

## Muslims and Education of West Bengal: Theory to Pragmatism

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**Abstract:** Education and development are two sides of a same coin. As we all know that proper development is not possible without education. Education is the back bone of development of any community or nation. There is several historical survey records has been seen that many communities have destroyed without education. According to prophet Muhammed “education is more sacred, than a blood of Sahid in the battle.” Everyone should have take education irrespective of gender, caste and religion for their better life style. India is characterized by multi ethnic, multi-religious and multi-linguistic groups and Muslims is one of the largest minority groups. According to 2011 census West Bengal comprises 26% population are Muslims. According to constitution everyone should have right to education. But pragmatic scenario shows that participation of Muslims education in Bengal in general and higher education in particular is completely latent. This paper will explore some observation in connection with Muslim education in Bengal.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

India is a country of multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-linguistic groups. People are occupying in many religious faiths live side by side. Muslims are one of them who constitute the largest minority group in the country. With a population of 80176197 in absolute numbers, Muslims constitute 26 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 (Hussain, Nazmul et al, 2012). The main objective of the paper is to highlight the educational picture of Muslims of Bengal. The paper is going through the secondary sources by using sociological techniques.

**Table-1: Trend of Muslims population Growth Rate:**

1991-2001	20001-2011
17.77	13.93

Source: Census, 2011 (Provisional)

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(Ibid:2012)

**Muslims in the Development Debate in India:** The Report of the Prime Minister’s High Level Committee (popularly Sachar Committee, 2006) on the ‘social, educational and economic status of Muslims’ propelled the community to the centre of the development debate. The Sachar Committee Report (SCR) outlines that Muslims across most parts of India, as a community are deeply impoverished and suffer from huge illiteracy, a high drop-out rate, depleting asset base, below average work participation and lack of stable and secure employment.

Their deplorable situation is further compounded by their limited access to government schemes and programmers, poor credit flow from public banks and other financial institutions and meager share in public employment. Regional variations notwithstanding, Muslims, as a whole, have performed only a shade better than scheduled castes and tribes (SCs/STs) on most indices of development, while they have lagged behind the Other Backward Classes (OBCs). A year later, the report of the Commission on Linguistic and Religious Minorities (Ranganath Misra Commission, 2007) also reached a similar conclusion regarding the status of Muslims. As a follow up exercise, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government at the Centre had introduced a series of ameliorative measures – especially educational and financial – to address the development deficits faced by Muslims, in particular, and religious minorities at large. Measures such as Multi-Sector Development Programme, scholarship schemes for pre-metric, post-metric and technical education, enhanced credit flows to minorities through public sector banks, strengthening National Minorities' Development and Finance Corporation, Madarsa Modernization Scheme, Prime Minister's 15 Point Programme were initiated. In quantifiable terms, the above mentioned schemes have fallen short of meeting the laudable aims with which they were launched. However, there singular achievement have been in presenting Muslims and religious minorities as units of analyses, policy making and state induced development thinking in India( Tanweer Fazal:2013).

### **Right to Education Act, 2009 and Rights-based Framework for SSA:a**

To make elementary education compulsory the 86th Amendment of the Constitution in the year 2002 made provision of the Article 21-A, which states 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 and its consequential legislation”. The same has come in to force with introduction of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 throughout India with effect from 1st April, 2010. The salient features of the RTE Act are mentioned below:-

- i. The right of children to free and compulsory education till completion of elementary education in a neighborhood school
- ii. ‘Compulsory education’ makes it obligatory on the government to provide free elementary education and ensure compulsory admission, attendance and completion of elementary education to every child in the 6-14 age groups. In order to make elementary education “free”, no child shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which would prevent him or her from pursuing and completing elementary education.
- iii. The RTE Act mandates that eventually elementary education must be provided by formal and recognized schools. All existing EGS centers (Sishu Siksha Kendra(SSK)and Madhyamaik Siksha Kendra(MSK in West Bengal) should be converted to regular schools or closed down when children are mainstreamed into neighborhood schools.
- iv. It provides for a child not enrolled, whether never enrolled or a drop out, to be admitted to an age appropriate class in a formal school.
- v. It specifies the duties and responsibilities of the appropriate Government, local authority and parents in providing free and compulsory education, and sharing of financial and other responsibilities between the Central and State Government.
- vi. It lays down the norms and standards relating to Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTRs), buildings and infrastructure, school-working days, teacher-working hours etc.
- vii. It provides for rational deployment of teachers by ensuring that the specified pupil teacher ratio is maintained for each school ensuring that there is no urban – rural imbalance in teacher postings. It also prohibits the deployment of teachers for work not related to education, other than the decennial census, elections and disaster relief. Also school teachers should not be involved in private tuition.
- viii. It provides that teachers will be appointed only with the requisite professional training and academic qualifications. RTE (section 26) requires that vacancy of teachers in a government school or government-aided school should not exceed 10% of the total sanctioned strength.
- ix. Every unaided school, imparting elementary education, is to be registered with the appropriate authority (e.g., District Inspector's Office) within a given timeframe. Unaided schools are required to reserve 25% of the seats for children belonging to weaker sections and disadvantaged groups in the neighbourhood. The State RTE Rules should specify the limits of neighbourhood unambiguously for primary and upper primary schools.

**II. 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 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 is 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 (Hussain, Nazmul et al.; 2012).

**Table-2 : Muslim Literacy Rate in Comparison to Other Religious Communities**

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

Source: Nazmul Hussain, Md Zahir Abbas and Saba Owais: Islam and Societies,2012.

**Education:**

According to the NUEPA report, while Muslims are 25.25% of the population of West Bengal, 32.30% of all children enrolled at the primary level in West Bengal in 2009-10 were Muslims. The national average is 13.48% only (in 2009-10). In 2011, out of a total of 10,04,931 Madhyamik examinees in West Bengal, 2,53,779 are Muslim students, which is 25.27% of total Madhyamik examinees. In 2011, out of 6,38,240 Higher Secondary examinees, 1,48,777 are Muslims, which is 19.85% of total Higher Secondary examinees. In 2011, 49,588 Muslim students have appeared in Madrasah Board Examination in the state. West Bengal government has made 300 acres of land available for setting up this AMU regional campus. The Calcutta Madrasah was upgraded to Aliah University in 2007, which are currently offering five year integrated M.A and M.Sc. courses in humanities, social sciences, basic sciences, engineering, management and computer science alongside Arabic and Islamic theology. The Aliah University is already operating with some faculties and numbers of new posts were created in various departments of the university till 2010.

**Madrasa Education in West Bengal:**

The West Bengal Madrasah Service Commission was established in 2008 to overview the recruitment of madrasah teachers. By 2009, more than 4,000 new teachers were recruited by the Madrasah Service Commission. 93% of total new recruit were Muslims. According to the report of 2010 by west Bengal govt. there are 19,992 teachers engaged in Madrasah

**Table-3 : The District wise number of recognized Madrasahs along with number of students**

Sl. No.	District	Jr. High Madrasah	High Madrasah	Senior Madrasah	Total	Number of Students
1.	BANKURA	5	9	1	15	5292
2.	BIRBHUM	5	22	4	31	16795
3.	BURDWAN	0	31	3	34	14307
4.	COOCHBEHAR	0	21	2	23	13522
6.	DAKSHIN DINAJPUR	3	12	4	19	11795
7.	DARJEELING	3	2	0	5	872
8.	HOOGHLY	7	24	9	40	22175
9.	HOWRAH	5	25	3	33	19308
	JALPAIGURI	3	7	1	11	7503
	KOLKATA	0	8	1	9	3680
10.	MALDA	12	55	14	81	88381
11.	MURSHIDABAD	42	53	16	111	104193
12.	NADIA	4	14	4	22	16153
13.	NORTH 24 PARGANAS	6	28	17	51	37897
14.	Purulia	0	4	1	5	8159
15.	PURBA MEDINIPUR	2	14	2	18	7975
16.	PASCHIM MEDINIPUR	3	13	3	19	3580
17.	SOUTH 24 PARGANAS	3	38	12	53	36989
18.	UTTAR DINAJPUR	9	15	5	29	25246
19.	TOTAL	112	395	102	609	443822

Source: National Family Health Survey (NFHS):2005-06.

### III. EDUCATIONAL BACKWARDNESS OF MUSLIMS

We find concrete relation 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 ( Hussain, Nazmul et al.; 2012).

#### OBC Muslims:

The Sachar Committee has talked of the issue of social stratification among Muslims. It points out that the 1901 Census had listed 133 social groups, "wholly or partially Muslim", in India. This classification thus recognised the fact of social stratification in the community. The Committee has identified different groups of Muslims based on studies by sociologists. The community, according to these studies, as mentioned by the

Committee, is placed in to two broad categories, namely, Ashraf and Ajlaf. The former, meaning 'noble' (emphasis added), includes all Muslims of foreign blood and converts from higher castes. While Ajlaf, meaning 'degraded' (emphasis added) or 'unholy', embraces the 'ritually clean' occupational groups and low ranking converts. In Bengal, Sayyads, Sheikhs, Moghuls and Pathans constitute the Ashrafs, The ajlafs are carpenters, artisans, painters, graziers, tanners, milkmen, etc. According to the Census of 1901, the Ajlaf category includes "the various classes of converts who are known as Nao Muslim in Bihar and Nasya in Bengal. It also includes various functional groups such as that of Jolaha or weaver, Dhunia or cotton carder, Kulu or oil presser, Kunjra or vegetable seller, Hajjam or barber, Darzi or tailor, and the like." The 1901 Census also recorded the presence of a third category called Arzal: "It consists of the very lowest castes, such as Halalkhor, Lalbegi, Abdal and Bedia." The Committee has taken note of the fact that the Presidential Order (1950), officially known as Constitutional (Scheduled Caste) Order, 1950, restricts the Scheduled Caste status only to Hindu groups having "unclean" occupations. Their non-Hindu equivalents have been bracketed with the "middle caste converts" and declared OBCs.

**List of Other Backward Classes (OBC) in West Bengal:** Presently, 108 communities belong to the OBC. As notified by Govt. of West Bengal, they are divided into 2 categories: More Backward (Category-A) and Backward (Category-B) for various purposes. Most of the Muslims are considered Category A.

Baidya Muslim  
Beldar Muslim  
Bepari/Byapari Muslim  
Bhatia Muslim  
Dafadar  
Dhunia  
Hajjam  
Jolah (Ansari-Momin)  
Kasai  
Khotta Muslim  
Majhi/Patni Muslim  
Mal Muslim  
Mallick  
Molla  
Muchi/Chamar Muslim  
Muslim Barujibi/Barui  
Muslim Biswas  
Muslim Halder  
Muslim Mali  
Muslim Mandal  
Muslim Piyada  
Muslim Sanpui/Sapui  
Nasya-Sekh  
Rajmistri  
Siuli (Muslim)  
Dhali (Muslim), (Category-B)  
Pahadia (Muslim), (Category-B)  
Dhatri/Dai/Dhaity (Muslim)  
Gharami (Muslim)  
Goldar/Golder (Muslim)  
Halsana (Muslim)  
Kayal (Muslim)  
Naiya (Muslim)  
Shikari/Sikari (Muslim)  
Adaldar (Muslim)  
Akunji/Akan/Akhan (Muslim)  
Bag (Muslim)  
Chaprashi (Muslim)  
Daptari (Muslim)  
Dewan (Muslim)  
Dhabak (Muslim)  
Gazi (Muslim)

Khan (Muslim)  
 Kolu Muslim (Shah, Sahaji, Sadhukhan, Mondal)  
 Majhi  
 Malita/Malitha/Malitya (Muslim)  
 Mistri (Muslim)  
 Paik (Muslim)  
 Pailan (Muslim)  
 Purkait (Muslim)  
 Sana (Muslim)  
 Sareng (Muslim)  
 Sardar (Muslim)  
 Sarkar (Muslim)  
 Shah (Fakir)/Shah/Sha/Sahaji  
 Tarafdar (Muslim)  
 Gavara  
 Mouli (Muslim)  
 Sepai (Muslim)  
 Pailan (Muslim)  
 Purkait (Muslim)  
 Sana (Muslim)  
 Sareng (Muslim)  
 Sardar (Muslim)  
 Sarkar (Muslim)  
 Shah (Fakir)/Shah/Sha/Sahaji  
 Tarafdar (Muslim)  
 Gavara  
 Mouli (Muslim)  
 Sepai (Muslim)

**Fellowship:**

The fellowship is an important pillar for the upliftment of education of a person in general and for economically backward people in particular. Recently Government of India lunched two important fellowships for minority pupils like as Minority Fellowship and Maulana Azad National Fellowship. West Bengal Government has distributed almost 20,000 metric and post metric fellowship in the year of 2011-2012 among the Muslim minority students. UGC is the nodal agency for implementing the Maulana Azad National Fellowship for minority students, as defined by Government of India from time to time. This fellowship was implemented in the year of 209-2010.

**Table-4: Community wise distribution of 2011-2012**

State	Muslim	Christian	Sikh	Buddhist	Parsi	Total
West Bengal	75	3	0	3	0	81

Source: UGC

**Educational Loan:** According to the government report of West Bengal (March-2011) that there are 2310 student are enjoyed rupees 713.25 (in lakh) as an educational loan.

**Challenges:** Though theoretically, Govt. of West Bengal has started so many programmes and trying to implement of Sachar and Ranganathan Misra committee’s report based on their capability, yet particularly Muslims participation in higher education is negligible mainly for two reasons, one from within community and second from others notions. As we can say that Bengal Muslims are more free to send their students to the local maktab or madrash. Some of they are so fundamental centric so that they are not ready to go outside education. And second problem is basically comes from religious group mainly from dominant groups. They are sometimes blaming the Muslims as an antisocial and someone are not mentally prepared to rent house. Even though, the state of West Bengal has no occurring unexpected violence like rest of the country.

**Conclusion :** For socio-economic development of Muslims of West Bengal, we need to focus their education and educational development we must come across the infrastructure of education as like as hostel, toilet, common room( particularly for girls students), technical education like use of computers etc, classes for spoken english and sports etc. Though, govt. has started coaching for entry in various govt. services, yet it should be regular monitoring.

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