

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF INDIAN MUSLIMS: A STUDY OF WEST BENGAL

Md Mainuddin

Research Scholar, Department of Sociology,
Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi (India)

ABSTRACT

Socio-economic condition and political representation is an important indicator to measure the development level of any community. This paper is based on the secondary data. The main objective of the study is to explore the socio-economic condition and political representation of Muslims of West Bengal. Though there is paucity of literature and data about this classified as backward community, it is an attempt to gather the data from various sources and put together in a systematic fashion and analyzed. Indicators such as population, urban population, sex ratio, literacy, educational attainment, work participation rate and political representation are discussed. Hence, one can easily understand the plight of the community who are the victims of a process of invidious discrimination in Indian society.

Keywords: Indian Muslims, Economy, Education and Politics.

INTRODUCTION:

“Silence”, is a powerful enemy of social justice.

- Amartya Sen,

“The Argumentative Indian”

The larger section of population of India, in contrast, is non-Muslim, but Muslim population is still the third largest in the world (following Indonesia and Pakistan). India has one of the most diverse indigenous populations. People belonging to many religions like Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and Christianity live in this country since time immemorial. Muslims constitute the largest minority community with 14 per cent population of this country at the end of 2001 census¹. They are not only the largest minority community, but their presence is visible in all the states and union territories. Nonetheless, discrimination, social stagnation and educational marginalization have cumulatively resulted in growing economic backwardness of the Muslims in large parts of the country (Sikand, 2006). This largest minority community has been relegated to the lowest socio-economic stratum amongst all religious minorities in the post-independent India. More often the community has become the 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. Above consequence are the results of communal riot and it is a two way process. Moreover, it is often the minority community who were at disadvantage position in communal riots. In India it is evident that most of the communal riots occurred between the majority and the minority groups. The two most vulnerable minority group in India are Muslims and Christians. Historians and anthropologists have struggled to understand the religious nationalism of South Asia. They conclude that one of the most tragic outcome have been accelerating violence against the Muslim minority. For example, the destruction of mosque in late 1992 by organized Hindu activists, men and women in the day light. They denied the law of land and ‘insisted that they could not await the decisions of an ordinary court to adjudicate rights to the land: their claim transcended mundane legality’ (Metcalf, 1995). Most of the victims were Muslims. Muslims had been the victims of a process of invidious discrimination. As considerable evidence exists, a process of marginalisation of minority communities exists in almost all societies and there is nothing to warrant that the same is not true of Muslims in India to a greater or a lesser degree (Ahmad, 2007). Muslims have negligible influence on the process of economic development (Beg, 1989). The socio-economic condition of Muslims has not improved much before and after the independence. In pre-Independent India, In this regard W. W. Hunter wrote, “...earlier it was impossible for a well born Musalman to become poor; at present it is almost impossible for him to continue rich” (Hunter, 1969). 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 independent India and their general economic condition has been deteriorating progressively (Ahmad, 1975).

Until recent time there were no reliable statistics to explore the situation of Muslims including other religious minorities in India. Whatever the literature available is based on the guesstimates and micro-level study (Alam & Saraswati, 2007). Though, volumes of literature are available on the study of Islam and its practice by Muslims in India, but its use is limited to study of Muslims in contextual or Anthropological perspective (Mainuddin, 2011) or in other words, ‘role of religion in Muslim life and culture’ (Hasan and Menon, 2004). For the first time, the data on Muslims socio-economic indicators have been released by National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) through its 43 round survey conducting during 1987-1988. The analyzed state wise data reveals us that the presentation of Muslims are poor in most of the socio-economic indicators like literacy, work participation rate, land ownership, government jobs and school continuation rate (Shariff, 1995, Kuran and Singh, 2010). In case of West Bengal, Muslims are at disadvantage position in terms of physical and infrastructure facilities even where they constitute the majority population of a district (Alam, 2009). This socio-economic backwardness of Muslims is not merely confirmed by the individual researches and surveys, and voluntary organizations but also by various Committees appointed by Government of India from time to time. 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 (GOI, 2006). There appears a substantial difference in the socio-economic and political representation of major religious communities in India. Among all the religious communities, Muslims are the most socio-economically underdeveloped and politically under-representative community in Indian society, as the paper shall attempt to show. It has been noted that the underprivileged sections of this numerically significant minority group has not received social and political support from the state, if their position is compared with their counter part in the Hindu community (Dasgupta, 2009). The poor situation of

Muslims is similar in various Indian states except southern region comparatively. The Muslims living in West Bengal are poor and deprived instead of their rich history in pre-partition period. The first *census of India 1901* puts accurately the Muslim population at between 70% and 90% of the total. This large population attracts geographers, historians, travelers and academicians from various corners of the world from time to time like Sulaiman Tajir (d. 851), Ibn Khurdahbih (d. ca. 850), Masudi (d. 950), Idri Si (d. ca. 1150), Ma Huan (1433), and Vasco da Gama (1498). They came to this part of the delta (Bengal is earlier called as) and stayed there and explore about Muslims and their way of life which is found in their travel account or some other form. In between 1503 and 1508- another traveler named Ludovico di Verthema wrote that “this city was one of the best that I had hitherto seen, as has a very great realm” adding that the Sultan’s entire army, two hundred thousand men, were Muslims (Eaton, 1994). Muslims ruled Bengal for 500 years and more in pre-partition period but today they are under-privileged community in the state. On this above background, the Muslims of West Bengal has been taken as a sample of this study to present the situation of Muslims from particular to general.

In West Bengal Muslims are not the exceptions. There is a marked scarcity of sociological inquiry on the Muslim community in the state (Moinuddin, 2000). Moreover, no sociological inquiry has been made on Muslims to analyze the socio-economic and their political representation as a whole. They are educationally most backward, economically poor and politically a powerless community of the country in general and of West Bengal in particular (Mainuddin, 2008 and Hussain, 2009). Although they constitute 25 per cent of the total population of the state, yet 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 (Dasgupta, 2009). However, of late, some exclusionary state policies are drawing lines between the majority and the minority communities. This is one of the factors that led to the marginalization of Muslims in West Bengal (Dasgupta, 2009). There is persistent under-representation of Muslims in central and state legislature (Hasan, 2009). The state government did not pay adequate attention to economic problems Muslims that became a cause for their alienation.

Socio-economic differentials in India at the level of religious aggregation are simplistic and not advisable. However, academic research has to reflect the socio-economic and cultural realities of its age. The contemporary politicization of religion is such that a new focuses which can be called as ‘political economy and political demography of religions’ is the need of the hour (Shariff, 1995). Even today it is important to understand that ‘the mainstreaming would require a significant change in the nature of politics’ (Besant, 2011). Beyond this debate the need to conceive this paper and write it. Hence, this systematic study helps to understand Indian society in better perspective. This paper aims to gather various types of data like demographic, social, economic and political data from census and other secondary sources and put together in a systematic fashion for an objective assessment of the reality. It also aims to analyze the collected data by using various simple statistical tools. Therefore, this paper shall try to analyze the socio-economic condition and political representation of Muslims in India in general and of West Bengal in particular.

THE STUDY AREA:

West Bengal is one among the 28 Indian states and it is situated in the eastern part of the country. It lies between 85° 50'E and 89° 50' E longitude, the latitudinal extent of the state is from 21° 10' N to 27° 38' N. It has a total land area of 88,752 sq. km. In terms of overall population size, West Bengal stands fourth amongst the larger states of India. It is surrounded by three countries: Bhutan and Nepal in the north and Bangladesh in the east. On its north-east lies the green valley of the state of Assam; on the western side Bihar and Jharkhand states; while to the south-west lays the state of Orissa. The Bay of Bengal lies on its South. The state of West Bengal has been divided into 3 sub-divisions which together consist of 19 districts. The state inhabits a total population of 80,176,197 persons comprising 41,465,985 males and 38,710,212 females.

INDICES OF SOCIO- ECONOMIC CONDITION OF MUSLIMS:

In order to analyze the socio-economic condition and political representation of the Muslims, many broad indicators can be utilized. But it is reported that there is dearth of data on Indian Muslims. Unfortunately, however, the leading data collection agencies in the country, namely, the Registrar General’s Office and the National Sample Survey, do not provide data by religion on grounds of political considerations though the data is available with them (Ahmad, 1981). But, the last census of India (2001), for the first time in post-independent India, has come out with religion-wise data on few socio-economic indicators like, sex-ratio, literacy level and workers. Hence, we limit our study to demographic, urban population, sex ratio, literacy rate, educational attainment, work participation rate and political representation of the community.

DISTRIBUTION OF MUSLIM POPULATION:

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). 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 in Table 1.

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

TABLE 1: Some Demographic Aspects of Muslims of West Bengal, 2001

Districts	Population (%)	Urban Pop. (%)	Sex Ratio	Literacy (%)
West Bengal	25.23	16.78	933	57.47
Murshidabad	63.67	8.32	958	48.63
Maldah	49.72	1.62	950	45.3
Uttar Dinajpur	47.36	2.12	950	36.04
Birbhum	35.08	4.29	952	59.86
South 24 parganas	33.24	13.15	948	59.83
Nadia	25.41	3.93	938	49.41
Haora	24.44	47.37	910	67.8
Koch Bihar	24.23	3.35	954	56.07
Noth 24 parganas	24.22	20.90	929	65.05
Dakshin Dinajpur	23.93	0.43	956	67.21
Kolkata	20.05	100.00	739	68.06
Bardhaman	19.78	25.29	920	68.79
Hugli	15.14	23.70	958	73.5
Medinipur	11.35	11.41	953	64.97
Jalpaiguri	10.85	8.63	941	55.34
Bankura	7.50	4.54	924	59.91
Purulia	7.12	14.70	935	53.44
Darjeeling	5.30	29.95	868	50.38

Data Source: Computed by author from Census of India, 2001.

URBAN MUSLIMS:

The India's population is predominantly rural and hence the Muslim population. But the level of urbanization has been higher than the average. According to 2001 census, Muslims national average of urbanization is 35 per cent, which is quite higher than the national average of 27 per cent. In contrary only 16 per cent 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 Muslims of West Bengal are largely rural community as 83 per cent Muslims live in villages. Among the Muslims in the rural areas it is found that they are deprived community in West Bengal including the state of Bihar, Assam and Orissa (Srinivasan and Mohanty, 2004). The Muslims are excluded from the resources allocated by government agencies in the various districts of West Bengal. Being, a rural community they are poor, landless and educationally backward. It is evident that 'the ratio of population to amenities worsens progressively with an increasing proportion of Muslims in the clusters' (Alam, 2009).

It is quite evident from the data that in most of the district the concentration of Muslims in cities are thin. In almost all the districts the urban percentage is less than 30 per cent except Howrah (47.37 per cent). The highest urban concentration of Muslims is in the district of Kolkata i.e. 100 per cent (because Kolkata is a metropolitan city) and lowest in Dakshin Dinajpur i.e. 0.43 per cent. There are four districts in which their percentage lies in between 20-30 per cent and these districts are Darjeeling, Bardhaman, North 24 Parganas and Hugli. In

remaining twelve districts their urban population is less than 20 per cent and these districts are Jalpaiguri, Koch Bihar, Uttar Dinajpur, Malda, Murshidabad, Birbhum, Nadia, Bankura, Purulia (14.7), Jalpaiguri and Medinipur. Though Muslims constitute 16 per cent 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” (Siddiqui, 1998). Instead of the repeated try of the congress government to ameliorate the conditions of Muslims, the fact is hard to swallow that the conditions of Muslims are quite bad (Besant, 2011).

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 this to depict the proportionate share of female in the population sample. Sex ratio is defined as number of females per 1000 males. The sex ratio of population of a country or a community is an important indicator for measuring their socio-economic condition as well as the extent of prevailing equality between males and females at a given point of time.

Declining sex ratio is one of the serious problems for a country or a community. At present, India is one of the country, which is facing the problem of declining sex ratio and West Bengal is not different. The menace of declining sex ratio has surfaced due to the conglomeration of various factors, which inter alia are a) Female infanticide, b) Taking less care of the female child and of lactating mothers, c) poor availability of nutritious food, d) 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 (Jawaid, 2007).

The trend of sex ratio in W.B is favourable to females as it shows a continuous trend of increasing sex ratio from 865 in 1951 to 934 in 2001. In provisional census 2011 the trend of increasing sex ratio is maintained in West Bengal because the state has sex ratio of 946 females per thousand males. As per census 2011, average sex ratio in West Bengal is 946 i.e., two point more than national average i.e., 944 (Census of India, 2011). Among the various religious communitiesⁱⁱ, 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), while sex ratio among other religious groups is 981 for Buddhists, 929 for Jains. Christians, is the only religious community having favourable sex ratio of 1002. 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. There are two districts which have same and highest sex ratio of 958 among the Muslims is Murshidabad and Hugli. There are 12 districts having Muslim Sex ratio more than the state average, these are Murshidabad (958), Hugli (958), Dakshin Dinajpur (956), Koch Bihar (954), Medinipur (953), Birbhum (952), Maldah (950), Uttar Dinajpur (950), South 24 Parganas (948), Jalpaiguri (941), Nadia (938) and Purulia (935). Though prima facie higher sex ratio seems to be an encouraging fact, but the underlying reason proves to a gloomy scenario. Several researches have brought to light that due to the male-selective out- migration process in these districts, the sex ratio got such a status. It means, for economic reasons more male than female migrates nearby urban centres like Uttar Pradesh and Delhi. In remaining districts the sex ratio is less than the state average and these districts are North 24 Parganas (929), Bankura (924), Bardhaman (920), Haora (910), Darjeeling (868) and Kolkata (739). The sex ratio among Muslims in West Bengal shows an edge over majority community. It indicates that factors like infanticide, foeticide, child mortality rate and practice of child preference are less prevails among Muslims. Analytically, it is evident that ‘Muslim women are not less autonomous than Hindus in many areas, such as, in terms of their autonomy in over women’s healthcare access and women’s earnings’. The regional variations shows that son preference is greater among the Hindus, Muslim women’s better health at birth of children, Muslim non-vegetarianism and Muslim women’s lower representation in jobs out -side home as possible factor. The last may have some positive benefit in terms of care of children, (cited in Wilkison, 2010). In summary, it also implies that status of Muslims women in the family is somehow better as compared to other religious community, but they are economically not independent but this dependency is changing as Muslims girls are more educated in recent past. This suggests that there is less overt discrimination against girl child, at least in the allocation of food and healthcare and practice of female foeticide and infanticide, among Muslims than among other social groups (Deolalikar, 2010). Nevertheless Muslims of West Bengal are socio-economically poor.

LITERACY RATE:

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 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. In rural areas Muslim literacy rate is about 56 per cent as compare to Urban Muslims i.e., 66 per cent. As literacy rate in rural areas is less than the urban areas and also Muslims of West Bengal are rural community hence, we can say that Muslims are educationally backward as compared all other minorities.

There is also inter-religious inequality in literacy level (Waheed, 2006). Hence, it would be apt to examine where the different minority group stand in terms of literacy (Jawaid, 2007). Recent study found 'the literacy rate among Muslims are lower than most other SRCs (Socio-Religious Communities) and are not increasing fast enough to converge with literacy rates of other groups' (Basant & Shariff, 2010). The data indicates that the literacy rate of Muslims is the lowest (i.e. 57.47 per cent) among the six religious groups in West Bengal while that of the Jains the highest i.e. 92.81 per cent. Sikhs occupy the second position with literacy rate of 87.19 per cent and third position by Buddhists with literacy rate of 74.73 per cent. Christians occupy the fifth position having literacy rate of 69.72 per cent, more than state average. The crux of the above discussion leads to the conclusion that Muslims are the most educationally backward among other religious minority community.

Likewise, within community literacy rate also differs from one district to another. 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 per cent and lowest literacy rate is found in the district of Uttar Dinajpur i.e 36.04 per cent. 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 per cent). The districts like Kolkata, Haora, Dakshin Dinajpur, North 24 Parganas and Medinipur have literacy rate less than state average but more than 60 per cent. In above mentioned districts the literacy rate of Muslims is though more than 60 per cent but the important dimension is that in Hugli which have the highest literacy rate of Muslims constitute only 15.14 per cent of Muslim population and Haora with 24.44 per cent 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 per cent. The literacy rate in three districts namely Nadia, Murshidabad and Malda is low and it lies between 40 to 50 per cent. Out of these three districts two districts that is Murshidabad (63.67 per cent) and Malda (49.72 per cent) constituted more than 50 per cent Muslim population but lowest literacy rate. It is because of this unique combination (of high Muslims population and low Muslims literacy rate), it can be deduced that as the concentration of Muslim population increases in the districts, the literacy rate decreases or rather that areas of higher Muslim concentration have lower literacy levels, which renders them disadvantaged. This is one of the negative capabilities for the socio-economic development of any community as emphasized in Human Development Report, 2004 (UNDP, 2004).

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL:

Education plays a significant role in the dissemination of modern attitudes, values, approach and rational outlook (Khurshid, 2008). Educational level of a society or a community cannot be judged from its literacy rate, though it is an important indicator for making a distinction between literate and non-literate. A literate person is not defining on the basis of his/her educational attainment but only on the basis of knowledge of reading or writing any of the language. Thus 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).

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. Here the paper deals with the following levels like Below primary, Primary, Middle, Metric, Higher secondary and Graduate. Though census of India 2001 for the first time after Independence provides age wise educational level data of religious communities, we have analyzed, 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. It must be noted here that total population of the state in the age group of 7 and above is 6,87,61,975, While Muslims constitute 1,64,64,543 crore.

Table 2
Distribution of Literates by Educational Level, Religious Community

Religion	Below Primary	Primary	Middle	Matric/ Secondary	Higher Secondary	Graduate And Above
Total**	16347698	11449999	8050643	4859685	2287115	3186374
Hindus	11470789	8719791	6671953	4181271	2048622	2932968
Muslims	4541597	2494842	1198591	570473	192216	195192
Total** (%)	23.77	16.65	11.71	7.07	3.33	4.63
Hindus (%)	22.61	17.19	13.15	8.24	3.53	5.05
Muslims (%)	27.58	15.15	7.28	3.46	1.17	1.19

Note: *Literate includes unclassified educational levels

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

Data Source: Census of India, 2001.

It is evident from the calculated data that the average percentage of people at state level who have attained below primary level education is 23.77 per cent. While Muslims show 27.58 per cent share in this category which is 4 per cent higher than the state average. In Below primary school education presence of Muslim community is not higher only in West Bengal. In primary level of education, Madrasa and Maktabas are included and Muslims are used to prefer to send their children in these traditional institutions (Khalidi, 1995, Cited in Ahmad, 1981).

At primary level the state average is 16.65 per cent, while Muslims are 1 per cent less than the state average (15.15 per cent). At middle level, the state average is 11.71 per cent. Muslims share in middle level education is 7.28 per cent which is just half of Hindus and 4 percentage point less than the state average. At metric level, state average is 7.07 per cent. Muslims show much lower percentage with only 3.46 per cent in this category. At higher secondary level the state average is 3.33 per cent. While Muslims show poor share with only 1.17 per cent. In graduate level, the state average is 4.63 per cent, while Muslims (1.19 per cent) are 3 per cent less than the state average. From the above discussion it is clear that as the education level increases the educational attainment of Muslims decreases. While the majority community have higher educational achievement as compare to state as well as Muslims in all educational level except below primary level.

TABLE 3: 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		71.52	54.82

Data Source: Census of India 2001

It is pertinent to note here that Muslims are educationally most backward community in West Bengal. They lag behind other religious group (see table 3). This empirical finding of Muslims educational backwardness is still supported by the various research studies by sociologists, political scientist, educationists, individual researcher and government reports from time to time (Singh, 1983, Ahmad, 1981, Khalidi, 1995, Aleaz, 2005, GOI, 2006,). In pre-independent India, 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 not proportionate to the Muslim numerical strength in the provinces of Bengal. This means that even in pre-independence period, Muslims share in overall educational scenario of the country was meagre. 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).

After independence various Census reports, government findings and many research paper confirm the popular impressions about Muslim lag in education in West Bengal (Census, 2001, Hussain, 2005). The notable 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). This backwardness of the Muslims and their continued downwards mobility in the field of education, particularly in a great metropolis like Kolkata which has throughout been a centre of learning would, perhaps, appear paradoxical (Siddiqui, 1998). The underlying factors responsible for these poor state of affairs are; high rural poverty and high concentration of Muslims in rural areas. The situation has been further 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 and Menon, 2005). 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 West Bengal were predominantly rural, and it was not easy for them to send their sons to Calcutta to receive modern education" (Safiuddin, 1980). This seems to hold true even now: "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).

The all India condition of Muslims has been summed up by Basant and Shariff (2010). The picture draws by them of the educational condition of Muslims in India, in general, equally applicable to the educational condition of Muslims in West Bengal in particular. They write

"In recent years, the growth in literacy rate among SCs/STs has been higher than for Muslims. The percentage of Muslim children who never attended school is high; it is only slightly lower than that of SCs/STs. Dropout rates are highest among Muslims and this seems to go up significantly after middle school. School enrolment rates are among the lowest but interestingly have improved recently....primary and higher secondary attainment levels are also among the lowest for Muslims, and inter-SRC differences rise at the school-leaving stage. This contributes to large deficits in higher education; graduate attainment rates (GARs) are also among the lowest and do not converge with the average...as with other areas of education, participation of Muslims in technical and engineering education is also among the lowest".

Same condition of education is also in operation in West Bengal which accounts for the Muslim educational deprivation in the state.

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. 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 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.

Table 4: Wpr In West Bengal For Hindus And Muslims By Sex And Residence

Religion	Total			Rural			Urban		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
General	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

Data Source: Census of India, 2001

Average WPR of West Bengal is 36.77 per cent. Whereas the condition of Muslims is a cause of concern as they have 4 percentage points less WPR than state average. Conditions are worse in rural areas. The average state WPR in urban areas is 33.85 per cent and Muslim lag by 1 percentage point, whereas in rural areas the average state WPR is 37.90 per cent and Muslim lag by 5 percentage points. This shows the poor economic condition of Muslims in the state.

Another important fact is that WPRs for male in both rural and urban areas for Hindus and Muslims are fairly high. 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 per cent while this rate is 20.86 per cent at state level. Similarly, the urban WPR for females is only 10.48 per cent for Muslims, while it is 11.57 per cent for the state. Though this gap is not wide but female WPR for Muslims is less than majority Hindus. The low aggregate work

participation rate for Muslims are essentially due to much lower participation in economic activity by women in the community (GOI, 2006). Apart from this the lack of education and work opportunities for females, the cultural factors such as the practice of purdha and seclusion might have affected the female WPRs at state level (Khalidi, 1995, Sarikhani, 2008, Hasan, 2009).

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION:

The discrimination in various social, economic and educational areas coexists with low political participation. Political representation 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 Muslim community is inadequately or simply under-represented in general legislatures and even in the Lok Sabhaⁱⁱⁱ. Its representation is less than 50 per cent of what it should be, assessed as per the share in the population. Besides being an alienated group, absence of legislature from any social group in a plural society puts the group at a clear disadvantage (Shariff and Azam, 2004). Muslims in India are politically powerless community (Mainuddin, 2008). They are under-represented in the parliament and state legislature. Their under-representation in Indian politics has never been considered as a problem and hence it needs solution unlike schedule caste and schedule tribe. On the eve of election, Muslims are often referred as 'pampered community' and the government's promises, though seldom fulfilled, are criticized as 'minorityism'. The vitiated communal atmosphere poses more threat to the security of this minority community (Rab, 1998). Instead of the "adult franchise", Indian Muslims are exploited due to their illiteracy, ignorance, and poverty, ill-representation 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). Over the years, it has been realized that the government failed to resolve the question of inherent socio-economic discrimination and political marginalization of Muslims in participating in the national decision making process through power sharing (Beg, 1989). The reports of Sachar Commission and Misra Commission reported that Muslims exclusion from the place of influence and power, created flurry of recognition, before being swallowed up in the bureaucratic torpor of *laissez-faire*. Moreover, West Bengal proved to have worst records for the representation of Muslims in the administration and bureaucracy (Seabrook and Siddique, 2011).

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.

Table 5 : Muslim Representation In West Bengal Legislative Assembly

Year	Total Members	Muslim Members	Percentage	Expected Presentation
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	-	-	-	42.67per cent

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

The data in table 5 indicates the unfavourable presentation of Muslims in the state. Though in West Bengal

Muslims representation is better as compared to other states but it is not proportionate to their population. The highest Muslim representation is in the year 1991 i.e. (14.29 per cent) and lowest in the 1952 (9.66 per cent). In the last assembly election in 2001 Muslims have a reasonable representation of 39 members, one less than that in 1996. The data clearly shows that there is no continuous increment in the Muslims representation in the state politics and same is the case at national level. Moreover, one could easily draw the conclusion from the above low number of Muslim members in the West Bengal legislative assembly that political parties have deliberately not allowed the increase in the number of Muslim party members. If they would have shown their strong will to increase their numbers, the situation might have been much better and much publicized allegation of Muslim alienation would have not been continued to persist so long.

The discrimination in various socio-economic areas coexists with low political participation. Here again discrimination is seen in the non-inclusion of Muslims in the voter lists and the unfair delimitation exercises wherein Muslim majority constituencies are reserved for the SC category, even when the latter have higher population shares in other constituencies in the states. Consequently, Muslim candidates are not able to contest from Muslim concentrated areas (Besant, 2007)

In spite of the strong secular traditions of politics in the state, Muslims political representation is not proportionate to their share in the total population 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). Democracy has no meaning if minorities are not secure and also do not get proper share in economic development in proportion to their population.

Our political culture, though democratic, is still not all inclusive. Political power and fruits of economic and social development are monopolized by upper caste Hindus, on one hand, and, a trickle is passed on to OBCs and SCs and STs which support some political parties. Minorities like Muslims are left high and dry.

CONCLUSION:

To conclude, it may once again be emphasized that socio-economic backwardness and political alienation have given rise to some important questions as far as minority community is concerned. After six decades of independence, Muslims in West Bengal are lagging behind other community in terms of socio-economic condition and politically representation. Though they constitute 25 per cent population in the state and hence they are the second largest religious group in this Indian state. In some districts Muslim constitute more than half of the district population. But the major concern is that they do not constitute the urban bulk of the population as 2001 census data shows that only 16 per cent Muslims live in urban area. Hence, we can say that Muslims of West Bengal are a rural community. Being a rural community in the context of WB, they are bound to be socio-economically poor. Balance sex ratio is an indicator of equal status of men and women. Moreover, it also indicates the level of socio-economic development in a society or within a community. Among the various religious communities the Muslims' sex ratio is 933 which is one point more than the majority community (Hindus: 932). District level data reveals that in almost all districts sex ratio of this minority community is better than the state average and the majority community. But this does not lead the conclusion that Muslims are socio-economically better in the state. But the possible reason for higher sex ratio is the out-migration of male members of the community to neighboring states in search of employment. Literacy rate are low among the Muslims in the state and it is worse in those areas where Muslims constitute half or more population of the district. The study also reflects that educational attainment of this minority community is much less as compare to the state average. The study found that as the level of educational level increases the percentage of Muslims educational attainment decreases sharply. This trend of course puts an impediment in the development of the community as education is supposed to be the main instrument for bringing about social, economic and political inclusion and durable integration of people particularly those 'excluded', from the mainstream of any society. The WPR of Muslims is less than the state as well as the majority community. But the major concern is low WPR for Muslim women which directly influence the low aggregate of the community's WPR.

Muslims in India as well as in West Bengal are politically alienated community. Their political participation in mainstream politics is minimal. Muslims are under-represented in the parliament and state legislature. Their participation in the political process did not increase to the extent what it should be since the inception of first general election. Their political participation is also less in proportion with their population share in the state. Democracy has no meaning if minorities are not secure and also do not get proper share in economic, social and political development in proportion to their population. However, it needs to be pointed out that without political empowerment, socio-economic development of Muslims will be a utopian approach and vice versa.

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ⁱ Though the provisional data of census 2011 has been declared on 31st March 2011, but religion wise data will be made public in 2-3 years. For this reason the discussion is based on 2001 census.

ⁱⁱ The Census 2011 Religion Data is not published yet.

Literacy Rate in West Bengal- Person- 77.08, Male-82.67, Female-71.16 (for general population)

ⁱⁱⁱ Lok Sabha is "composed of representatives of the people chosen by direct election on the basis of the adult suffrage. The maximum strength of the House envisaged by the Constitution is 552, which is made up by election of upto 530 members to represent the States, upto 20 members to represent the Union Territories and not more than two members of the Anglo-Indian Community to be nominated by the Hon'ble President, if, in his/her opinion, that community is not adequately represented in the House. The total elective membership is distributed among the States in such a way that the ratio between the number of seats allotted to each State and the population of the State is, so far as practicable, the same for all States". For more details visit <http://loksabha.nic.in/>.