But the percentage of Muslims in this category is less than above two categories of cultivator and agriculture worker. In this category the highest percentage of Muslims is in the district of Haora with 27.19% and lowest in the district of Jalpaiguri i.e. 1.29%. Besides Hoara there are only two districts namely Murshidabad and Malda where the percentage of Muslim household industry worker is more than 20%. Then there is a sudden decline in the percentage in rest of the districts. There are only three districts with percentage of Muslim Household worker lies in between 10-13% and these districts are Bankura, Birbhum and Mednipur. There are eight districts having Muslims percentage in between 5-10% and these districts are South 24 Parganas, Kolkata, Purulia, Hugli, North 24 Parganas, Bardhaman, Nadia and Dakshin Dinajpur. There are 4 districts having less than 5% household industry worker and these districts are Uttar Dinajpur, Darjeeling, Kuch Bihar including Jalpaiguri.

#### d) Other Workers

According to Census of India, “All workers, i.e., those who have been engaged in some economic activity during the last one year, but are not cultivators or agricultural labourers or in Household Industry, are 'Other Workers (OW)'. The type of workers that come under this category of 'OW' include all government servants, municipal employees, teachers, factory workers, plantation workers, those engaged in trade, commerce, business, transport, banking, mining, construction, political or social work, priests, entertainment artists, etc”. In effect, all those workers other than cultivators or agricultural labourers or household industry workers are 'Other Workers'.”



**Fig: 4 b**

In this way this is a residual category of workers which includes workers of innumerable kinds having varied socio-economic status in society and life chance

in market situations. On the one hand the category includes workers associated with white collar occupations, salaried jobs, trade and commerce, bank and industry, on the other hand it includes menial workers and wage earners like rickshaw-puller, musicians, construction site workers etc. It is, therefore a deceptive category of workers whereby we cannot know economic condition of religious communities. If in a religious community, like Muslims large numbers of workers are rickshaw-pullers or wage earners, data of this category would show their favorable condition. District wise percentage of Muslim other worker is presented in the following table 4.5.

**Table: 4.5**

**District-wise Percentage of Muslim Other Worker**

| S.No | Districts                 | Other Worker        |
|------|---------------------------|---------------------|
|      | <b><i>West Bengal</i></b> | <b><i>40.51</i></b> |
| 1    | Kolkata                   | 90.64               |
| 2    | Haora                     | 64.11               |
| 3    | Darjeeling                | 63.05               |
| 4    | Hugli                     | 58.59               |
| 5    | South 24 parganas         | 51.69               |
| 6    | Medinipur                 | 49.53               |
| 7    | Noth 24 parganas          | 49.38               |
| 8    | Purulia                   | 45.08               |
| 9    | Jalpaiguri                | 44.86               |
| 10   | Bardhaman                 | 44.01               |
| 11   | Nadia                     | 44.01               |
| 12   | Birbhum                   | 33.95               |
| 13   | Bankura                   | 33.53               |
| 14   | Maldah                    | 32.02               |
| 15   | Dakshin Dinajpur          | 31.09               |
| 16   | Murshidabad               | 26.96               |
| 17   | Koch Bihar                | 23.29               |
| 18   | Uttar dinajpur            | 17.13               |

Source: **Census of India, 2001**



It is evident from the above table that the average percentage of other worker at state level is 40.51%. The highest percentage of other worker reside in the district of Kolkata (a metropolitan city) is 90.64%. Then, there is sharp decline in the percentage by about 30 Percentage points in remaining districts. The highest percentage of other worker in Kolkata shows that Muslims have better socio-economic condition and engaged quality occupation. But it is not true, as other worker includes innumerable kind of worker; therefore it is difficult to decide in which kind of work they are engaged. It is reported that about three fourth of Muslim population in the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) lives in the slums or the areas of substandard housing, locally known as bustees. These slum dwellers are engaged in lowly occupation like furniture making, rickshawpulling, zari embroidery etc. Muslims in the city are also at safe distance from bureaucratic, administrative, and white collar jobs, as also from employment in the organized sector to a large extent (Siddiqi 2006: 93-94). This indicates that poor socio-economic condition of Muslims in the capital of West Bengal, also one of the largest metropolis in India. There are 4 districts namely Haora, Darjeeling, South 24 Parganas and Hugli where percentage of Muslim other worker lies in between 50-70%. There are 10 districts having other worker in ranges between 30-50%. These districts are Mednipur, North 24 Parganas, Purulia, Jalpaiguri, Bardhaman, Nadia, Birbhum, Bankura, Malda, Dakshin Dinajpur. In remaining three districts, Murshidabad, Koch Bihar and Uttar Dinajpur the proportion of other worker is more than 15% but less than 30%.

Why the percentage of Muslim other worker is high than other three category of worker? Is it due to their poor economic condition of misery and poverty which forces them to take up any kind of work which comes their way? They cannot feed their children, if they don't work as daily wage labourers, rickshaw-pullers and other menial works. Therefore, we find more Muslims as Other Workers than other three category of work. "In developing countries (*Among poors*) open unemployment (especially usual status) is typically found to be low. This is partly because a large number of the poor cannot afford to be unemployed and undertake whatever work comes their way." (GOI 2006: 89).

### **Political Representation**

Political participation is an important socio-economic indicator to measure the condition of a community within a society. "Political participation is another indicator of a community's empowerment. In a democracy, the legislature is the fountain head of power. The fact is that the Muslim community is inadequately or simply not represented in general legislatures and even in the Lok Sabha. Its representation is less than 50 per cent of what it should be, assessed as per the share in the population. Besides being an alienation experience, absence of legislature from any social group in a plural segmented society puts the group at a clear disadvantage. The role of MP and MLA in promoting development of his or her constituency can not be over undermine. The community's interest can be brought centre stage with the help of the respective Members of the Parliament.

This is a natural and legitimate expectation. Hence for any development or welfare programme to reach out to a deprived and backward community and not get diluted or lost in bureaucratic maze demands due representation in legislature....However, it needs to be pointed out that without political empowerment, any development or welfare schemes for Muslims will at best remain token schemes” (Shariff 2004: 77 ).

Instead of the “adult franchise, Indian Muslims, exploited as they are due to their illiteracy, ignorance, and poverty, ill-representated in panchayats, state and central legislatures. They stand politically disinherited. It is not only Muslim under representation in elected and public bodies in numerical terms that is so alarming. But rather the fact is that most Muslims who are handpicked to represent Muslims and other Muslim beneficiaries of the official patronage system are those who are generally alienated from the community. Some of them are even ashamed of their Muslimness” (Shaikh 1989:163).

Though the literature is not available about Muslims political representation and also Government of India does not provide data regarding their political representation. However, an attempt has been made to find out the Muslims representation in the political system of West Bengal which is largely based on the writing of various political scientists, sociologists and journalists.

The following table 4.6 and 4.7 indicates the extent of Muslim representation in the state legislative assembly from 1952 to 2001.

**Table: 4.6**  
**Muslim Representation in West Bengal Legislative Assembly**

| Year          | Total Members | Muslim Members | Percentage | Expected |
|---------------|---------------|----------------|------------|----------|
| 1952          | 238           | 22             | 9.66       | 46       |
| 1957          | 252           | 25             | 9.92       | 49       |
| 1962          | 252           | 27             | 10.71      | 50       |
| 1967          | 280           | 35             | 12.5       | 56       |
| 1969          | 280           | 36             | 12.86      | 56       |
| 1971          | 279           | 29             | 10.39      | 57       |
| 1972          | 280           | 35             | 12.5       | 57       |
| 1977          | 294           | 37             | 12.59      | 60       |
| 1983          | 292           | 36             | 12.24      | 63       |
| 1987          | 294           | 35             | 11.91      | 63       |
| 1991          | 294           | 42             | 14.29      | 69       |
| 1996          | 294           | 40             | 13.61      | 69       |
| 2001          | 294           | 39             | 13.27      | 69       |
| Total Average | -             | 438            | 12.03      | 764      |
| Deprivation   | -             | -              | -          | 42.67%   |

Source: I.A. Ansari, *Political Representation of Muslims in India, 1952-2004*, p.342

From the following table it is evident that in the first election in 1952 the congress nominated 24 Muslims out of 236 seats that it contested (10 per cent) where as Muslim population of the state was more than 19 per cent. Out of 24, 20 Muslim members were elected. Together with two independents there were 22 Muslims in the first assembly. Thus about 50 percent under representation was a result of under nomination by the congress, whatever the social constraints and political compulsions. From 1952 to 1972 the congress has been the major party representing Muslims in the assembly. From 1957 elections, the INC increased nominations of Muslims to bring better result for Muslims who had 25 members in 1957, 27 members in 1962, 35 in 1967 and 36 in 1969; of which congress contributed 21, 19, 19, 12 respectively.

Table: 4.7

## West Bengal Legislative Assembly Party-wise Muslim Members

| Party        | 1952      | 1957      | 1962      | 1967      | 1969      | 1971      | 1972      | 1977      | 1982      | 1987      | 1991      | 1996      | 2001      |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| INC          | 20        | 21        | 19        | 19        | 12        | 16        | 27        | 10        | 13        | 8         | 13        | 17        | 10        |
| IND          | 2         | 2         | 3         | 9         | 6         |           | 1         | 2         |           | 1         |           | 2         | 2         |
| CPI          |           | 2         | 3         | 1         | 2         | 1         | 3         | 1         | 1         |           | 1         |           | 1         |
| PSP          |           |           | 1         | 1         | 1         |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |
| RSP          |           |           | 1         |           | 1         |           |           |           |           | 1         | 3         | 1         | 3         |
| CPM          |           |           |           | 4         | 6         | 11        | 2         | 22        | 19        | 23        | 20        | 16        | 17        |
| BAC          |           |           |           | 1         |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |
| NDF          |           |           |           |           | 1         |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |
| FBL          |           |           |           |           | 1         |           |           | 1         | 1         |           | 4         | 4         | 3         |
| PML          |           |           |           |           | 3         |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |
| RCI          |           |           |           |           | 1         |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |
| WPI          |           |           |           |           | 1         | 1         |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |
| SUC          |           |           |           |           | 1         |           | 1         |           |           |           |           |           |           |
| MUM          |           |           |           |           |           |           | 1         |           |           |           |           |           |           |
| MUL          |           |           |           |           |           |           |           | 1         |           |           |           |           |           |
| ICS          |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           | 2         |           |           |           |           |
| FBP          |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           | 1         |           |           |           |
| INL          |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           | 1         |           |           |           |
| JD           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           | 1         |           |           |
| AITC         |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           | 2         |
| WBSP         |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           | 1         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>22</b> | <b>25</b> | <b>27</b> | <b>35</b> | <b>36</b> | <b>29</b> | <b>35</b> | <b>37</b> | <b>36</b> | <b>35</b> | <b>42</b> | <b>40</b> | <b>39</b> |

Source: I.A. Ansari, *Political Representation of Muslims in India, 1952-2004*, p.342

The CPI increased its share from zero in 1952 to 2 in 1957 and 3 in 1962.

From 1967, CPI(M) overshadowed CPI, securing 4 Muslim seats while CPI secured only one. The share of CPI(M) in 1969 further rose to 6 and that of CPI to 2. The election witnessed diversification of Muslims political representation by getting 24 seats divided into 10 parties and 6 independents. The INC still enjoyed the bigger share of 12 seats, CPI(M) with 6 seats being the second largest. In 1971 CPI(M) with 11 Muslim members became the major challenger of the congress which still had 16 seats . 1972 elections show a comeback of the congress with 27 Muslim seats. From 1977, the CPI(M) became the leading party winning 22

Muslim seats, followed by 19 in 1982, 23 in 1987, 20 in 1991 and 16 in 1996 . Significantly congress has not been wiped out. Even in 1977 it own 10 Muslim seats. In 1996 it had 17 seats against CPI(M)'s 16.

In the present assembly election in 2001 Muslims have a reasonable representation of 39 members, one less than that in 1996. CPI(M) has 17 Muslim members and the INC has 10 members. The remaining 12 seats are distributed among regional parties, including AITC. The CPI(M) has improved its position, at the cost of congress whose strength has been reduced from 17 in 1996 to 10. CPI has regained 1 seat, and RSP has gained 2 seats more than the single seat in 1996. A new entrant WBSP has secured 1 seat at the cost of FBL, which has now 3 members instead of earlier 4.

The state's succeeding elections since 1967 have unfolded better opportunities for Muslims to make tactical choices. Except for low representation of 29 in 1971, Muslim representation has shown a generally upward trend of above 35 seats. Given their present population of about 25% and a good number of Muslims concentration constituencies, and given the less communalized political climate of the state it should be possible to give them representation proportionate to their population, within the existing system.

One feature of CPI(M)'s role needs to be noted. For the Lok Sabha elections the CPI(M)'s average nomination of Muslim candidate is about 9 per cent, which is fairly satisfactory. However, the party's nomination average for the

state assembly is 12.48 per cent, whereas average share of Muslims in state population is 25%. As a major party in West Bengal CPI(M) has to give due consideration to setting up more Muslim candidates, for their better representation in the Assembly.

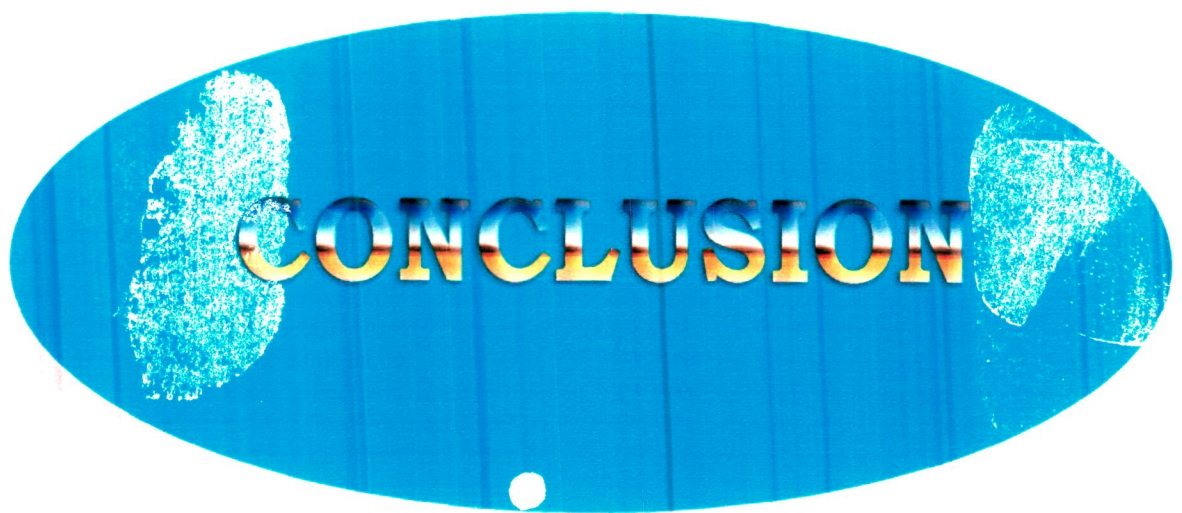
In spite of the strong secular traditions of politics in the state, the numerical deprivation (the level of Muslim deprivation in political representation is calculated under the formula of reservation of seats on the basis of population that Draft Article 292 Of the Indian Constitution has sought to guarantee) of Muslims being 43 per cent should make those committed to the ideal of inclusive democracy realize that the electoral system needs to be reviewed (Ansari, 2006: 27, 340-1, 378-9).

### **Conclusion**

From the foregoing analysis one can conclude that the economic condition is one of the important measures to evaluate the social and economic condition of any community in the society. Poor economic condition of any community is a barricade to their development process. After independence, though India achieved heights in economic development but its fruits did not reach equally to all section of the society. Muslims are largely deprived of the process of economic development and its benefits. Thus Muslims are lagging economically in comparison to other minority community and even SCs and STs. Hence, “economic backwardness is causing in turn educational backwardness” (Beg 1989: 126). Also their share in various sector of economy like agriculture, industry and

tertiary is minimal. Though Muslims in India as well as in West Bengal are largely rural community but they are not cultivator except few. They work as a labourer in other's field and engaged in menial work in the village. They are also not the owner of industries and they maintain a distance from industry. In industry Muslims are largely engaged as skilled and unskilled worker. But as far as small scale industry is concerned they are owner of many such industries. Sometimes it is said that Muslims are mainly concentrated in small scale industries but due to lack of capital and marketing of the final product they are dependent on middleman who exploit them trouble them for getting appropriate market value of the product. In tertiary sector they perform more badly. Their share in public and private sector is negligible. Though political participation is one of the crucial instrument for empowerment of any community. But in this front also, their participation is low. Instead of 25% of state population of Muslim in Bengal, they are deprived of the political participation. Though there is a strong secular trend in the state politics but Muslims are not getting equal share in political system of the state. Hence, political leaders and religious leaders should come forward and take suitable action to ameliorate their condition by implementing various governmental plans and programmes.





## Conclusion

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Muslims are the largest religious minority community in the country. Half of the Indian Muslims live in India's 'Hindi heartland' and West Bengal. The community has long history and a rich heritage. It has immensely contributed in the development of Indian society, economy and civilization. But still they are the most backward community in the country. Though in recent past India has achieved success in all fronts but Muslims are unaffected by the process of economic development. We have analysed some of the indicators of their recession in to backwardness and had a comprehension of the fact that the socio-economic weakness of their vast bulk prevents them from catching up with the rest of their countrymen. In other words, we can say that this backwardness narrows down their world view, sets limits to their aspirations, subjects them to exploitations and external manipulations, pushes them towards social, economic marginality, puts serious impediments in their constructive endeavour and leads a sizable number of their members towards poverty and disorganization. The country does not have enough empirical data about the socio-economic and educational problems of the Muslims. But there are few studies are available on Muslim done by government organisation, individual researcher and non governmental organisation. In this regard Razzack mentioned that there is sufficient evidence to prove that Muslim representation in education, economy, public and private employment, political participation etc., is relatively less as

compared with their percentage in the population (Razzack 2007: 739). There are some pockets in the country where the Muslims are largely concentrated but they are the most backward community in that region.

West Bengal is one of the region where Muslims constitute about  $\frac{1}{4}^{\text{th}}$  of the total state population. Instead they are most backward community in the state. They are unevenly distributed in the entire length and breadth of the state. Muslims came to Bengal in 13<sup>th</sup> century, but Bengal's contact with Islam and foreign Muslims for trade and missionary works, began much earlier. It is believed that many Muslim scholars and saints (*Sufis*) have come even before the conquerors. The role of both the Muslim scholars and saints were equally significant to spread Islam in Bengal. Some of them also settled in Bengal. In Bengal Islam spread mostly in rural areas. Muslims are a rural community in West Bengal as 83% Muslims live in rural areas. In rural areas Muslim are landless, poor and educationally backward community. Despite their abject poverty and illiteracy, the social status of Muslim women is higher than the Hindus as Muslims show better sex ratio as well as child sex ratio than Hindus. According to the POI project there are 21 Muslim communities in West Bengal and they are unevenly distributed in all parts of the state. We found that all Muslim are poor and marginal community. They are mainly engaged in low paid occupation such as masons, snake charmer, fishmongers, cotton craders, bidi binding, carpentry etc. Few of them are associated with agriculture and allied activities and petty

business. Most of the communities are educational backward and even few community members do not send their children to schools. Though the high literacy rate at state level, only 57% Muslims are literate which is lowest of all religious communities of the state. District-wise analysis shows that higher the concentration of Muslims in the district, lower is their literacy rate. As far as educational attainment is concerned Muslim performs badly. State level figure reveals that as the level of education increases the educational attainment of Muslims decreases. What are the factors responsible for low level of literacy and educational attainment of Muslims in West Bengal? Or does the government discriminate those areas in educational development where Muslims are concentrated more? These questions must be probed by social scientists.

Bengali Muslims are economically poor. In urban areas they are largely engaged in low economic activities like rickshawpuller, fruit seller, carpenter, servants, skilled and unskilled labour in industries etc. While in rural areas they are landless and work as day labourer in other's field. The analysed data shows that share of Muslim in Cultivators is 20% and Agricultural Workers of the state is low i.e. 26% while their percentage in Household Industry Workers is also low i.e. 12%. But the share of Muslims workers in Other Workers category is high with 40%. This implies that the economic condition of Muslim in rural economy of the state is uncertain. From the high share and Other Workers one may say that in urban areas Muslims are economically sound. But it is not true. For most of the

Muslims in Household Industry are daily wage workers. While high share of Muslims in Other Workers is because of larger number of Muslims of the state are in informal sector of the economy and generally engaged in menial occupations. Lack of adequate political leadership increases their misery many fold. Muslims of West Bengal are politically under-represented. Political backwardness is causing in turn educational and economical backwardness.

Though the government of India and state government have implement many programme and plans to ameliorate the Muslims. There is still a lot required to be done in this sphere. There is also a need to take more strict measures for improving social and economic condition of Muslims in West Bengal.

This study has depicted the data on socio-economic conditions of Muslims of West Bengal. The evaluation of various socio-economic indicators related with Muslims backwardness in the sate need to be further examined. It is evident in the preceding page that there is dearth of research oriented literature on Muslim's social, economic and educational backwardness. Hence, in such a situation, it is the urgent need of the time to do some planned and systematic sociological study of comprehensive nature. This will help to generate empirical data related to Muslims socio-economic problems in the sate of West Bengal in particular and of India in general.

Such a study can be done by formulating a research design for the purpose of exploring social and economic conditions of Muslims in the state of West

Bengal. It is suggested that an exploratory research design would be relevant in this context to carry out in-depth research.

The sample will be drawn from the diverse cross-section of the universe. A representative sample of household from both rural and urban areas will be selected on the basis of stratified random sampling. The study shall rely on both primary and secondary data. The primary data will be collected from the sampled population. The primary data will be collected with the help of both qualitative and quantitative tools viz., FGDs, Interviews and Structured Interview Schedule. Needless to say in the case of secondary data, the content analysis will be done.

It is hoped that such research would provide a lead in understanding the contemporary Indian society in a better perspective. Moreover, it also helps to understand Muslim society of West Bengal in particular. The main purpose of such research will be to generate interest among the readers to pursue further research on this issue, both at the micro-disaggregated and macro level.

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# LOCATIONAL MAP OF WEST BENGAL

