

## STATUS OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN WEST BENGAL

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Received: April 20, 2018

Accepted: May 22, 2018

### ABSTRACT

*The present paper highlights the status of Muslim women in West Bengal. They are inherently disadvantageous and marginal in all field of social living since long period of time although among all the state population, about 12.16% are occupied by Muslim women. After passing seventy glorious years of independence the major portion of Muslim women belong to the economically penurious and politically marginalized sections in Indian society and is in the most disadvantage condition with the least literacy rate. Islam ideology gives coequal right for women with acknowledge her and recognizes her independent personality factually although there is so far difference between Islam Ideology and present practices about the women. Their life style and movement in public place are under restricted and controlled. Muslim women are confined in home and lion share of them strictly obey the system of Parda Practices. And the Muslim women are educationally far behind. This is why in employment scenario, Muslim women are far behind rather than women of other religious. Muslim women are suffering due to malnutrition, misconception and different unhealthy activities during the menstruation.*

**Keywords:** Muslim women, Muslim women empowerment, Educational backwardness, Socio-economic condition, Marginal social group.

### Introduction:

India is a country having characteristic of multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-linguistic and various religious faith. So far as the minorities of India are concerned Muslim population which is the largest minority in our country. As per the census data 2011, India consists of 1210193422 absolute number of population, our state West Bengal consists of 91347736. The Muslim population of west Bengal is 24536001 which figure constitutes 26.86% of the total state population. Thus Muslims put signature of the second state religious group in West Bengal and largest minority group in Bengal. Among all the state population, about 12.16% are occupied by Muslim women (Census of India, 2011). That figure of Muslim women cannot be neglected in any sphere of life. But majority of this minority community is educationally, economically and socially backward. Almost all other minorities educationally, economically and socially better off in India as well as West Bengal. Muslims have been found most educationally backward religious minority community in national level that is why the Government of India acknowledges them 'National Backward Minority' in 1993. Nevertheless destiny of Muslims of our country has not changed in last glorious sixty nine years of independence. In 2006, The Sachar Committee also recommended that the Muslims are the most underprivileged in the country

The all round progress or development of any nation or state is not possible without considering its women regardless of their cast, color and creed as they stand for about half of the population. In tradition of West Bengal women in Muslim society used to living in a much close societal environment and they were mostly confined to homes due to many social and ritual restriction with regards to the pattern of behavior and activities (Hossain,2013). Muslim women has suffering from both internal and external oppression, not only Muslim but also women of all religious have been facing problem of social conservatism as they are weaker sex in society (Chatterjee, 2015). The only difference is that, among the other religious of India this unexpected situation is fast changing, but situation is not so positive as far as Muslim women are concerned (Mondal, 2005). lion share of Muslim women observed strict seclusion or the system of Parda Protha and they are suffering from several social disabilities. They are the victim of early child marriage (Hoque, 2016).They still remained socially, economically and educationally towards the back position when change is assortment of today. Muslim women are ignorant, illiterate and confined in their own home and mostly living in isolation due to strict rules of Prada seclusion ( Hossin and Mainuddin,2013).

### Islam Ideology and Muslim women in West Bengal

Islam gives coequal right for women with acknowledge her and recognizes her independent personality factually. According to the Islam, the women status is something solitary, something novel and something apparent. Even though Islam emphasizes the equality of men and women as yet in equality between men

and women are very wide in many fields in practice; but due to various historical, misconception about Islam and socio-economic grounds their condition is also something different from the ideal norms (Mondal, 1994). The right and privilege of Muslim women are emphasized by the Holy Quran and Hadith. "The holy Quran repeatedly expresses the need for treating men and women with equally. The contribution of women is acknowledged in the history of Islam. It is now argued that women's place in the religion of Islam has been suppressed by the conservative and fundamentalist forces. Women Passivity, seclusion, and marginal position that noticed in Muslim society have little to do with Islamic ideology, but are on the contrary patriarchal ideological construct that can be considered alien to Islam and the effect of exploitation of the power by the authoritative and reactionary forces in Muslim society." (Mondal, 2005, pp.34-35). There is so far difference between Islam Ideology and present practices about the women. Muslims are living in various part of the country that is why they are influenced by both Islamic ideology as well as local tradition. There are many stain in our societal picture such as Muslim women are living in malnutrition, superstitions, illiteracy and under the ignorant ruling of Mollah (fundamentalist). The misconception about modern technology and medical science have been made among Muslim women by fundamentalist Mollah, such that all diseases can be cured by only Mollah and they have the power to understand and give answer of all type of problem among the human being. Somehow they believe that Mollahs can understand to provide answer to all problems from railway engine to every scientific, economic problem as described in our holy book. The fundamentalism (Mollah Raj) had declared that women leadership or empowerment is prohibited in Muslim region. Although, the increasing literacy rate among Muslim women show that the Mollahs beliefs are gradually losing ground and it is silver lining of Muslim community. In fact Islam took a positive view and come forward to safe guard whatever was essential for up gradation of women in Muslim community. The preservation, Protection and promotion of the rights of women in Muslim society are highlighted by Islamic Law and Holly Quran (Kar and Ghosh, 2017: pp141).

### **Education among the Muslim women in West Bengal:**

After passing seventy glorious years of independence the major portion of Muslim women belong to the economically penurious/poor and politically marginalized sections in Indian society and is in the most disadvantage condition with the least literacy rate. The educational and socio-economic condition has not been changed since independence i.e. 1947. Although, from time to time, the government of India has formed different committee to find out the reasons of educational and economical backwardness of the Muslim community. In 1983, the Gopal Singh Committee was constituted by the Government of India and the committee announced that the Muslims are a backward community in India as well as West Bengal. As per the Sachar committee (2006) "Poverty is the main cause of poor education among the Muslim in India". Another commission Ranganath Mishra Commission (2007) stated that "Muslims are socially, economically, educationally, politically and culturally underprivileged and are far behind the main stream of Indian society". As per the Sachar Committee report, 4% of all the children of the Muslim community are enrolled in recognized school and 9% of this total attends some short of school recognized or unrecognized and remaining 91% do not have any school to attend. Those enrolled hardly complete school education and 90% of the enrolled get dropped out.

Educational backwardness is the vital key factor and responsible for the social, cultural, economical and political backwardness of the Muslim community in West Bengal. It is unclosed that the literacy and educational level of Muslim in West Bengal are far the national average rate. According to the Census 2011, the literacy rate in West Bengal is 77.08% which is significantly higher than national average rate of 74%. But the literacy rate among the Muslim community reached to only 57.18% which is too much lower than the national average figure. In Bengal Muslim literacy 57.18 is lower than Schedule Tribe literacy 57.92% (census, 2011). Muslim literacy is the least in west Bengal among all the socially disadvantage community. It is terrible event that Muslim literacy is less than all social disadvantage section and Muslim women literacy 49.75% is too much less than Muslim literacy 57.18% in west Bengal. Muslim female literacy rate is much less than Muslim male literacy rate of 64.61 % (Ghosh & Kar, 2017). The Muslim women of rural areas are belonging very worse condition in relation to literacy. Average literacy of rural Muslim women (47.87) is much less than Muslim women literacy of urban areas (59.23%). In the study of Rahaman and Bhumali (2011:84 and 91) described " among various reasons, the major reasons for educational backwardness among the Muslim are poor economic condition limited number of government and Government aided school in Muslim areas and lack of job opportunities of the educated people in the community. Perhaps Muslim women are lagging behind in education because of socio-infrastructural facilities for education in Muslim consented areas. Muslims have limited access to the far off schools. Thus the need of the hour is to provide job oriented education and also to setup sufficient number of technical

school for male and female separately in the Muslim consented areas". According to the "National Education Survey" Muslim women are seven times behind than Hindu women in high school education and in post high school they are nine times behind them. Hassan and Menon, (2004: 47) mentioned that ' the educational backwardness of Muslim women is a matter of particular concern, especially the high dropout rate, resulting in subsequently fewer proportions of them managing to complete high school". The parents of Muslim girls involves in common belief that education of their girls is not so important due to wrong moral and cultural values. Initially girls are enrolled but they are withdrawn after few years or at an early age for marriage. High dropout picture is shown among the Muslim girls in west Bengal (Ghosh and Kar, 2017). Some parents are less interested to admit their girls in school and co-education school due to parda system and few of them are interested to admit their girls in Government unrecognized Madrasha only for ritual education and they think that this type of girls education is the main stream of fundamental of ritual, There is often misconception regarding "purity" of girls. They think that the purity of girls has been lost during the time of higher education or university education or travel aboard.

### **Socio-Economic status of Muslim Women in West Bengal:**

The most important factors for socio-economic development of individuals are educational achievement and employment opportunity. Muslims of west Bengal are facing both of those problems. Muslims of India as well as west Bengal are lagging behind in terms of quantitative and quality education. "Major part of Muslims of West Bengal belongs in poor economic condition. Muslim women are lagging behind in education probably owing to socio- cultural pattern of the family and the society. The pessimistic attitude to the education of the girls and the lack of accessibility of infrastructural amenities for education in Muslim concentrated areas are two factors which act as bottleneck of their development. They do not have adequate access to far away school. In order to provide job oriented education and to set up adequate number of technical school separately for male and female in the Muslim concentrated areas is necessary"(Rahaman and Bhumali 2011: 84 and 91). Muslim women follow strict seclusion or parda system. Women of muslim society are ignorant, illiterate and confined in home. They are mostly living in isolation on account of Parda practices. In the Muslim society the unilateral form of divorce and polygyny are found and the girls are predominantly married at a very premature age early after puberty (Hoque, 2016).

As per Sachar committee report (2006), Muslims occupies the second highest incidence of poverty, with 31% of people bellow poverty level, following SC/STs who are the most poor with a head count ratio (HCR) of 35%. The literacy rate among the Muslim is far below the national average in 2001 and the rate of decline in literacy was much lower than SC/STs. 25% of Muslin children in the age6-14 age group either never to school or else dropout at some stage. In considering the employment of Muslim in proportion, they are marginal. Muslim have considerable lower representation in government jobs, including in public sector undertaking, compared to other exclude groups. Muslim participation in professional and management cadres in the private sectors is also low. Their participation in security relates activities (like police) is considerable lower than their population. Muslims representation in civil service, state public service commission, railway, department of education etc are also equally appalling (Biswas, 2017, pp.261- 262).

Women empowerment implies their better position in socio-political as well as economic sphere. Women empowerment in Muslim society is crucial as they continue to be victimized by ongoing traditional social structure, and social institution of their community. Backwardness in education of major part of Muslim women is one of the crucial reason for their lagging behind in employment, where economic empowerment is also indispensable for rising their status in social change and social hierarchy. Therefore backwardness in education, poverty, economic dependency and ignorance of their rights have made the Muslim women further vulnerable to exploitation. According to the census data 2011 the work participation rate of Muslim women in West Bengal in relation to other community is very poor. In Bengal the work participation rate (WPR) of Hindus, Christian and Buddhist are 19.2, 29.2 and 25.8 respectively where as the work participation rate (WPR) of Muslim Women is only 14%. In rural west Bengal, a huge number of Muslim women are engaged as agricultural labour.

### **Employment picture of Muslim women in West Bengal**

Muslim women of Bengal are far behind rather than Hindus women of Bengal in relation to Employment. In the study of Kar and Ghosh, (2017) revealed that) the working condition of Muslim women in village is not satisfactory. Average 60 % of Muslim women are engaged as household or housekeeping work and remaining part of this section are involved in different economic activities like that non paid work (in their

own field) paid work (agrarian labour) and Government jobs (including self-help groups and others). The planting paddy, jute sapling and untie tissue of jute from streams are known as agrarian work (Kar and Ghosh, 2017:173-177). Due to poverty and backwardness of education teenage Muslim girls are also involved in household work. They bring up duck, fowls, cow and goats in the households (Hossain and Mainuddin, 2013). A noticeable number of them are engaged as bidi worker and local hair industry worker. A significant number of muslim women also specializes in handicraft work like needle work, zori work, embroidery, tailoring and paper craft. Muslim women of rural areas and suburban of west Bengal are found to arrive in Kolkata and other cities every morning largely by local train in search of daily work job. Muslim are mostly self employed where as Hindus are better employed in regular salary paying job in urban areas (Ghosh and Kar). "The work participation rate of Muslim women is extremely low. The landholding is better among Hindus than Muslims in rural part of India. Muslims are by far, the least educated when compared with Hindus and Christian population in India" (Sharif, 2003: 92). "Muslim women have the least work participation rate (WPR) with large gap between the WPR for Muslim women and Hindus women or Christian women among all three categories of work. Muslim women in self employed are 60% who are engaged as household or housekeeping work and the employment rate as regular work in urban neighborhoods are 15.7% for Muslim women as compared 27.7 for Hindu women and 51.5 for Christian women and in rural region there is also an approximately analogous employment status for Hindu and Muslim women comparing 3.6 and 3 % respectively. These figures emphasize the marginal presence of Muslim women in salaried job. Muslim women marginal presence as workers in the formal economy is pointed out through their high self employment rates and the subsequent low participation in salaried job indicating their visibility as casual employees. Again it is very complicated to pin point specific roots behind their meager employment status due to lack of existing research and analysis in sphere employment of Muslim women while their educational status must apparently exercise a significant pressure in both urban and rural areas on the type and ranks of their employment" ( Kazi, 1999: pp.24-25).

#### **Health status among the Muslim women in West Bengal:**

Huge number of ill health and malnutrition are shown among the Muslim women. Commonly health care is almost ignored due to lack of nutrition, poor health, lack of maternity centre and lack of health awareness. Muslim women as a house wife who takes the responsibility of all of her family but there is not few men to take responsibility of her (Kar and Ghosh, 2017). Women are suffering due to misconception and different practices during the menstruation. They used to take clothes instead of sanitary napkin; this is why frequently they are suffered for reproductive truck infection (Pandit, Bhattachariya and Bhattachariya, 2014). Due to ignorance and illiteracy of Muslim women sometimes the pulse polio vaccination has been refused for their child. Pregnant Muslim women in west Bengal suffering from anemia are 98.6% where as Hindus are 96.4%. A large number of poor Muslim men and women in West Bengal have not seen a doctor in their life time. So they depend on quack (Kar and Ghosh, 2017: pp141).

#### **Political awareness among the Muslim women in West Bengal:**

Involvement in political matter of Muslim women in West Bengal is almost negligible. Due to the causes of low level of modern higher education, confinement of women in their house, Parda practices and less opportunity to interact with other of outside world the Muslim women are far behind from the political awareness in west Bengal (Chatterjee, 2015). Education not only plays the vital role for empowerment and job opportunity but also plays the vital role for self-awareness and self-confidence about the power of discussion making. Most of the Muslim women have no knowledge about the political parties and the ideologies of the political parties. Although, in election they are too much involved to casting their vote without any justification the eligibility of contesting candidates. In the scenario of casting vote they feel empowered though to whom they should cast vote is not decided by them. The family decision mainly the decision of male member of family is considered to be the final one (Kar and Ghosh, 2017:pp.147). But the present situation is slightly changed somewhere due to the reservation system in three tires general panchyat election.

#### **Conclusion:**

Taking into consideration the above discussion it can be concluded that Muslim women in West Bengal are lagging behind the mainstream in almost every sphere of progress. In the perspective of socio-economic situation, educational status, employment, health status, political awareness and political participation, Muslim women are most marginalized, secluded and deprived section of the society. Muslim women of Bengal have been retarded in the field of education, knowledge, economy, culture and political participation

by poverty and educational backwardness. It is a visible fact that the educational status of Muslim with particular reference to the women is very low, inadequate and negligible due to complex phenomenon of educational problems among the Muslim women of West Bengal where historical, situational, educational and socio-cultural variables are together playing vital role to perpetuate the situation in the contemporary time when modernization is the main characteristic of today.

The backwardness of any religious men or women in any part of country is a national calamity and should be treated as an obstacle of whole nation. To overcome the situation of Muslim women in Bengal need to be done to build awareness of development, greater inspiration, self reliance and self correction within the community. The over-all development of Muslim women is needful immediately. For all over development and change the Muslim society, the need come out from their low level of aspiration, frustration, cultural retardation, societal depression.

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