

Muslims on the Margin: A Study of Muslims OBCs in West Bengal

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Abstract: Muslim is substantial minority and second religious group in the state of West Bengal. They are inherently disadvantageous and marginal in all indicators of social living since long period of time. This has become a challenging issue of discussion and debate not only in the academic circle but also to the community itself. Though there is paucity of literatures and data on the Muslim community of West Bengal, it is an attempt to explore the marginal condition of Muslims of West Bengal, and to analyse the role of OBCs' reservation and the status of Muslim in West Bengal. In the present paper, data have been collected from various secondary sources like Published journals, various committee reports, and news reports. Major findings are socio-economic condition, backwardness of Muslims, religious politics, and reservation for Muslims OBCs and the marginal condition of Muslims in West Bengal.

Keywords: socio-economic condition of Muslims, Muslims OBCs, Muslims reservation and change.

I. INTRODUCTION

Terms like Marginalization, backwardness, social exclusion have become the buzz words of discussion in the academic circle. The status of Muslims, socio-economic conditions of Muslims, educational backwardness and political powerless of the Muslims have also become more important issues along with SCs and STs in analysis the development of Indian society. Various reports (government and non-government) have revealed the status of Muslims at different parameters of the society. Muslims are socio-educationally backward, economically poor, politically powerless, and medically disadvantaged group. Reports like Rangnath Misra commission report (2007), Sachar Committee report (2006) at National level and the status of Muslims in West Bengal (2014), Living Realities of Muslims in West Bengal (2016) at state level are the strong evidences about the status of Muslims. Inclusion of Muslims in the OBC list and reservation for OBCs has paved the way of the change of community fate.

The dictionary meaning of the word marginalize is to relegate to the fringe, out of the mainstream, make seem unimportant. According to *Cambridge Dictionary* 'marginalize' means to treat someone or something as if they are not important. According to the *Business Dictionary* 'marginalisation' is the process whereby something or someone is pushed to the edge of a group and accorded lesser importance. This is predominantly a social phenomenon by which a minority or subgroup is excluded, and their needs or desires ignored.

Marginalization is a process whereby specific group of people have been pushed at the margin of society economically, politically, culturally and socially following the policy of exclusion. It denies a section of the society equal access to productive resources and avenues for the realization of their productive human potential opportunities for their full capacity utilization. This pushes the community to poverty, misery, low wage and discrimination and livelihood insecurity. Politically, this process of relegation denies people's equal access to the formal power structure and participation in the decision making processes leading to their subordination and dependence on economically and politically dominant groups of society. The concept of marginalization is multi-dimensional which refers to marginalization in economic, social and political sphere. Social marginalization can refer to a state or situation, but often refers to a process, to the mechanism by which people are excluded (Kumaran R, 2010: P1).

II. METHODOLOGY

The study of the conditions of Muslims and OBCs has been conducted by analyzing the data gathered from mainly secondary sources like reports, news, published journals and magazines.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows.

- To study the Marginal conditions of Muslims of West Bengal in the light of various reports (Government and Non-government).
- To study the role of OBCs reservation for Muslim Backward classes in West Bengal.

- And to know the present status of Muslims of West Bengal.

Muslim Population in West Bengal

Figure: 1, Muslims Population district wise Comparison between 2001 and 2011 census in West Bengal

District	Population (%) in 2001	Population (%) in 2011
Murshidabad	63.67	66.28
Maldah	49.72	51.27
Uttar Dinajpur	47.36	50.92
Birbhum	35.08	37.06
South 24 Parganas	33.24	35.57
Nadia	25.41	26.76
Howrah	24.44	26.20
Koch Bihar	24.23	25.54
North 24 Parganas	24.22	25.82
Dakshin Dinajpur	23.93	24.63
Kolkata	20.05	20.60
Bardhaman	19.78	20.73
Hugli	15.14	15.77
Medinipur (East & West)	11.35	14.59 & 10.49
Jalpaiguri	10.85	11.51
Bankura	7.50	8.08
Purulia	7.12	7.76
Darjeeling	5.30	5.69
West Bengal	25.23	27.01

(Source: Census 2001 and 2011, Govt. of India)

Nationally, Muslims constitutes 14.2% in 2011. Assam recorded highest increase in share of Muslims, from 30.9% of the state's population to 34.2%. Manipur is the only state which shows a fall in Muslim Population 8.8% in 2001 and 8.4% in 2011. Jammu and Kashmir shares 68.3%, Bengal 27% of total population in India. Other states that show high increase in share of population are Uttarakhand 11.9% in 2001 and 13.9% in 2011. Kerala shows 1.9% increased from 24.7% in 2001 to 26.6% in 2011. Where Goa increased 1.5% from 6.8% to 8.4% (Census of India: 2011).

Figure: 2, Trends in Muslim population of West Bengal

Census Year	% of total population	Decadal growth
1951	19.85%	NA
1961	20%	36.48%
1971	20.46%	29.76%
1981	21.51%	29.55%
1991	23.61%	36.89%
2001	25.25%	25.91%
2011	27.01%	21.80%

Source: B.P. Syam Roy, 2015

Status of the Muslims of west Bengal

Even though there is scarcity of literatures regarding the issues of Muslims as religious minority and disadvantage community in India as well as in West Bengal, an attempt has been made to study the status of Muslims on the basis of available literatures. A numbers of study on the status of Muslims reported the same results in their analysis of data.

According to Census 2011, Muslims constitute 27% of total population of West Bengal. Muslims are concentrated in majority of population in two districts namely Murshidabad district (population 66.3%) and Malda district (population 51.3%). The Female-Male sex ratio among Muslims of the state is 951 as opposed to 950 for the total population of the state. The corresponding figures for the 0-6 population are 961 and 951 respectively. Majority of Muslims in west Bengal inhabit in rural areas and speaks in Bengali language. As per 47th Report of the Commissioner of Linguistic Minority (July-2008-Jun, 2010), around 92% of the Muslims in West Bengal speak Bengali. Very few Muslims speak in Hindi or Urdu in some districts which are mostly attached with Hindi belt areas like Bihar and Jharkhand. Some Muslims live in Kolkata also speak in Hindi or Urdu languages. The level of Urbanization in West Bengal is 32% (2011) but for the Muslims population, it is much lower at 19%.

According to *Sachar Committee report* (2005) Muslims are at double disadvantage with low levels of education combined with low quality education; their deprivation increases manifold as the level of education rise. Muslims who completed at least graduation is below 5% (2001) in West Bengal. It is generally believed that Muslims are more interested to go for Madrasah education. In West Bengal, where Muslims forms 25% (Census 2001) of the population, the number of Madrasah students at 3.41 lakhs is only about 4% of the 7-19

age groups. Overall, unemployment rates are slightly higher for all Muslims than for all Hindus but there are differences within each group. Unemployment rates among Muslims (male, female, rural and urban) are lower than SCs/STs but higher than Hindu-UCs. They are also higher than Hindu-OBCs except in urban areas. Muslims occupied 23.7% employment government regular salaried Non-agriculture work and 6.5% in Private work in West Bengal. Whereas the total employment of state in government regular salaried work is about 34.2% and in private Ltd is about 13.1%. Muslim employed in manufacturing sector is about 20.6% while state constitutes about 16.8% (2004-2005). Muslim workers engaged in Trade about 10.5% and 11.7% for the state of West Bengal. Self employed Muslim workers in urban area about 52.6% and 45.6% for the state.

Kundu Report is a post Sachar Evaluation Committee report headed by Prof. Amitabh Kundu in 2014. Its purpose was to evaluate and assess the results, which came out with the implementations of recommendations made by Sachar Committee Report in 2005. Kundu committee report found the slight change in the socio-economic and educational conditions of Muslims in India.

However a report on *the Status of Muslims in West Bengal* was published by association SNAP in Kolkata in 2014. It conducted a survey of 325 villages and 75 urban wards, in the first round of inquiry, to cover 97,017 (79,913 rural and 17,104 urban) household consisting 4, 63,904 total population and in second round another 8,000 (6,500 rural and 1,500 urban) household were included. According to this report, Muslims are living in very pathetic socio-economic milieu in the state which could be found in different indicators such as infrastructure, electricity, drinking water, irrigation, health, education, employment and other basic amenities. Area is inhabited predominantly by the adivasis, dalits and Muslims had a much larger share of waterlogged roads than what an upper caste hamlet had. And as a general pattern, area inhabited by Muslims and other social underdogs recorded a higher incidence of electricity deprivation as compared to their more privileged counterpart. Scarcity of water was found to be a common characteristic of most of the surveyed village. In regarding the Primary Health Centre among surveyed village, 35% of villagers has to commute at least four kilometres to access the facility of PHC and for 12% villagers, the distance is even longer-more than 8 Kilometres. Many of the PHCs are found to exist only for the sake of existence: some are only defunct and buildings are dilapidating fast, 46% of them have no doctors and 75% have no beds or facilities for indoor treatment. It is often argued that Muslims are averse to modern health facilities. But there is the poor accessibility of the modern health facilities and the members of the community are very willingness to access the decent quality of medical facilities (Public Report, W.B, 2014:41-42).

Recently, a report "*Living Realities of Muslims in West Bengal*" was prepared jointly by Pratichi Trust, Founded by Amartya Sen, Guidance Guild and the association SNAP. It was released on 14th Feb 2016 in Kolkata by Amartya Sen. The report has actually exposed the living realities and socio-economic conditions of Muslims in West Bengal. The report had been made up by focusing on the areas like Muslim Demography, Literacy and Education, Economy, Health, amenities, cultural practices, and gender dimension in West Bengal. The study was conducted of 325 villages and 73 urban wards from a sample of 8 community development blocks and 30 municipal bodies across Bengal. The study has conducted in two phases which consists of 105017 households (Rural 86430 and Urban 18604). The selection of the sampled units was done on the basis of proportion of Muslims to total population. According to this report the literacy rate among the Muslims in rural West Bengal (68.3%) is about 4% points lower than that for general population (76.26%) as per Census 2011. In terms of the percentages of the population that has completed certain level of education, Muslims in West Bengal lag behind the others. The survey shows that among the literate Muslims, only 2.7% holds graduate degree or above. The overall enrolment ratio for Muslim children of age 6-14 years is 85.9% and the girls are marginally ahead of boys (86.4 vis-a-vis 84.6). About 15% Muslim children age 6-14 years are found to be out of school. While 9.1% were never enrolled, 5.4% dropped out. Financial problems emerged as the major factor for not being able to go to school (42.5% boys and 40.4% girls). Lack of infrastructure, lack of motivation, lack of schools, lack of hope and long distance are the chief factors behind dropping out school. The report shows that there is a clear inverse relationship between this indicator of availability of schools and concentration of Muslims in block.

The *Economic conditions of Muslim* in West Bengal are very worst. The report revealed that about 47% of all working rural Muslims belong to the category of either agricultural worker or 'daily workers' in non-agriculture in West Bengal. Only 1.55% households' main income earner is a school teacher. 1.5% households reportedly depend on regular public sector jobs as the main source of income. Regular salaried jobs in the private sector are also a rarity- only 1% households are fortunate to have such jobs as their main source of income. In the entire sample of 7880 households only five (5) were found to have a college or university teacher, and there was no household with any of the highest category of professionals as members, such as doctors, engineers and advocates. The most significant fact is that about 80% of the Muslims households in rural West Bengal earn Rs 5000/- or less per month. About 38.3% Muslim households in rural West Bengal earn Rs 2500 or less per month, which is one-half of the cut-off level of income for the population below the poverty line. About 3.8% households earn around Rs 15000 or above per month. 41.5% of the rural Muslim households

owned some land other than their homestead land and only 23.5% households cropped land besides the homestead land.

The *health condition of Muslim areas* is not up to the mark. There is lack of infrastructure, lack of Nurses, lack of doctors in primary health centers, in IPD services. In considering citizenship status of Muslims that 13.2% adult do not have voter cards. The provision of drainage system for the Muslim households (12.2%) is nearly one-third of overall provision in the state (31.6%). In considering the gender status among Muslims, the percentage of divorce, separation is very low. Among Muslims women in West Bengal participation in decision-making concerning family/household matters is high. A significant percent of about 74% (rural and urban) participate in everyday purchases, a bulk of which concern spending on everyday food consumption. Muslim women are participated in different kinds of works like Bidi work (23.9%), or Daily work (21.4%), Domestic Help (11.4%), Jodi/Smith worker (8.2%). Within land owning families, the land ownership by female members comes around 27.8%, which is comparatively low.

Abhijit Dasgupta, a social researcher conducted a study on the conditions of Muslims of West Bengal along with slight focused on the conditions of Dalit Muslims and Christians. He noted that the socio-economic and educational conditions of Muslims was worst before the coming of Left rules in West Bengal but there was no such positive steps like reservation which was provided for the Muslims in other states like Kerala, Karnataka, etc. Left ruling party took a positive step; the land reform policy after holding the political power in the West Bengal in 1977. This policy benefited both the communities Hindus and Muslims of West Bengal. The participation of Muslims in political sphere was significantly low. The Muslims have not been entitled to get the opportunities of OBC reservation as Muslim OBCs chunk was very limited (Dasgupta, A 2009: 91-96).

Muslims OBCs Reservation and its effects

Muslims' backwardness could be caused due to the negligence and ignorance of Political parties. Muslims were deprived before independence and still deprived after independence generally in India and particularly in West Bengal. Muslims as a deprived section of society and as a backward community has never been included in Govt. policy and planning in West Bengal. It was the time when left front got its victory in 1977 election in West Bengal they introduced a big policy of land reformation which affects positively the Muslims along with SC and other Hindus. During their ruling period of the West Bengal any other positive policy has not been found till their downfall except reservation for OBCs. If this positive initiative was taken earlier, its many positive results could to be found among Muslims of West Bengal. However Muslims are accessing to the opportunities of OBCs reservation in different fields in the State and in Central govt. The left front govt. then provide 10% reservation for Muslims OBCs in 2010 in West Bengal, which was implemented by the newly formed TMC govt. by including Muslims in the lists of Backward classes. However Muslims under the OBC Category-A are accessing to all kinds of opportunities that have been provided in West Bengal. Majority of the Muslims OBCs come under the OBC Category-A, and very few under Category-B. Majority of Hindu OBCs come under the OBCs Category-B. Therefore majority of Muslims has to receive the benefits of reservation in OBC Category-A. Many Muslims students are getting admission in different educational institutions for higher studies like Doctor, Engineering, Research courses, etc. Muslims students are also getting OBC scholarship for their education, entering in various high profile jobs like teaching profession in West Bengal. But there are some problems in accessing to receive the opportunities of OBCs reservation. A general observation has been made by the author on the aspirants who deserve the job surety in various teaching and non teaching posts like primary, secondary, college and university. Some aspirant claims that they are eligible in general as well as OBC Category but they have not been empanelled in general list.

The literacy rate of West Bengal is about 77.1% in 2011 and 68.64% in 2001. And literacy rate among Muslims is about 57.47% in 2001 (available only 2001 census). The literacy rate of Muslims in the state is far behind than the national average. According to 2001 census literacy rate of Hindus 72.4%, for Christians 69.7%, for Sikhs 87.2%, for Buddhists 74.7%, and for Jains 92.8% are higher than Muslims literacy in West Bengal. Muslims being a marginal community has been divided into two sections; advantage section and disadvantage section due to the reservation. Those literate and educated Muslims are able to access in the reservation opportunities continuously but those Muslims who are uneducated or illiterate or semi-literate are still unable to receive the opportunities of reservation. Majority of the Muslims are still in the condition of illiteracy and lack of knowledge. Hence majority of Muslims could remain to be deprived within the community in West Bengal. The above report indicates that Muslims are continuously deprived in all aspects of socio-economic and educational development of society. Even though a change in such domain has commonly been observed in India, this is very insignificant change for the community. In case of west Bengal, a slight change has recently been found among the Muslims and it is due to reservation for Muslims OBCs. Majority of Muslims have been included in the OBCs lists which was very limited during the left rules of the west Bengal. Muslims have been getting admission in various educational institutions, getting high profile jobs. This could pay the way to change the community fate. However this change is very thin and slow. It is due to the low level of education, lack of

patient to make a bright future, miss conception of people to get jobs due to the prevailing practices of corruptions at all level of system. Some figures about the socio-educational level and economic stand could be shown below.

Figure: 3, Completed at least graduate in West Bengal (2001)

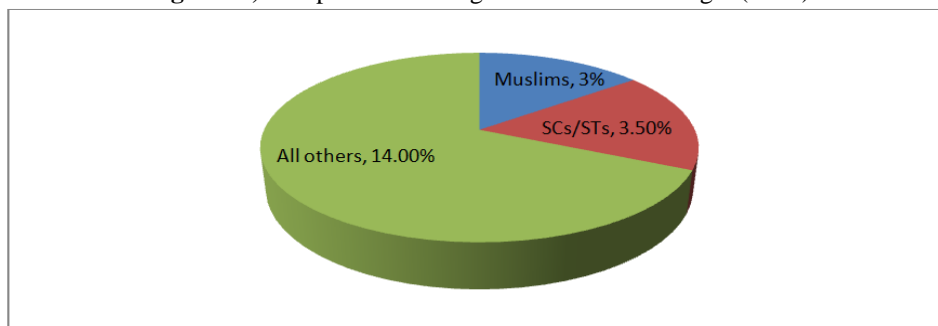
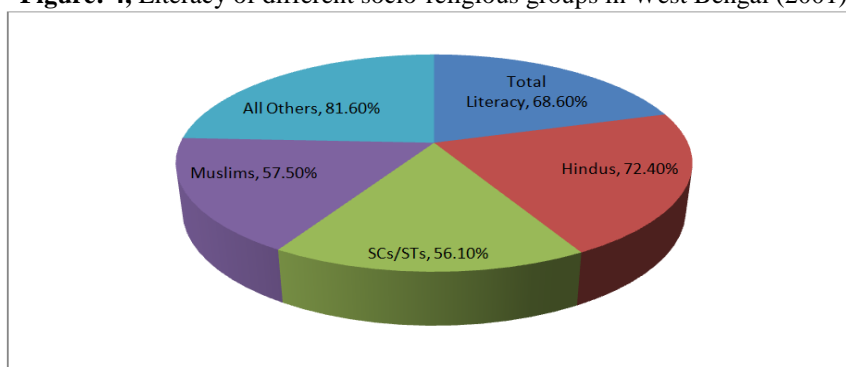


Figure: 4, Literacy of different socio-religious groups in West Bengal (2001)



(Source: Sachar Committee Report 2005-06)

Figure: 5, Muslims Employment Data provided by government of West Bengal

Total Muslim Population (2001)	25.2%
Total Number of employees	134972
Share of Muslims in state Employment	2.1%
Education Department	-----
Health, Women and Child welfare dept	1.0%
Home Dept.	7.1%
Transport	-----
Other Dept.	2.4%

(Source: Sachar Committee Report 2005-06)

Figure: 6, West Bengal share of Muslims employees in Judiciary services

Share of Muslim Employees	5.0%
Advocate General	0.0%
Dist. Session Judge	4.8%
Addl. Dist. & Session Judge	7.7%
Prl. Judge	0.0%
Munsif	3.2%
Public Prosecutors	5.4%
Group-A	2.3%
Group-B	3.4%
Group-C	4.3%
Group-D	7.1%

(Source: Sachar Committee Report-2005-06)

III. CONCLUSION

Marginality and Marginalisation of Muslims in West Bengal could be caused to the lack of government irresponsibility towards Muslims' welfare and lack of consciousness of socio-economic status of Muslims themselves. Backwardness in education could be caused to the lack of tradition of education among Muslims, poor economy since very long time of its history in India. Muslims of West Bengal deserved some positive

policy for them like reservation. It has been provided by state govt of West Bengal. It is the responsibility of the community to receive all kinds of benefits and opportunities provided by state government under this OBC reservation. For this they have to come forward in educational milieu. Until a community itself come forward for its own development or change, nobody could bring change or development among them. This reservation for Muslims OBCs could change the community's fate but Muslims need to reform themselves first.

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