
**ISSUE OF MINORITY WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN WEST BENGAL –
A SPATIOTEMPORAL APPROACH**

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ABSTRACT

Empowered women in any society reflect its gender just sociocultural, political and economic policy. Literature shows women have been suppressed in socio-economic representation since the inception of human civilization on earth in general and minority women in particular as feminist approach believed upon. For present study, Muslim women considered as minority according to religious minority definition of 1993. Muslim women's disempowerment in cultural essentialist discourse is neither scientific nor empirical rather, mere reductionism. Embedded poverty, high illiteracy, increasing everyday insecurity and deprivation of welfare schemes are the possible ramification of Muslim women's disempowerment. Can education eliminate these extents of disempowerment? Based on selected indicators this paper made an attempt to find out the spatial pattern and causes of perpetual disempowerment of Muslim women in the districts of West Bengal. Essential of this paper lies on social justice measure which hone proper utilization of human capital, inclusive development, sustains growth and title of good governance. West Bengal has third largest Muslim population in India but result shows that Muslim women of West Bengal are the victim of negligence from mainstreaming. To analyze the development index of Muslim women secondary data has been employed and, statistical tools and GIS approach have been used to shows the result. Immediate attention call on Muslim dominated districts which faced greater lacuna in education and employment index than the districts having less Muslim women population.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Education, Inclusive Development, Mainstreaming

INTRODUCTION

The concept of empowerment is very complex and fuzzy at spatiotemporal context. This word has a widespread usage in many different contexts, even in the same timeline and space barrier, to understood as to infuse people with power (Narayana, 2002), i.e. access to resources, as expansion in individual 's agency (Kishore, 2002), as power of decision making i.e. autonomy (Jojeebboy, 1995). Accessibility of resources and their flow direction basically govern and

controlled by skilled labour forces. Therefore, female workforce should pursue same autonomy if followed workforces' guidelines. Robert Adams (2003) mean 'Empowerment: the capacity of individuals, groups and communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals, and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives. To uphold wellbeing one should be economically empowered and spiritually and self-assertive. In democratic form of government people ensure equality by state in all sphere of life. The idea of empowerment is being derived from the values of 'equality', 'liberty', and 'freedom' and from the principles of democratic polity such as 'equity' and 'social justice (Andre Beteille, 1999). Creating a social environment in which one can make decisions and make choices, either individually or collectively for social transformation that pose to acquiring knowledge, power and experience (Hashemi Schuler and Riley, 1996). The United Nations has put together an "empowerment booklet" where they define the term as the "process of enabling people to increase control over their lives, to gain control over the factors and decisions that shape their lives, to increase their resources and qualities and to build capacities to gain access, partners, networks, a voice, in order to gain control". This is the stage in which most of the developing and under developed countries of the world are going through.

In developing countries bases of empowerment sources from essential needs like, education and health. On the other hand, empowerment lauded beyond the basic needs and, therefore, empowerment in developed countries is equality driven rather, basic needs. To ensure empowerment, basic necessity is education from which employment, quality of life, autonomy, liberty and freedom are perpetuated.

Who needs empowerment? Answer by asking, in structured and organized society has diverse responses from different background. Therefore, the authors purposefully select women in general and Muslim women in particular to enlighten the darkest part that needs immediate attention as far as study area is concerned.

In academic discourse, the scholarly discussion of empowerment has been context driven rather than theory driven. Empowerment is instrumentally important for achieving positive development outcomes and well-being of a society, especially for the backward section who are far away from main streaming. Gender empowerment also has important ramifications for the rest of the household; empowered women have fewer children and higher child survival rates (Rosenzweig and Schultz, 1982), healthier and better-fed children (Lundberg, Pollak, 1997), and a generally greater allocation of resources to children (Thomas, 1990). The empowerment of women has been widely acknowledged as an important goal in international development .United Nations Organization (UNO) declared 2001 as the year of women's empowerment. India

too recognized the same year as the year of 'women's empowerment'. In spite of a handful literature, found on women empowerment in India, only a few of them covers empirical analysis of women empowerment among Muslim community-the largest minority group in India. Attempt has been made to analyze the selected socioeconomic indicators of Muslim women in light of empowerment. The real extent, forms and factors of Muslim women's deprivation and disempowerment are not exactly known because, dearth of household data.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The status of Muslim women could be the best indicator of a nation's progress if Women's active role is regarded as an integral part of a progressive social system (Azim, 1997). Given West Bengal's entrenched social hierarchy and complex cultural diversity, it is important to evaluate group-specific performances. The United Nation's Millennium Development Goal (MDG) has been criticized for ignoring the specific vulnerabilities of minorities, such as discrimination, insecurity, and the lack of political empowerment. This paper reflects the issues and challenges of Muslim women's empowerment of West Bengal. In a nutshell, the defining factors of 'Muslim women' identity and status are popularly believed to be segregation because of male privilege society (Hasan and Menon, 2004) which is not correct.

STUDY AREA

The state of West Bengal is selected as a study area which is located between 21° 25' North to 26° 50' North latitudes and 86° 30' East to 89° 58' East longitudes share ring its border with three international boundaries i.e., Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. With 2.70% of the India's total geographical area; it extends from the Himalayas in the north to the Bay of Bengal in the south. West bengal ranked third in per cent share of muslim population followed by Jammu and Kashmir and Assam .The overall picture of literacy rate in the state has gone up from 68.64 % in 2001 to 77.08 % and 57.47% to 68.53% for muslim in 2011. Though, overall Muslim female adds 15.01% while, 12.83% and 11.09% add by rural and urban respectively. The employment rate rose up from 32.89% to 34.23 % for Muslim and 36.77% to 41.23% others.

Location Map of Study Area

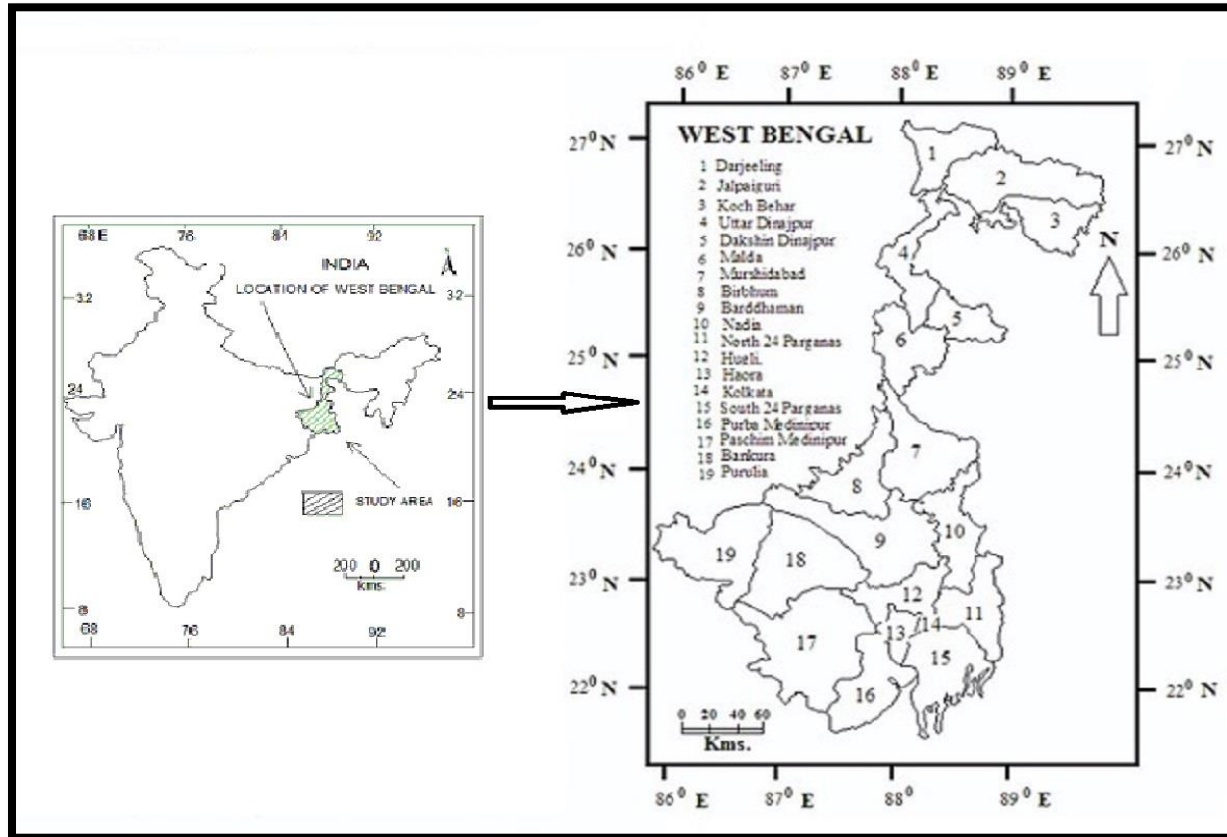


Fig. 1

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1. To find out the spatial pattern of women empowerment indicators in the study area.
- 2. To give study-based suggestions for improve the conditions of Muslim women.

DATA BASE AND METHODOLOGY

The present work is based on quantitative approach, supported by secondary sources of data which obtained from Census of India, census of West Bengal PCA 2011. Karl Pearson's correlation co-efficient (r) technique is used to compute the data and, bar diagram used to show the distribution. GIS technique is used for drawing locational and distributional maps.

Limitation of the Study

Due to the vastness of the topic, it is not possible to cover all the aspects of Muslim women empowerment in the study area. Therefore, the study is strictly focused on education and employment indicators. The study voids age specific literacy of working and non working classes of Muslim female. Rural urban gap in literacy rate is tabulated but, same is not possibly done for workforce.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Most of the study from developing countries found basic obstacles in the way of empowerment. Embedded poverty, high illiteracy, increasing everyday insecurity and deprivation of welfare schemes are the possible ramification of Muslim women's disempowerment concern made by Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Women's own perception of themselves on their empowerment must be changed. They should also strive to change their image as weak, dependent, passive and try to become independent, active, strong and determined human being.

“Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that a son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine that the child of a farm worker can become the President of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another”.

—Nelson Mandela

The Census 2011 figures returned Muslims as least literates among all religious communities. To empower women in all sphere of life it is most fundamental to provide proper educational facilities at all level. This is perceived to be highly suitable for providing employment and, thereby, improving the quality of life, the level of human well-being and access to basic social services (Misra, 2007).

Literacy rate for Muslim women in West Bengal achieved remarkable growth of 11 per cent but still bellow the state average, i.e., 77.16 per cent. The Hugli, lone district in the state, cross 75 per cent mark in literacy rate. Ten districts having bellow national average literacy rate while eight districts lies between 65 to 75 per cent of literacy rate (**Table: 1**).

Table 1: Share of Female population and Literacy rate (in per cent)

Sl. No.	District	Per cent of Muslim Female Share			Per cent of Literacy Rate			
		All	R	U	Other than Muslim Female	Muslim Female		
						All	R	U
1	Darjiling	5.5	3.7	1.8	73.3	57.2	52.3	66.7
2	Jaipauri	11.5	9.5	2.0	66.22	63.1	63.7	60.2
3	Koch Bihar	25.6	24.5	1.1	68.5	62.9	62.6	69.2
4	Uttar Dinajpur	50.1	48.6	1.5	52.1	45.4	45.1	54.7
5	Dakshin Dinajpur	40.7	24.5	0.12	67.0	63.1	73.6	88.3
6	Malda	51.5	46.7	4.7	56.9	56.4	55.5	65.0
7	Murshidabad	66.5	55.4	11.1	63.1	60.7	61.3	57.6
8	Birbhum	37.5	33.7	3.3	64.1	65.4	65.2	68.0
9	Barddhaman	20.7	15.0	5.7	69.6	70.5	70.3	69.9
10	Nadia	26.8	24.9	1.9	70.9	61.2	60.8	66.7
11	North 24 Parganas	25.7	19.3	6.3	80.3	71.9	72.8	71.3
12	Hugli	15.8	11.0	4.8	78.4	77.3	79.2	72.7
13	Bankura	8.0	7.6	0.5	60.5	58.9	58.6	64.1
14	Haora	26.2	9.1	17.1	79.4	74.9	73.6	75.5
15	Kolkata	20.2	00	20.2	84.1	70.1	00	74.1
16	South 24 Parganas	35.7	27.0	8.8	71.4	66.1	65.0	69.5
17	Purba Medinipur	14.6	11.9	2.8	81.4	73.5	72.7	77.0
18	Paschim Medinipur	10.4	9.1	1.3	70.5	66.2	66.1	66.5
19	Purulia	7.7	5.6	2.1	50.5	46.8	44.7	52.5
	West Bengal	27.0	21.1	6.0	70.5	64.8	63.4	69.4

Source: Census of West Bengal PCA 2011

Note: M- Muslim, R- Rural, U- Urban

Correlation (r) between Muslim Female Literacy and Urban Muslim Female = 0.67

Correlation (r) between Muslim Female Literacy and Rural Muslim Female = - 0.78

Districts like Uttar Dinajpur (45.4%), Purulia (46.8%), Malda (56.4%) ranked below the state's combined average of SCs and STs (56.8%) according to 2011 census. In total, rural urban gap is 6 per cent while Purulia lies at bottom in both cases of literacy rate. Muslim women (36.3%)

count amongst the most illiterate segments of the society, their status comparable only with SC/ST (38.2) women. In terms of levels of educational attainment, nearly one-fourth (23.1%) of all Muslim males and one-fifth (20.1) of females were merely literate. The educational deprivation of Muslims is further compounded by the fact that even in the current school going age group (6-14 year), enrolment of Muslims remains poor as more than one-fifth (20.7%) were estimated to be out of school (Sachar, 2006). The All India Survey of Out-of-School Children found a very high proportion – 7.67 per cent of Muslim children in the age group 6-13 reporting out of school in West Bengal while corresponding figure for SCs, STs and OBCs was 5.96, 5.60 and 2.67 per cent respectively.

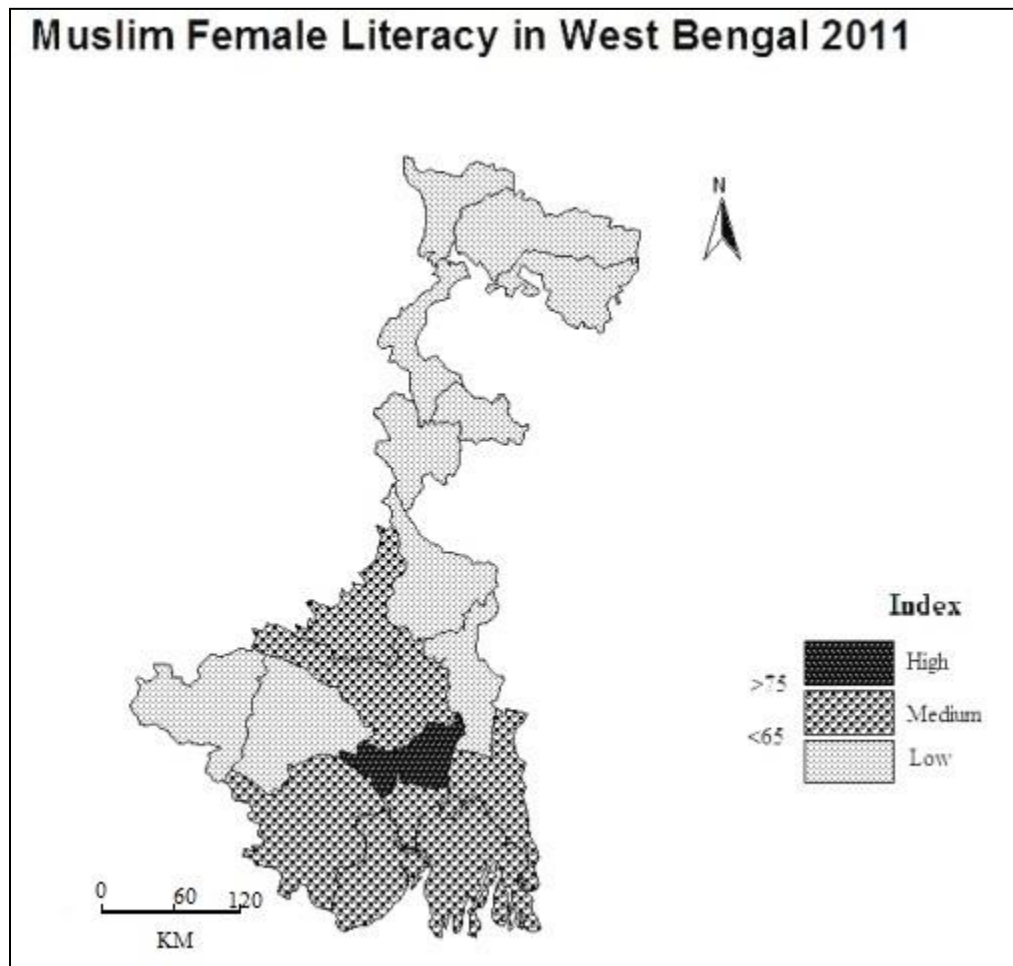


Fig. 2

Regarding backwardness of Muslim female education study found that the overt discrimination from school (Sachar, 2006) leads to a high drop-out rate among Muslim girls. Traditional apathy for education; poverty and lack of means (Durrani, 1989); lack of sufficient number of educational institutions in rural areas are others important hurdles of mass illiteracy. Lack of proper communications and adequate educational aids (scholarship, monetary grant) for the purpose of books, clothing and hostel facility (Ramkrishnaya, 1986) are responsible causes of low level success in case of Muslim female.

Workforce

The condition of women in India is more miserable than the rest of the world in almost every field's of socioeconomic and political aspect. Women are paid half of 3/4 of the same job that their male counterpart are doing. The outdoor nature of Muslim female are generally oppressive and conservative (Hasan and Menon, 2004). Women do more than half of the total agricultural work but their work is not valued. On an average a woman works 15 to 16 hours a day unpaid at home and underpaid outside. According to 2011 census, every one-fifth works in the state is an agricultural labour. One seventh of the agricultural labour is Muslim female.

Workforce in both of cases, i.e. total and marginal share of Muslim women is less as compared to total workforce of female due to maximum share in household works. In case of main workforce, maximum gap notice 14 per cent, while 17 per cent and 30 per cent gap recorded in total and marginal workforce respectively. About 7 per cent less non worker reside in Purulia district from state's maximum Nadia district (66.92 %).

Table 2: Muslim Female Workforce (in per cent)

Sl. No.	District	Total Workforce		Main Workforce		Marginal Workforce		Non Workers	
		O. F	M.F	O.F	M.F	O.F	M.F	O.F	M.F
1	Darjiling	29.85	18.05	34.44	15.34	44.82	41.59	60.65	61.52
2	Jaipauri	27.86	24.71	25.11	16.37	52.89	54.90	62.21	62.64
3	Koch bihar	25.05	24.96	18.20	16.60	60.49	61.69	64.15	63.29
4	Uttar dinajpur	25.65	23.03	19.68	16.08	55.88	51.35	61.09	60.71
5	Dakshin dinajpur	28.92	20.64	23.12	11.26	59.22	50.41	63.25	64.68
6	Malda	29.35	28.54	23.36	23.46	51.82	48.42	60.62	60.40
7	Murshidabad	23.33	24.29	21.61	22.78	43.10	43.27	63.62	62.89
8	Birbhum	22.66	16.11	16.18	10.81	41.70	31.19	64.93	65.36
9	Barddhaman	21.31	21.23	20.02	17.84	41.63	38.96	63.48	65.17

10	Nadia	15.65	11.12	13.57	7.73	39.65	32.33	66.92	66.90
11	North24 Parganas	17.53	14.83	16.14	10.86	39.09	35.97	66.22	66.21
12	Hugli	20.40	14.48	17.16	9.57	42.91	36.86	67.29	67.43
13	Bankura	28.33	20.42	20.24	9.87	47.48	42.08	63.04	63.75
14	Haora	17.67	18.41	14.70	14.52	40.12	39.40	66.91	64.60
15	Kolkata	21.34	15.00	21.80	12.21	46.10	39.73	65.03	64.23
16	South24 Parganas	20.50	18.18	14.58	11.87	36.37	35.27	65.03	63.99
17	Purba medinipur	35.88	25.81	24.36	13.95	51.58	43.89	58.59	59.74
18	Paschim medinipur	29.96	20.24	20.63	10.35	49.41	40.29	63.26	64.48
19	Purulia	35.88	25.81	24.36	13.95	51.58	43.89	58.59	59.74
	West Bengal	23.13	19.72	18.59	14.61	44.45	40.35	64.44	64.04

Source: Census of West Bengal PCA 2011

Note: **O.F**- Others Female, **M.F**- Muslim Female

Correlation (r) between all Female Literacy and Percentage of Total Worker = 0.22

Correlation (r) between Muslim Female Literacy and Percentage of Total Worker = 0.53

Correlation (r) between Muslim Female Literacy and Percentage of Main Workforce = 0.25

Correlation (r) between Muslim Female Literacy and percentage of Marginal Workforce = 0.56

Correlation (r) between Muslim Female Literacy and non Worker = - 0.83

Except household, sectoral allocation of women workforce has insignificant share in all districts of the state. Six districts out of nineteen, more than 50 per cent of women are household workers while, in cultivation and gardening Kolkata ranked top in the state. Districts have lower Muslim female have higher per cent of agricultural workforce than districts having high rate of population.

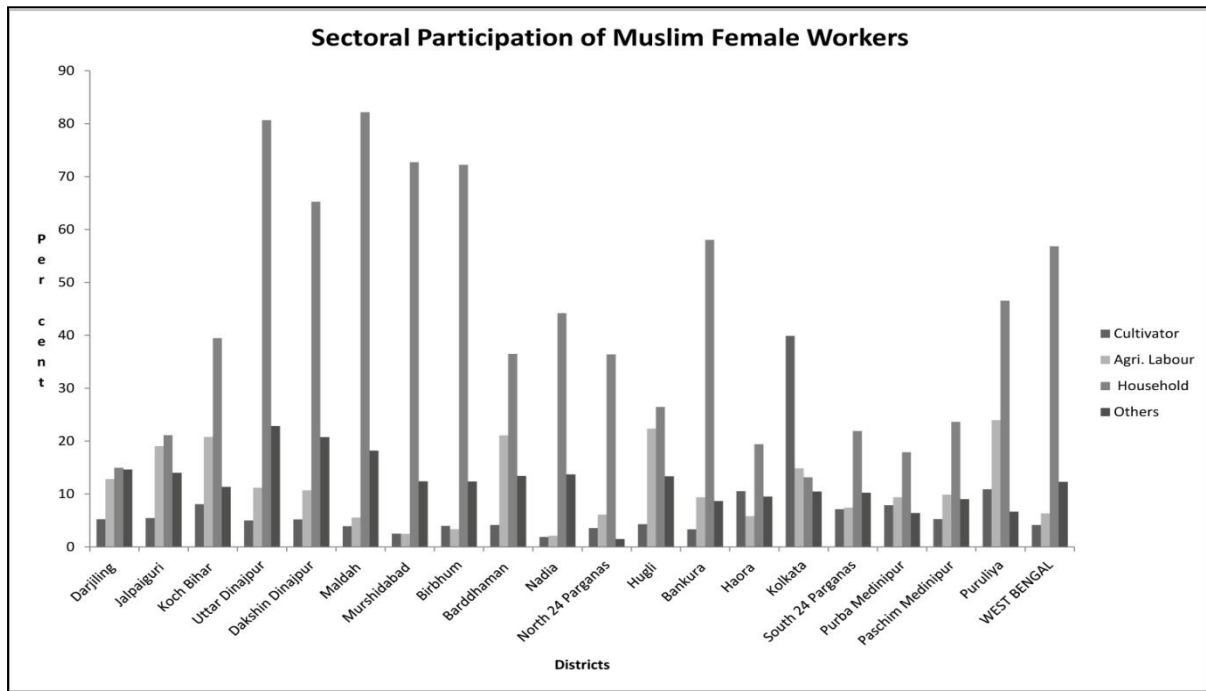


Fig. 3

Correlation (r) between Muslim Female Literacy and Percentage of Cultivator = 0.63

Correlation (r) between Muslim Female Literacy and Percentage of Agri. Labor = - 0.66

Correlation (r) between Muslim Female Literacy and Percentage of Household Worker = - 0.82

Correlation (r) between Muslim Female Literacy and Percentage of Others Worker = 0.28

Despite constitutional guarantees of right to equality and social justice, a large number of Muslims either unemployed or associated with manual low paid occupations both in villages and cities (Waheed, 2006). The participation of Muslims female in salaried jobs, both in the public and the private sectors, is much lower (2.92%) than state's average (11.29%) for all communities. The presence of Muslims was found to be only three per cent in the IAS, 1.8 per cent in the IFS and four per cent in the IPS. Moreover, Muslim female in central administrative jobs but female share is negligible.

Girl children in the age group of 0-6 years are engaged in different works instead going school. Koch Bihar, Uttar Dinajpur and Purulia show worse performance on this regard. Despite constitutional guarantees of right to education for the child in age group from 6 to 14 years of age 23 per cent of Muslim girls are out-of-school (Sachar, 2006).

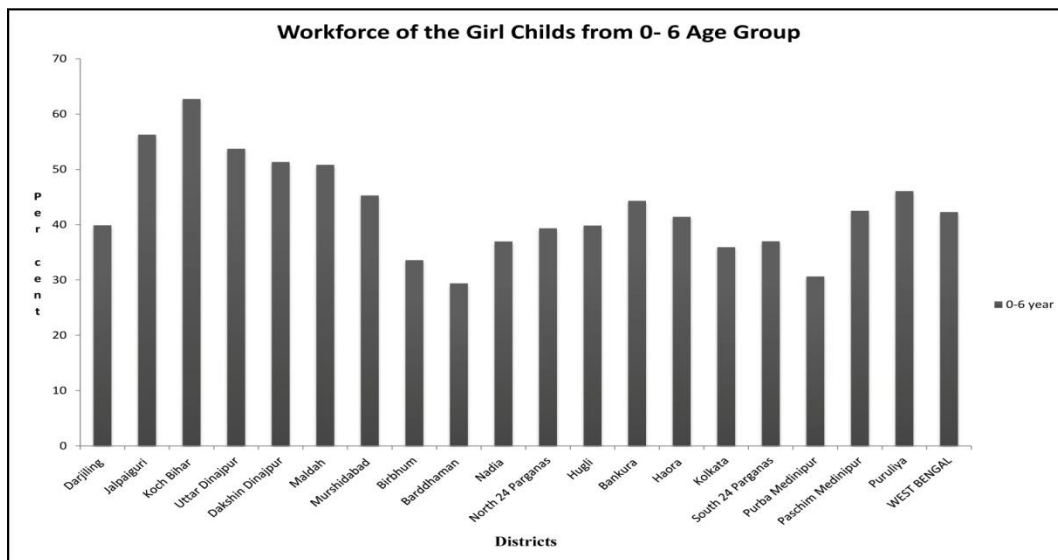


Fig. 4: Correlation (r) between Muslim girl children not attends any school and Workforce (0-6) = 0.69

Other indicators

The state employment index for Muslim female is 35. 65 per cent while, other share 43.84 per cent. The Planning Commission of India reported Muslims have highest poverty ratio, i.e., 33.9 per cent for urban area and 36.2 per cent in rural area. In the districts of Purulia (41.21%) Uttar Dinaljpur (34.6%), Malda (34.04 %) have higher rate of poverty compared to state’s average (31.8%). NFSH data shows the wealth index of Muslim varies from 36.2 to 4.0 with respect to state average 25.2 to 13.9.

The magnitude of cash earnings and their spent is decided by male in case of 85 per cent of households. In decision of a particular issue those females are participated only who are employed in organized sectors. National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) highlights the incident of early marriage of Muslim women led vicious health problems, i.e., death during pregnancy and nutritional diseases.

Challenge Ahead

To improve economic growth and quality of life, women empowerment is an essential tool. As far as study area is concerned, Education significantly makes difference in the lives of women. A large number of Muslim female engaged in self-employment activity. The main reason behind this is lack of education (Sachar, 2006). It was also found that the non-availability of schools within easy reach for girls at lower levels of education, absence of girl’s hostels, absence of

female teachers and non-availability of scholarships as they move up the education ladder, are the main reasons behind their educational backwardness (Sachar, 2006). In almost every three Muslim-dominated villages, one does not have a school. In West Bengal, only one out of the 25 undergraduate students and one out of the 50 post-graduate students is a Muslim in premier colleges. The share of Muslims in all courses is low, particularly at the PG level and marginal in the science stream (Sachar, 2006). Widespread poverty, increasing non-working population, poor health conditions are major hindrance for state's socioeconomic development. Without educational empowerment of weaker section, it is difficult to achieve real women empowerment in West Bengal.

SUGGESTIONS

In light of above studies, following suggestions can be made for the educational backwardness of Muslim women in West Bengal.

- 1) To enable the Muslim women to secure professional jobs, a number of concessions can be given in the form of relaxation in age, experience and qualification.
- 2) Reservations of seats in educational institution and relaxations of rules such as separate interview for Muslim women in comparison with other general candidates can be granted.
- 3) Establishment of new technical and vocational institutions is highly desirable for in situ empowerment of Muslim women in West Bengal
- 4) The new 15-point programme is felt to be necessary to amelioration of socio-economic and educational conditions of the Muslim women in West Bengal.
- 5) 'Self help groups' that presently emerged as an earning tool of women in rural area can become an effective tool to empower Muslim women in study area.

CONCLUSION

Empowerment is one of the main ceremonial concerns when addressing human rights and development issue of an area. According to the United Nations Millennium Campaign, women work two-thirds of the world's working hours, with growing food, cooking, raising children, caring for the elderly, maintaining a house etc., and universally is accorded by low status with no pay. This paper dealing with the pragmatic measurement of Muslim women empowerment in West Bengal concludes with the implementation of 'Fundamental Rights' such as Right to education, right to work, Right to safety and security to life and property, Right to social justice and so on. In age group of zero to six-year parents are bound to send them for work instead of school. It has been rightly said that to educate a woman is to educate the whole family.

Therefore, the emphasis with regard to women education should be to equip her multiple role as citizen, housewife, mother, and contributor to family income, builders of new society and builder of the nation (Sonowal, 2013)

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