

Muslims in West Bengal: Trend Of Population Growth And Educational Status

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Introduction

India is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-linguistic country. People belonging to many religious faiths live side by side. Muslims are one of them who constitute the largest minority group in the country. This paper presents a demographic and educational profile of Muslims in West Bengal which constitute largest minority in the state. With a population of 80176197 in absolute numbers, Muslims constitute 25 per cent of the state's total population. Thus Muslims constitute the second largest religious group in West Bengal and the largest minority in the state also. The available data on the socio-economic profile of Muslims reveal that Muslims are remained socially and economically backward. Further, provisions have been made for giving incentives to the weaker sections of population so as to provide facilities to them to participate fully in education along with other sections of population. Despite various provisions, the reality is that many sections of the society are still lagging behind in education and a considerable proportion of children from these sections of population are still out of school. Thus, low participation in education becomes a stumbling block in the path of achieving the goal of universal education. It may be noted that wherever provisions have been promised 'Programme of Action' (POA) in education for the backward minorities, particularly Muslim community, were more or less on ad-hoc basis, there is hardly any serious attempt made to plan for the education of Muslims either at national level or state level. Because of the lack of reliable data on religion with regard to educational statistics in the country, the researcher has been handicapped in this problem.

On the basis of the literacy rates, the Ministry of Home Affairs had declared Muslims and Neo-Buddhists as educationally backward minorities in the POA, 1986. Therefore, it is clear that lack of data on various aspects (characteristics) of Muslims has created an obstacle in planning for their education.

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In India, the Muslim literacy rates accounts for 59.1 percent in 2001 census which is far below the national average (65.38 per cent). Zaidi (2007) analyzed literacy figures from Census 2001 and reached the conclusion that in most of the states and districts Muslims are educationally most backward and it varies from state to state and from district to district, excepting a few states and districts. For example Muslims are educationally most backward in Haryana, Punjab and Assam. However Muslim's literacy is a serious concern in Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Jammu and Kashmir and Bihar. In West Bengal it is 57.47 percent among Muslims which is about 10 per cent points less than that of the state average (68.64 per cent). Educational inequalities do not merely persist but are also increasing day by day. Growing inter-group educational disparities is one of the challenges in present India. Low level literacy among the Muslim community documents its backwardness which is supposed to be associated with the backwardness of their poor socio-economic conditions. Siddiqui (1998) pointed out that the 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. Hasan and Menon (2005) focused on various factors responsible for Muslims' educational backwardness in West Bengal. Generally, very high rural poverty and high concentration of Muslims in rural areas are the important factors in the low educational status of Muslims.

In March 2005, the Prime Minister of India appointed a High Level Committee headed by Retired Justice Rajinder Sachar which shows that "Muslims are at a double disadvantage with low level of education combined with low quality education their deprivation increases manifold as the level of education rises". In the past, the Government of India has instituted several such committees on the country's minority communities, which made numerous suggestions for ameliorating the dismal living conditions of the Muslims, who rank along with the Dalits and Tribals, the poorest and most marginalized communities in the country. However, little or no action was taken by the Government on those reports, although it is hoped that at least this time the case might be different.

The low literacy level of Muslims and SC/ST is well documented in the research studies. Present work is a modest diagnostic study on education of Muslims. An attempt has been made to analyze the status of Muslim education in terms of literacy rate as available in 2001 census. The study seems to be more significant taking district as a small unit of study; it

is the best representative of the ground reality exhibiting larger heterogeneities within a smaller regional boundary which inspires planners as well as academicians

Objectives

Following are the main objectives of the present study;

- to examine the trends of Muslim population in West Bengal.
- to examine the distributional pattern of Muslim population across the district.
- to examine the variations of literacy rate across religion and region and the status of literacy of Muslim population and their educational backwardness.
- to examine distributional relationship between Muslim population and their level of literacy.

Area of Study

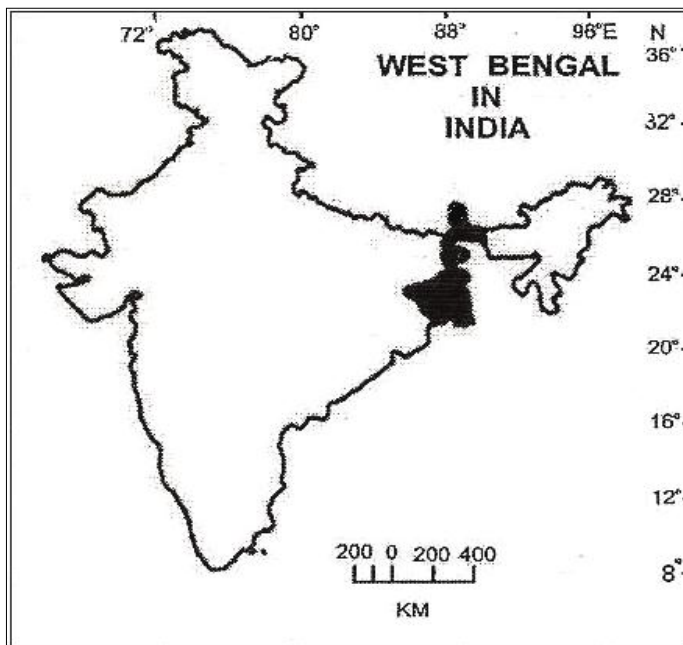


Figure 1. Location of the Study Area

West Bengal is one of the 28th medium-sized states and it is situated in the eastern part of India. It has a total area of 88,752 sq. km with 80.18 million populations out of which Muslim constitute 20.24 millions i.e. 25.2 per cent of the total state population. In terms of population, West Bengal stands fourth position among the states of India. It is surrounded by three countries, Bhutan and Nepal in north and Bangladesh in the East. On its north-east lies green valley of Assam. Bihar and Jharkhand states lie on the western side, while to the south-west

lies Orrisa state and the deep blue Bay of Bengal lies on its South. West Bengal has been divided into 3 sub-divisions which consist of 19 districts.

Database and Methodology

The paper used the districts and state 2001 census data. Simple percentage method has been used to show decadal growth rate of population and share of community wise population in the study area. Arithmetic method of population projection has been used to project community wise population. It is thus:

$$P = P_1 + (r \times t) \quad r = (P_2 - P_1) / 10$$

Where, PP is projected population, P_1 is population of base year, P_2 is population of succeeding year of base year, r is annual growth rate of population of two consecutive years (i.e., P_1 and P_2), t is time interval between base year and the year of which population would be projected.

The degree of educational backwardness has been worked out by the Coefficient of Equality (CE) method which is as follow:

$$CE = (rC/rT) \times 100$$

Where,

rC as the percentage of representation of community

rT the percentage share of that community in the total population.

If a community is not lagging behind the general population in any field under reference, it will have the CE around 100 which is normal value, if it is under represented the value CE will be less than 100 and if it is over represented the CE will be more than 100. The degree of backwardness will be measured on the basis of the deflection of CE of 100 towards the left or right, respectively.

Trends of Muslim Population

In West Bengal, there are several groups of people belonging to various races, religions, languages, and cultures and they ruled Bengal for several hundred years. Muslim rule influenced profoundly socio-religious structure of the Bengali people. The British came in Bengal in 1690 for trade, but gradually their increased influence resulted 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 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 the same religious

considerations. The Hindu-majority West Bengal became a part of Indian union and Muslim-majority East Bengal became a part Pakistan named as East Pakistan which later emerged as a independent country as Bangladesh in 1971.

TABLE-1

Trend of Muslim Population in West Bengal (in per cent)

Census Population						Projected Population			
1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011	2021	2031	2041
19.85	20.00	20.46	21.52	23.61	25.25	26.86	27.89	28.70	29.36

Source: Census of India

In West Bengal Hindus are the majority with 72.47 per cent (58 millions), while Muslims constitute as the largest minority community with 25.25 per cent (20 millions). The Muslims in West Bengal resides across the state and yet their concentration varies substantially. These two communities (Hindus and Muslims) share more than 97 per cent to the total population. The above table shows the trends of Muslims population (1951-2041) in West Bengal. In 1951 Muslim population accounted for 19.85 percent. The dominating position of the share of Hindu population continued, but then share decline from 78.45 per cent in 1951 to 72.47 per cent in 2001 (Census of India, 2001). Although, all religious communities have increased but among them Muslims have more positive growth in terms of percentage shares to the total population. If this growth continue in the same trend the share of Muslim population by 2041 is estimated to be 29.36 per cent and share of Hindu population is estimated to be 69.28 per cent. Overall, it has been observed that Muslims have been experiencing higher population growth rates than the Hindus and this is sometimes made into a political issue. Demographers have observed that the higher growth rate among Muslims is mainly due to their higher fertility rate, to some extent be associated with their low socio-economic and educational status. They have further tried to explain this in terms of the time lag and delayed changes in proximate variables between different religious groups in undergoing demographic transition (Mistry, 2005).

Distribution of Muslim Population

Muslims occupy an important position in society and culture of the state of West Bengal. Muslims are in minority both numerically as well as in terms of their position in greater socio-economic and political structure in Bengal as well as of the country also. Muslims in India constitute one of the most backward sections of the society, along with the

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neo-Buddhists, and scheduled castes and scheduled tribes etc, in terms of both educational spread and the quality of performance. They are characterized by socially backward, economically poor and politically powerless indicators (Mainuddin, 2008; Siddiqui and Hussain, 2009). According to 2001 census, 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 and Kashmir (67 per cent) and Assam (30 per cent). The Muslim population in West Bengal was 201240543 which formed 25.25 percent of the total state population and 14.64 percent of the country's total (138188240) Muslim Population. 83.22 percent (16845034) Muslim population lives in rural areas and 16.78 percent (3395509) in urban areas. Geographically Muslims are unevenly distributed throughout state. There are ten districts of state in which Muslims have million plus population.

The highest share of Muslim population with 63.67 percent (i.e. 3735380) is found in the district of Murshidabad while the district of Darjeeling has lowest share with 5 percent (i.e.85378) of total population. Three clusters of districts are made according to the concentration of Muslim population with the help of their mean and standard deviation which is shown in the Table-2. It may be consider that the districts where the concentration is more than 32.91 percent may called as '*Muslim concentrated districts*'. Further, the districts where the Muslim population is less than 16.95 of the total population may be called as '*low Muslim concentrated districts*'. It is evident from the table that out of the 18 districts of the state, 5 districts shows relatively higher concentration of Muslim population. They are Murshidabad (63.67), Malda (49.72), Uttar Dinajpur (47.36), Birbhum (35.08) and S 24 Parganas (33.24), forming a continuous region of high concentration of Muslim population in the middle parts of the state. During the Muslim ruling period in Bengal, Illiyas Shah's Kingdom at Gour and Sultan Nasiruddin and Hasan Shah's at Gour and Pandua of presently Malda district, and Nawab Shiraj-ud –Daula's Kingdom in presently Murshidabad district, are main reason for higher concentration of Muslims in central part of West Bengal (i.e. districts of Malda, Murshidabad, Uttar Dinajpur and Birbhum). Demographic concentration of Muslims in this region may be significant for their socio-economic and educational development as well as for political action if sincere efforts are made.

TABLE-2

Concentration of Muslim Population, West Bengal 2001

Region	Concentration	Districts
High	More than 32.91	Murshidabad (63.67), Malda (49.72), Uttar Dinajpur (47.36), Birbhum (35.08), S 24 Parganas (33.24)
Medium	16.95-32.91	Nadia (25.41), Howra (24.44), Koch Bihar (24.24), N 24 Parganas (24.22), Dakshin Dinajpur (24.02), Kolkata (20.27) Bardhaman(19.78)
Low	Less than 16.95	Hugli (15.14) Medinipur (11.33), Jalpaiguri (10.85), Bankura (7.51), Purulia (7.12) and Darjeeling (5.31).

Source: Computed by Author from Census of India, 2001

Muslim population ranging from 16.95-32.91 percent of the total population is considered as the '*medium slab of Muslim concentration*' which include the districts of Nadia (25.41), Howra (24.44), Koch Bihar (24.24), N 24 Parganas (24.22), Dakshin Dinajpur (24.02), Kolkata (20.27) and Bardhaman(19.78). Remaining six districts fall under 'low concentrations of Muslims', these districts form two notable region in the state, Jalpaiguri (10.85) and Darjeeling (5.31) in the northern parts and Hugli (15.14) Medinipur (11.33), Bankura (7.51) and Purulia (7.12) in the south-western part of the state.

Literacy Rate of Muslims

The literacy rate in West Bengal is not so bad and it is higher than the national average. The literacy rate in West Bengal is 68.64 per cent against the national average of 64.85 per cent. Rural literacy rate in West Bengal is 63.42 per cent and in Urban part of the West Bengal literacy rate is 81.25 per cent. There is also inter-religious inequality in literacy level (Waheed, 2006). Hence, it would be apt to examine where the different minority groups stand in terms of literacy (Jawaid, 2007). Educational backwardness is a key factor responsible for the social, cultural, economic, and political backwardness of the Muslim community in Bengal. Only a few authentic studies are available on this subject. No serious effort has ever been made to know the actual scenario of the community. Despite many central and state government sponsored educational schemes for minorities, only 57 percent of Muslims are literate in the state. Illiteracy may generally be assumed as the root cause of less development. Literacy level is highly associated with state's role. No country in the world had been able to educate all its children without state intervention (Sen, 2007). Education plays an important role in influencing the quality of human resources (Siddiqui and Naseer, 2004) as it is the media of exchanging ideas, thoughts and beliefs over time and space. Only

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education can break through the social barriers and superstitions and can bring social change, cultural advancement and by enhancing earning potentialities through achieving knowledge, skill and information for job opportunities and economic development comes consequently. Since independence much emphasis has been given on education in the country and it made remarkable progress in this regard. Yet, for various reasons, Muslims in India in general have been unable to enjoy the fruits of development and so they continue to belong to the weaker sections of the society.

According to the Census of India 2001, the literacy rate among the Muslims is 59.1 per cent; which is far below the national average (65.1 per cent). Literacy rate in West Bengal (68.64) is higher than the national average; moreover it has 12th position in literacy rate among states of India. It is interesting to note that, in spite of the fact that 25.25 per cent of the total population of West Bengal are Muslim, only 13.75 per cent accounts for the total literates of the state. Moreover, the literacy rate among Muslim is 57.47 percent which is 11.7 percent point lower than the average literacy rate (68.64) of West Bengal. There is no educational indicator except literacy rate on which data are available to show the status of Muslims or for any other religious group. This is a serious constraint in planning for the education of Muslims. Muslims in West Bengal are mainly landless agricultural labours, artisans and poor craftsmen in rural areas and in urban areas, poor labour as mill hands. The situation has been exacerbated with the steady decline of industry in West Bengal (Hasan, 2005). Thus, Muslims are almost totally dependent on the state for education, and this has resulted for some unexpected and poignant outcomes.

TABLE-3

Muslim Literacy Rate in Comparison to Other Religious Communities

	Hindus	Muslim	Christian	Sikhs	Buddhist	Janis	Total
Male	81.12	64.61	77.20	91.37	83.09	96.46	77.02
Female	63.09	49.75	62.30	81.98	66.22	88.87	59.61
Total	72.44	57.47	69.72	87.19	74.73	92.81	68.64

Note: Total population includes 'Others' and 'Religion not stated'.

Source: Census of India 2001, Final Population, West Bengal.

Table 3 reveals the inter-religious disparities in literacy level of West Bengal. Condition of the Muslims is worse than that of all other religious communities of the state; they recorded lowest literacy rate among the religious groups as only 57 of them are literate.

Literacy level of Bengali Muslims are not only less than the state's and national average literacy level but also national Muslim average literacy level, where only 64.61 per cent of males and 49.75 per cent of females are literate, or in vice-versa they are the most illiterate religious community in the state of West Bengal. The highest literacy level is found among Jain (92.81 per cent), while Sikh accounted for 87.73 per cent and Buddhist and Christian with 74.73 per cent and 69.72 per cent of literacy level respectively, occupy third and fourth position among the six religious group of the state.

TABLE 4
District wise Literacy Rate of West Bengal 2001

	District Name	General			Muslim		
		Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
1	Darjeeling	71.79	80.05	62.94	50.38	60.86	37.92
2	Jalpaiguri	62.85	72.83	52.21	55.34	64.98	45.01
3	Koch Bihar	66.30	75.93	56.12	56.07	64.59	47.11
4	Uttar Dinajpur	47.89	58.48	36.51	36.04	45.98	25.50
5	Dakshin Dinajpur	63.59	72.43	54.28	67.21	72.81	61.33
6	Malda	50.28	58.80	41.25	45.30	51.56	38.68
7	Murshidabad	54.35	60.71	47.63	48.63	54.21	42.76
8	Birbhum	61.48	70.89	51.55	59.86	68.28	50.97
9	Bardhaman	70.18	78.63	60.95	68.79	75.54	61.39
10	Nadia	66.14	72.31	59.58	49.41	54.42	44.03
11	North 24Parganas	78.07	83.92	71.72	65.05	71.41	58.13
12	Hugli	75.11	82.59	67.21	73.50	79.43	67.31
13	Bankura	63.44	76.76	49.43	59.91	71.81	46.96
14	Puruliya	55.57	73.72	36.50	53.44	71.32	34.14
15	Medinipur	74.90	84.91	64.42	64.97	75.05	54.36
16	Haora	77.01	83.22	70.11	67.80	74.13	60.78
17	Kolkata	80.86	83.79	77.30	68.06	71.25	63.61
18	South 24Parganas	69.45	79.19	59.01	59.83	68.84	50.27
	West Bengal	68.64	77.02	59.61	57.47	64.61	49.75

Source: Census of India 2001, Final Population, West Bengal.

Female literacy is one of the important indicators of educational development for any society. The table shows that the Muslim female literacy level (49.75 per cent) is lower than the general female literacy (59.61 per cent) by 9.86 percentage points. In case of state average also, Muslim female literacy rate is accounted for only 49.75 per cent which is much less than the Muslim male literacy rate (64.61). It is an interesting feature that the gap between general literacy rate of the district and Muslim literacy rate of the district varies significantly. It is clear from the table 4 that the gap between Muslim and general level of literacy is highest in Darjelling (21.41), where the general literacy rate is 71.79 percent, wherein only 57.47 percent of Muslims are literate. From the same table it can be inferred that as far as major districts are concerned Muslims are most backward in Darjilling followed by Nadia (16.73), North 24 Parganas (13.02), Uttar Dinajpur(11.85) and Koch Bihar(10.23). The state government needs to pay special attention towards the Muslim education of these districts in particular and in the state in general.

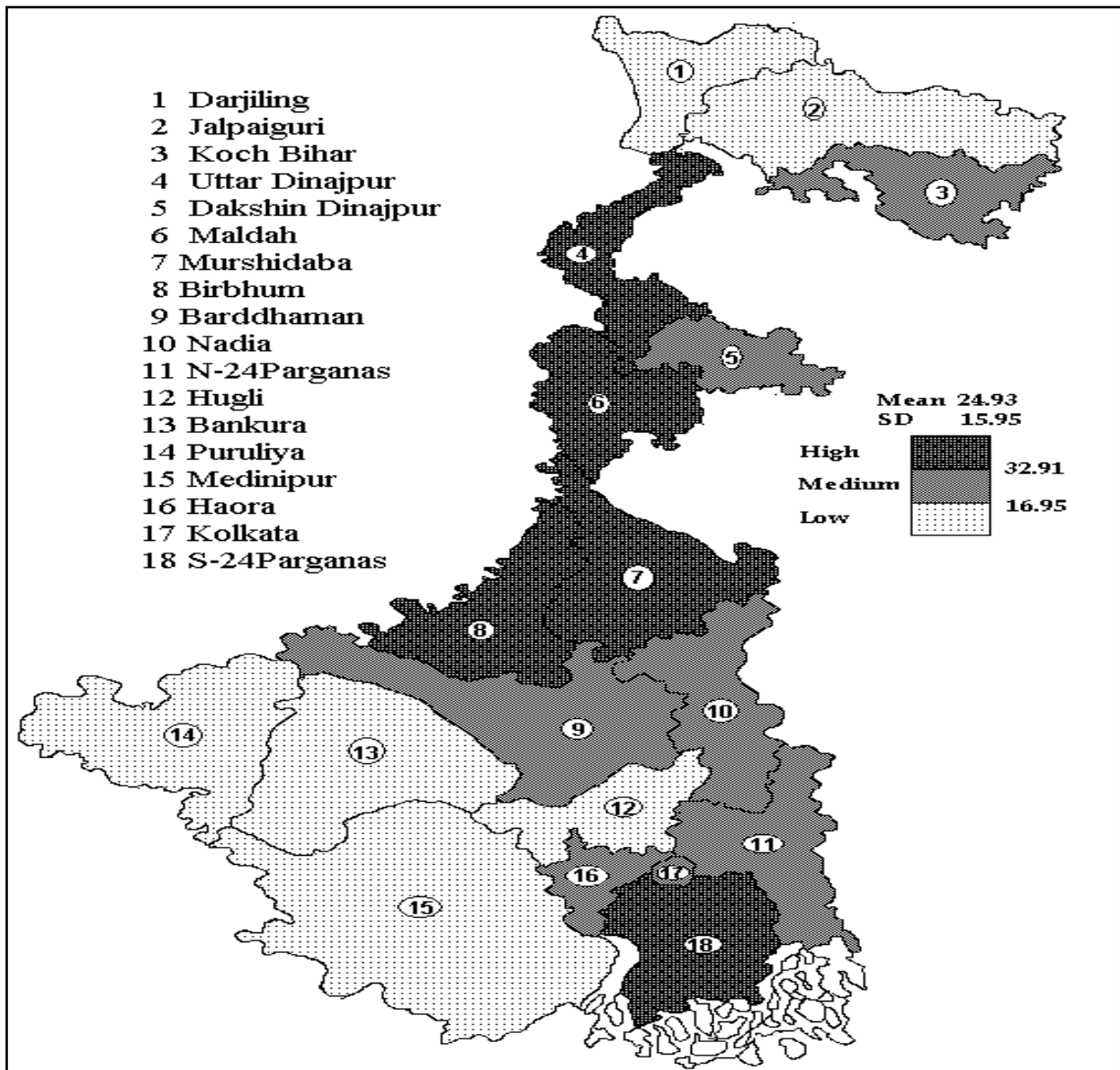


Figure 2: Distributional Pattern of Muslim Population in West Bengal

As per as the Muslim literacy level is concerned, there are 18 districts out of which four have their literacy rate at below 50 per cent. However, it is surprising to note that in district of Dakshin Dinajpur, where Muslims have registered (67.21) 3.62 percentage points higher than the general literacy level (63.59). The highest literacy levels among the Muslims have been accounted 73.50 per cent in Hugli. There are two districts (Barddhaman and Hugli) where literacy rate of Muslims is slightly higher than the general literacy level. The low level of literacy in the Muslim community is caused by their poor socio-economic condition or their poor socio-economic condition may be the consequence of low level of literacy rate of that community. For the investigation associated with literacy rate and socio economic character,

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community wise detailed study of both the aspects is crucial and is the base of diagnostic planning for human development (Figure-2).

Educational Backwardness of Muslims

There is definite correlation between the socio-economic conditions of the overwhelmingly large number of Muslims and the state of their education, which is supposed to provide a key to people's development. But this is the darkest and most discouraging aspect of life of the Muslims in the state. Though Muslims constitute 25 per cent of the total population of the state, their representation in the educational field is far warranted by their population share. Muslims are the most backward section of the society, in terms of both the educational spread and the quality of performance. This fact has been recognized by the programme of action relating to the New Education Policy (1986) which has specified Muslims and neo-Buddhists as educationally backward minorities. It speaks of providing suitable incentives to all educationally backward sections of the society, particularly in the rural areas. More specifically, referring to the minorities, it recognizes that 'some minority groups are educationally deprived or backward. It resolves that 'greater attention will be paid to the education of these groups in the interest of equality and social justice. If Muslims continue to lag behind in educational and economic spheres, it will have the effect of pulling down the general growth rate.

The relative backwardness of the Muslim community and particularly of Muslim women has been noted as a factor of comparatively high fertility rates observed among the Muslim population (Mistry, 2005). The census of India collected information regarding the literacy rate with certain amount of details of male-female and rural and urban bifurcation. The co-efficient of equality for the total literacy rate is 83.73 comprising of 87.66 and 81.54 for rural and urban areas and 83.88 and 83.46 for male and female respectively.

TABLE-5

Muslim Educational Backwardness in West Bengal, 2001

Region	Backwardness	Districts
High	More than 16.22	N.24Parganas(83.32), Uttar Dinajpur(75.26), Nadia (74.72) and Darjeeling(70.18)
Medium	7.08-16.22	Malda (90.09) ,Murshidabad(89.48), Jalpaiguri(88.04), Howra (88.04), Medinipur (86.75), S. 24Parganas(86.15), Koch Bihar (84.58) and Kolkata (84.17)

Low	Less than 7.08	Dakshin Dinajpur (105.69), Barddhaman (98.02), Hugli (97.86), Birbhum(97.35), Puruliya(96.17) and Bankura (94.44)
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Source: Computed by Author from Census of India, 2001

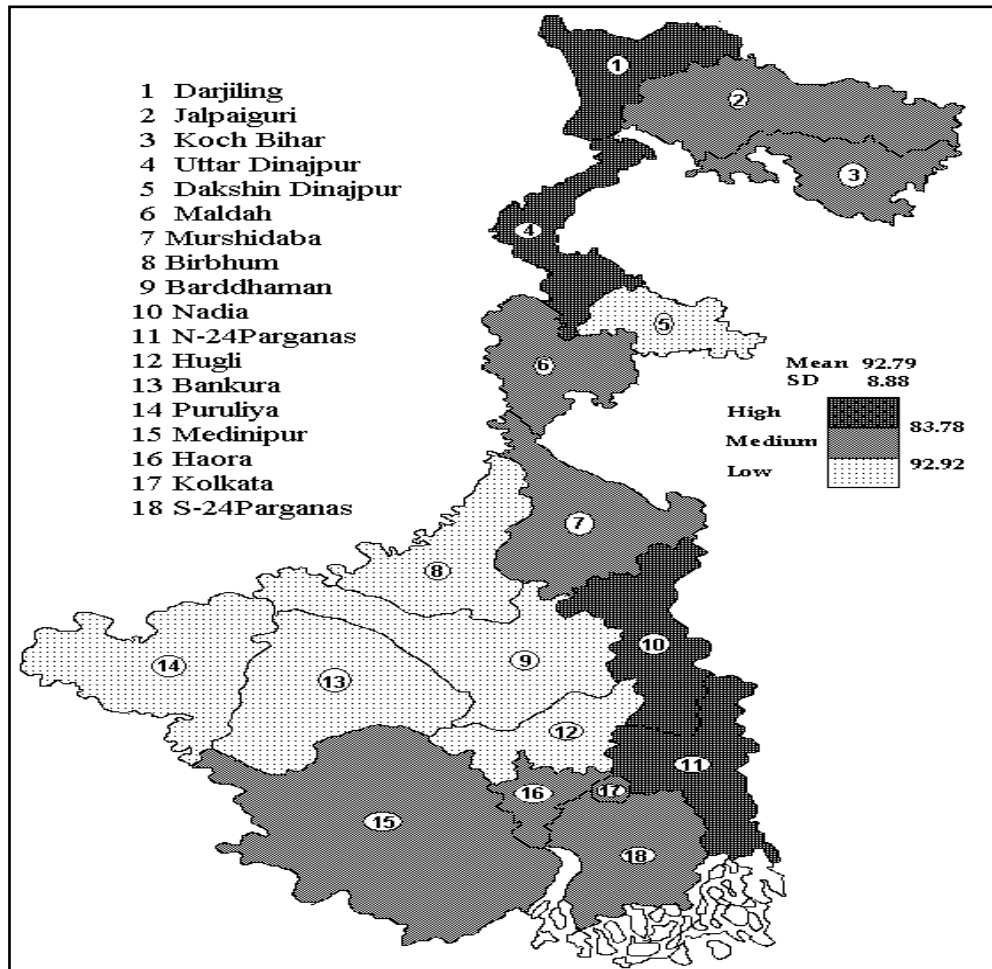


Figure 3: Pattern of Muslim Educational Backwardness in West Bengal

The clustering of the districts shows that there is comparatively high level of backwardness prevailing in the four districts namely N.24 Parganas (83.32), Uttar Dinajpur (75.26), Nadia (74.72) and Darjeeling (70.18). The backwardness is comparatively less in the district of Dakshin Dinajpur (105.69), Barddhaman (98.02), Hugli (97.86), Birbhum (97.35), Puruliya (96.17), Bankura (94.44). A closer look of this scenario says that the high backwardness does not follow any pattern of the concentration of Muslim population (Fig. 3).

Muslim Concentration vis a vis Educational Scenario

This section of the paper focuses on a distributional pattern of Muslim educational backwardness, Muslims Literacy and general literacy level with the concentration of Muslim population. Muslim community has failed to achieve socio-economic progress even though individually Muslims have, in many ways, made significant contributions to the arts, culture and even politics of the modern society. In addition, the status of Muslim literacy rate needs to be improved in general and female literacy rate in particular. In order to achieve all this enlightened leadership is required along with a great deal of commitment and focused developmental work. The most disheartening fact is that the literacy rates among Muslims of West Bengal are also lower in Muslim concentrated districts.

The figure 4.a reveals that the low concentration of Muslim population, with low level of Muslim backwardness are found in the districts of Hugli, Bankura and Puruliya; whereas the district of Uttar Dinajpur shows high levels of Muslim concentration with high level of Muslim educational backwardness. The district of Birbhum and Darjeeling shows interesting picture, Birbhum shows high level of Muslim concentration with low level Muslim educational backwardness while Darjeeling shows reverse picture i.e. low level of Muslim concentration with high level of Muslim educational backwardness. In the medium category of Muslim concentration, two districts Dakshin Dinajpur and Bardhaman have low level of education while the districts of Nadia and N-24Parganas shows high backwardness. The districts with medium backwardness are Jalpaiguri and Medinipur, have low muslim concentration while Maldah, Murshidabad and S-24Parganas have high concentration of Muslim population. Remaining three districts Koch Bihar, Haora and Kolkata shows medium level of educational backwardness with medium concentration Muslim population.

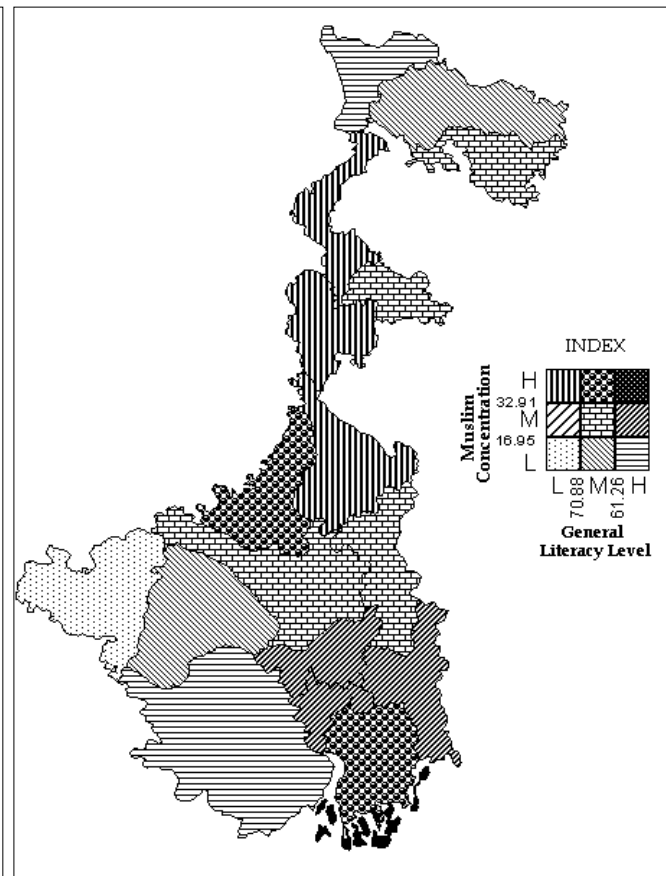
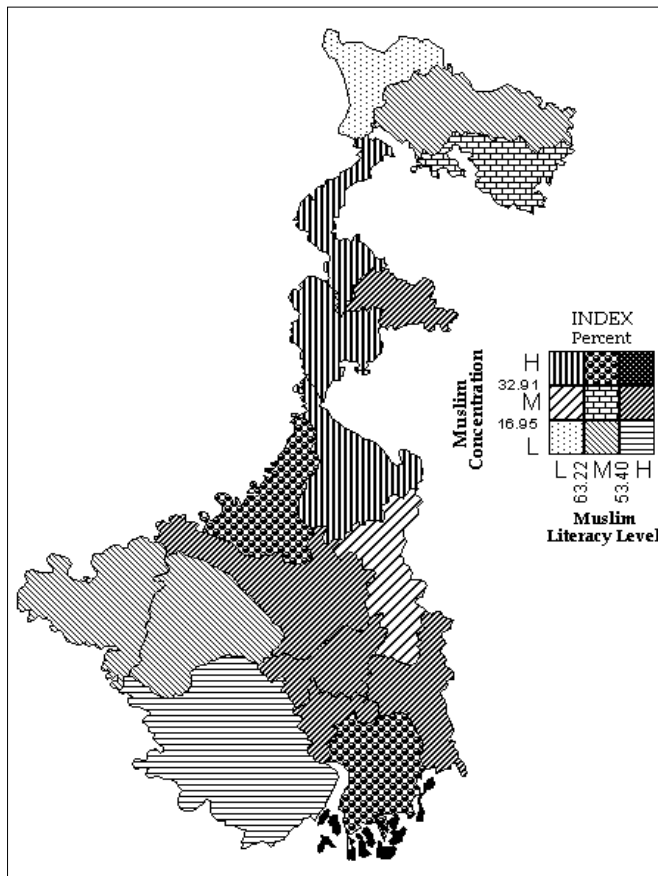
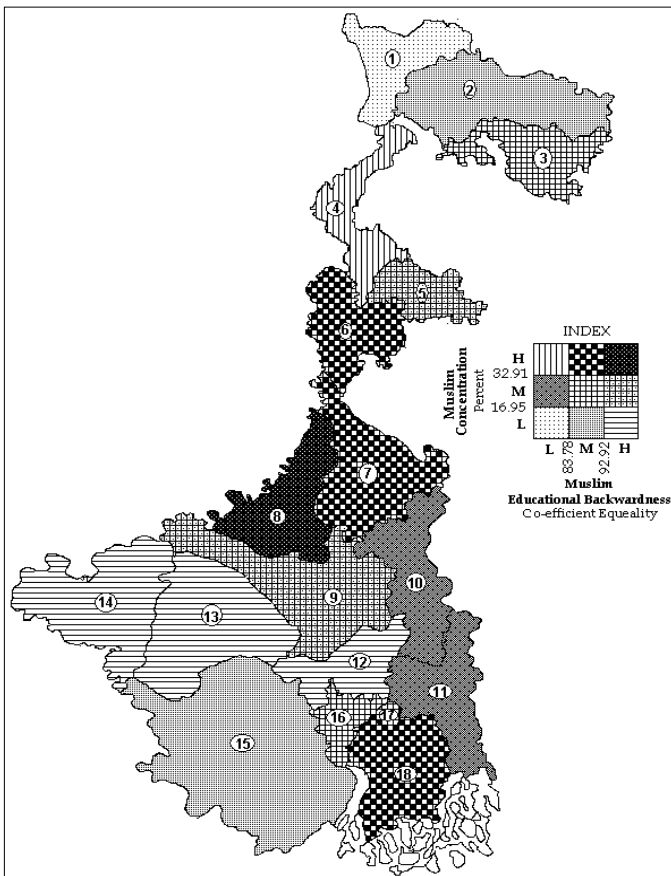


Figure 4.A: Relationship between Concentration of Muslim and Their Educational Backwardness

Figure 4.b: Relationship between Concentration of Muslim and Their Literacy Rate

Figure 4.c: Relationship between Concentration of Muslim and General Literacy Rate

The next figure 4.b reveals an interesting analysis of the district with high concentration of Muslim population which shows either low or medium level of Muslim literacy. There is no single district where Muslim population concentration is high with high level of literacy. Top three highest Muslim concentrated districts are Murshidabad, Maldah and Uttar Dinajpur, fall in the category low level of literacy while another two districts have the high concentration of Muslim population i.e. Birbhum and S-24Pargana, falls under medium level of literacy. District Darjeeling shows low level in both aspects. The high level of literacy among Muslims with low concentration are found in the districts of Hugli and Medinipur while they are moderate in the districts of Dakshin Dinajpur, Bardhaman, N-24Pargana, Haora and Kolkata. In the districts of Jalpaigur, Bankura and Puruliya Muslim concentration is low with medium level of literacy.

The figure.4.c reveals the same picture as fig.3.b with slight change. Here Puruliya is only district where Muslim concentration is low and general literacy also. The figure reveals that there is no single district where Muslim population is high with high general literacy, whereas the reverse picture i.e. low Muslim population with high general literacy has been speculated in Darjeeling, Hugli and Medinipur. Another two districts of low Muslim concentration and moderate level of general literacy are Jalpaiguri and Bankura. Among the seven moderate Muslim concentration districts, four of them also show moderate level literacy, while the districts N- 24 Pargana, Haora and Kolkata shows high level of general literacy.

It may be asserted from the analysis that higher concentration of Muslim population is reason for low rate of literacy in a region. In other word Muslim are suffering from the problem of illiteracy and it is clear that Muslims are educationally backward. Therefore, in those districts where the concentration of Muslim population is higher there is a need of having maximum focus on the education of Muslims in general and improvement of their literacy in particular.

Conclusions and Suggestions

The preceding analysis shows that Muslims form the largest minority in West Bengal, although they constitute 25 per cent of the population of the state, their concentration in six districts (where they form more than 25 per cent of population of the district) are of paramount significance. It is found that the growth of Muslim minority is slightly higher than that of the general population. It generally shows that lesser percentage of Muslims in a

district, higher is their literacy level. Whereas, the district in which the Muslim concentration is low they also recorded lower than the general literacy of the state except Darjeeling. So the concentration of Muslims in one place prevents them from education, the government discriminate those areas where the Muslims are concentrated more.

It may apparently be perceived that Muslim community is the problem for achieving socio-economic development of a region or an area. But from the above analysis it may be inferred that Muslims are the most backward section of society, standing at bottom position in the educational field when compared to the general population of West Bengal. No doubt, Muslims are not the main problem; rather mass illiteracy prevailing among them is the root cause of socio-cultural and economic development of the state in general and Muslims in particular. Immediate conclusion drawn is that, the community needs development and progress which should be about 1.47 times of what exists now, to be at par with the general population of the state of West Bengal. Raising the level of literacy is only solution to bring social consciousness among them. No doubt, socio-economic development of Muslim community might diminish the existing human group disparities. Thus Muslim dominated regions are bound to remain in low level of development may be due to the irrational allocation resource for and negligence of planners and policy makers towards these regions. Therefore it is explicit that no region is lagging behind solely because of Muslim habitation as well as deprived but it is implicit in the socio-economically backwardness of the region to which they belongs.

The urgent need is to take meaningful steps for the upliftment of Muslims who are living in abject poverty. The need of the hour is a time-bound programme of action on a war footing to remedy the situation. The following suggestions are made;

- ✓ An organization which may be a federation of all Muslim social and educational organizations and institutions may be formed at the National level with branches at State, District and Village/Town levels.
- ✓ A plan of action with particular emphasis on educational and economic development should be prepared at each level or implementation within a specific period of time.
- ✓ The Government at the Centre and in the States should adopt a liberal policy in sanctioning grants to educational institutions and industrial units to the minority community.
- ✓ The Government of India and the State Governments should implement the 15-Point Programme of the Prime Minister and the measures detailed in Chapter XIV on

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Minority Education in the National Education Programme of Action. Minority cells at national level, state, district and village/town levels should be formed or strengthened, as the case may be, for effective implementation of these programmes. There must be continuous and meaningful rapport between these Government cells and the committees formed by Muslims at each level.

- ✓ The Government should ensure that sufficient bank credit and institutional finance are given to Muslims for productive economic activities and such loans and grants should be distributed among the various districts of India on the basis of their population.

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