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Socio Economic Conditions of Muslims of West Bengal: An Enquiry to Their Social Exclusion

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Abstract

Social exclusion is multidimensional concept. The Muslim community is an excluded group in India. Muslims of West Bengal are a substantial minority and second religious group. They are, being in disadvantageous position and in marginal condition, socio-economically backward in the state of West Bengal. Even though there is lack of literature on the study of Muslims of West Bengal, the present study is an attempt to explore their socio-economic condition, living standard and social exclusion of Muslims in West Bengal. The study based on the collection of data from various secondary sources. The Muslims are excluded in the major aspects of social living such as education, employment, government opportunities, social and physical infrastructure and health. The possible ways, to escape from social exclusion like reservation for Muslims and other major steps, have been taken by the Government of West Bengal.

Key Words: Muslims, social condition, social segregation, Muslim reservation.

Introduction

Social exclusion is a broad concept. It is a process through which an individual or a group or a segment of society is slowly and gradually kept at the margin and excluded from society. Social exclusion keeps a social group outside power centres and resources. It takes the form of segregation from the social, political, economic, cultural, educational and religious domains of society. It, thus, imbues a sense of superiority and inferiority in members of a society or culture and results in a system of domination and subjugation. These processes ultimately lead to oppression and exploitation (Nazeerudin, 2012: 396). Muslims are principle minority and second religious group after the Hindus in India and, in particular, in West Bengal. According to census of India 2011, they constitute 14.64% in India and 27.0% in West Bengal. Muslims lack share of political power and social status. Their numerical strength of population is still lower than the majority community in Indian society. They are educationally most backward, economically poor and politically a powerless community of the country in general and of West Bengal in particular (Mainuddin, 2011: 125). Muslim minority are socially disadvantageous and excluded group. In case of West Bengal, Muslims are at disadvantageous position in terms of physical and infrastructure facilities even where they constitute the majority population of a district. Muslims living in West Bengal are poor and deprived instead of their rich history in pre-partition period (Mainuddin, 2011: 124-125). Muslims in west Bengal live in a communally harmonious and socially integrated milieu with their Hindu neighbourhood. But, communal felling and prejudice do still exist there which could not be ignored. However, Segregation of Muslim could be found in various domains of society. The Muslim social

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exclusion needs rectification through affirmative action. Muslim deserves social justice and equality as much as other disadvantaged group including Dalit and OBCs. Their inclusion in the development agenda of the Government would decide the destiny of Muslim community (Nazeerudin, 2012: 395) and pave the path of social inclusive growth and development in the State. The reservation policy and other welfare activities for Muslims are the positive discrimination to challenge their exclusion.

Social Exclusion

The concept of social exclusion was increasingly prominent in Western Europe in the latter part of the twentieth century and latter on spread in other global regions. While the concept's historical roots can be traced back to Aristotle, the contemporary notion of exclusion emerged in France in the 1970s, linked to a perceived breakdown in social cohesion following civil unrest in the late 1960s in the context of growing unemployment and socio-economic inequalities. The popularity of the social exclusion concept has been attributed to the meanings attached to it such as poverty, inequalities, and also adopted the political and cultural context. Its popularity offers an original perspective on the social world. Social exclusion as multidimensional concept has the potential to provide new insights into the nature, causes and consequences of poverty, deprivation, inequalities and discrimination, and gives new direction to remedial policies (Popy, 2008: 9-10).

Social exclusion has been conceptualised as a continuum across society, or as affecting a segment of the population outside mainstream social systems and relationships. This is as the processes embedded in unequal power relationships that create inequalities or as a state of multiple disadvantages. There is also a distinction between schools of thought that emphasises on lack of participation of individuals in society and in those that identify social exclusion as a lack of access to citizenship rights for members of particular group, community, society or country (Popy, 2008: 21).

Area of Study

West Bengal is one among the 28 Indian states, which is situated in the eastern part of the country stretching from the Himalayan in the North to the Bay of Bengal in the South. It is surrounded by three countries; Bhutan and Nepal in the North and Bangladesh in the last. On its north-east lies the green valley of the state of Assam. Jharkhand and Bihar are located in the west and Orissa in the South-west. The state of west Bengal has been divided into 3 sub-divisions which together consist of the 19 districts. According to 2001 census, the total population of the state comprises about 80,221,171 people including 41,487,694 male and 38,733,477 female. According to 2011 census, total population is about 91, 3 47,736 of which 46927389 male and 44420347 female people.

Methodology and Objectives of Study

Study on the Muslim in West Bengal is very rare in sociological and social anthropological literature. Therefore, the knowledge on the Muslim society of West Bengal is mostly limited. It needs to explore Muslim society and their socio economic conditions detailed which could fill the gap in sociological literature. In this paper it is aimed to study the Muslim population of West Bengal, their socio-economic condition and to explore the standard of their social living condition.

The study based on the collection of data from various secondary sources such as Journals, magazines, books, Government and Public Report, and many more. The religion bases data has been collected from census of India 2001 which is available.

Socio-Economic Conditions of Muslims in India

A study on the socio-economic condition of Muslims in west Bengal exposed that Muslims are disadvantageous in all indicators of socio-economic development like population, sex ratio, literacy, education, work participation, political representation, and etc. This study based on secondary data. It was intended to display the plight of the community who are the victims of a process of invidious discrimination in Indian society (Mainuddin, 2011:123-132). Waheed and Mishra analysed govt. high level committees and programmes for educational employment of minorities in India. They found that there are lacunas in implementation of various schemes and programmes for the minorities. It could be found the delay in publishing government's reports and take up immediate positive actions for the socio-economic development of minorities. Their analysis shows that government did neither frame the programme according to the need of minorities nor did it implemented these programmes effectively. Therefore, Muslims being the largest minority of the country continue to lag behind other communities on all indicators of human development.

The Muslim community is one of the excluded groups in India. Muslim Social exclusion can be seen in the form of segregation socially, politically, economically, culturally, educationally in Indian society (Nazeerudin, 2012: 395-96). Muslims are marginal and excluded community in some indicators in India. According to various high level committee and commissions of government, which were set up for the study of minority and socio-economically backward groups, Muslims are very poor whether it is in urban area or in rural area in comparison to SC/STs and Other socio-religious communities and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in India. Their improvement on some indicators such as literacy, employments, health, etc is still marginal and lower than SC/STs in India. It has been observed in social and anthropological study of Muslim by different scholars that the Muslims have experienced discrimination and injustice in case of both targeted violence during communal riots as well as equal participation in the development process. Muslims are unequally treated in several stream of social life. They are the victims of prejudice, discrimination, exploitation and subjugation. This has been observed in the Govt response to the implementation of various development schemes, programmes and making policy and planning (Parvez, Ayesa, 2011:1-6). According to the Planning Commission's India Human Development Report 2011, urban literacy in general (from 1999-2000 to 2007-08) has increase from 69.8% to 75.1% and rural literacy from 52.1% to 63.5%. However, the rate of increase of literacy amongst Muslims in comparison to other socio-religious groups is also lowest. Urban literacy in the SC group has increased by 8.7 points and among the ST group by 8 points. Among Muslims, it has increased only by 5.3 points. Likewise, there is decrease in the under-5 mortality rate for Muslims between 1998-99 and 2005-06 is 12.7 points whereas it is 31.2 for SCs and 30.9 for STs.

According to Sachar committee report, Muslims constitutes second highest incidence of poverty, with 31% of people below the poverty line, following SC/STs who are the most poor with a head Count Ratio (HCR) of 35%. The literacy rate among Muslims is far below the national average in 2001 and the rate of decline in literacy was much lower than the SCs/STs. 25% of Muslim children in the 6-14 age group either never went to school or else dropped out at some stage. In considering the employment of Muslims in proportion to their population, they are marginal. Muslims have considerably lower representation in government jobs, including in public sector undertaking,

Socio Economic Conditions of Muslims of West Bengal: An Enquiry to Their Md Zinarul Hoque Biswas compared to other excluded groups. Muslim participation in professional and management cadres in the private sector is also low. Their participation in security-related activities (for example in the police) is considerably lower than their population. Muslims representations in civil services, state public service commissions, railways, department of education, etc, are also equally appalling (G.O.I, 2006). However, the situations of Muslims, in case of west Bengal, are not different from the other parts of the country in general.

Muslim Population in West Bengal

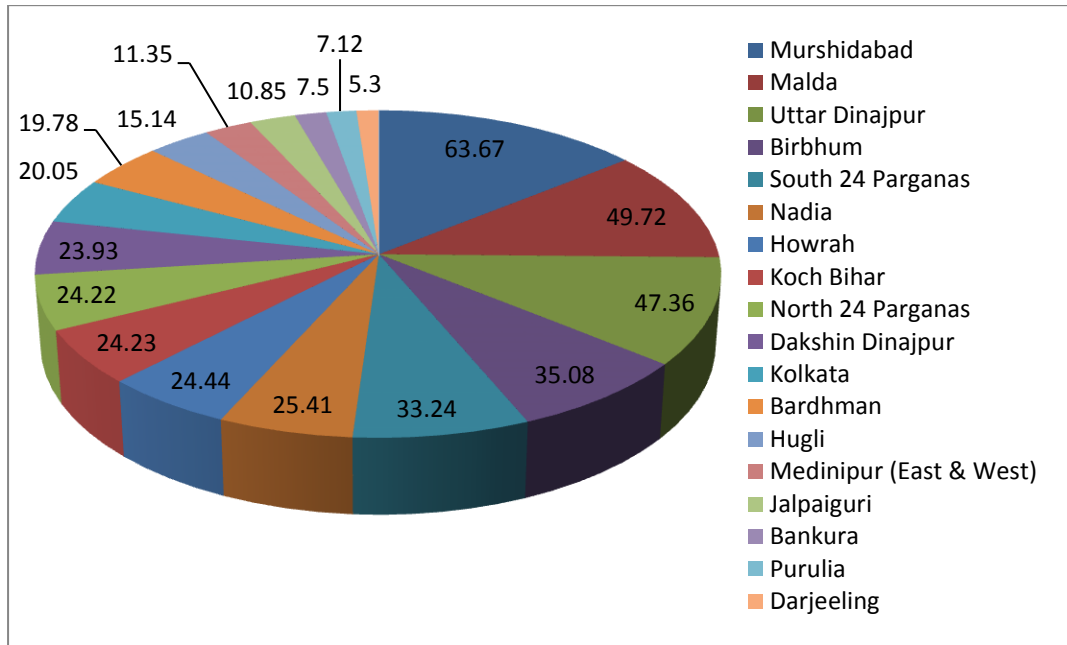
Muslims of West Bengal constitute second largest religious and principle minority group among all other socio-religious communities in the state. According to 2001 census, West Bengal occupies third position among various state and union territories of the country in terms of percentage of Muslim population. Muslims constitutes 26.65% (2011) of the state population in West Bengal. On the bases of available data of 2001 census, Muslims are concentrated in all the districts of West Bengal in varied proportion which has been categorized into three levels based on the degree of concentration. It may be considered that the districts where the concentration is more than 32.01 percent may be called as ‘*Muslim concentration districts*’. Further, the districts where the Muslim population is less than 16.95 of total population may be called as ‘*low Muslim concentrated district*’. There are 5 districts which show relatively higher concentration of Muslim population out of the 18 districts. They are Murshidabad (63.67), Malda (49.72), Uttar Dinajpur (47.36), Birbhum (35.08) and South 24 Parganas (33.24), forming a continuous region of high concentration of Muslim population in the Middle parts of the state during the Muslim rule in the West Bengal (Hussain, N. 2012:44).

Figure-1
Concentration of Muslim population, West Bengal 2001

Region	Concentration	Districts
High	More than 32.91	Murshidabad (63.67), Malda (49.72), Uttar Dinajpur (47.36), Birbhum (35.08), S 24 Parganas (33.24)
Medium	16.95-32.91	Nadia (25.41), Howrah (24.44), Koch Bihar (24.24), N 24 Parganas (24.22), Dakshin Dinajpur (24.02), Kolkata (20.27), Bardhaman (19.78)
Low	Less than 16.95	Hugli (15.140), Mednipur (11.33), Jalpaiguri (10.85), Bankura (7.51), Purulia (7.12) and Darjeeling (5.31)

Source: Hussain, N 2012: 45

Figure-2
District wise Muslim populations in West Bengal, 2001



Sources: Census of West Bengal, 2001

There are 341 Blocks in the state. Out of these Blocks, 58 Blocks share more than 50% Muslim population, in 25 blocks the corresponding figure ranged between 40-50% and in 59 blocks it was between 25-39%. There population share was less than 15% in 143 blocks.

Figure-3
Block wise Distribution of Muslims

Muslim concentration (in %)	No. of Blocks	Blocks %
Above 50	58	17.01
40-50	25	7.33
25-39	59	17.30
15-24	56	16.42
Below 15	143	41.94
West Bengal	341	100.00

Source: Public Report, W.B, 2014

Socio Economic Conditions of Muslims of West Bengal

Muslims in West Bengal live in both rural and urban area. Majority of them concentrates in rural area. Both the urban and rural Muslims suffered from poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and other social problems. But the situation is critical in rural areas where Muslim population share majority of West Bengal.

Justice Rajindar Sachar has pointed out that the Muslims of West Bengal have not only lagged behind Muslims of the all other states but even are the most deprived community amongst all in the

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In West Bengal, the mean year schooling (MYS) among Muslim children is the lowest among all socio-religious communities (SRCs). The MYS of Muslim children is lower than that of ‘All other’ in almost all state. The MYS of Muslims is lowest in state like West Bengal (ibid, 56). According to Census 2001, the Muslim literacy in West Bengal is about 57.5% whereas literacy among SCs/STs is 56.2% and among Hindus 72.4%. The Muslim literacy is lower than total literacy (68.6%) of state.

It is estimated that Muslims worker engaged in trade is about 12.3% which is lower than the Hindu workers 10.5% in West Bengal. Self employed workers among Muslim are about 52.6% which is more than the Hindu self employed workers 44.6% (ibid, 342-43).

Social Living Condition

In West Bengal, Villages are generally found to be consisting of smaller hamlets, called *paras*. The *paras* had their origin in the social division of the society, where particular caste or religious groups maintained, or were made maintain, their relative insularity, this used to get reflected in the nomenclature of the hamlets such as *Brahmanpara*, *Dompara*, *Musalmanpara*, etc. In course of time, however, various social changes have resulted in re-shaping the structures of the habitation whereby the *paras* are now found to be inhabited by multiple social groups, despite retaining their original names, and some of the original characteristics. For example, a *Dompara*, once the exclusive habitat of the people of Dom community now has denizens from other communities, even though still in number (G.O.W.B, 2014:37-38).

A public report (2014) on the “status of Muslim in West Bengal” which 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 conditions in the state which could be found in different indicators such as infrastructure, electricity, drinking water, irrigation, health, education, employment and other basic amenities. *Paras* 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, *paras* 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

Figure-4
Road and Electricity Status in West Bengal (% Percentage)

Para Characteristics	No electricity	Waterlogged	All	Number of paras
Pre-dominantly Upper caste Hindu	3.53	16.47	4.71	85
Pre-dominantly Scheduled Caste	6.25	27.78	7.98	144
Pre-dominantly Schedule Tribe	8.33	36.67	3.33	60

Pre-dominantly Muslim	8.19	27.13	50.06	903
Pre-dominantly Diverse	8.17	26.47	33.92	612
Total	7.82	26.77	100	1804

Source: Public Report, W.B:2014

The above figure shows that Muslims and SCs are more prone to electricity deprivation than STs and upper caste. STs are more victim of waterlogged than Muslims and SCs. But Muslims, SCs and STs are more prone to waterlogged than higher caste people in West Bengal. However, Muslims are more victimised to electricity deprivation and waterlogged than SCs, STs, and upper caste.

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).

Discussion and Conclusion

The Muslims of West Bengal are socio-economically disadvantageous and marginal group. Government of West Bengal had formed many initiatives for the welfare of state and other disadvantageous groups. But there was no effective positive action in favour of Muslims of West Bengal in post independent India. It was the land reform policy of then Left Front Government of West Bengal in 1970, which benefited the poorer sections of both the Muslim and Hindu communities (Dasgupta, 2009: 95). 30.9% of the rural households in West Bengal are Muslim household having access to 25.6% of the total cultivated land in the state (G.O.W.B, 2010). But it was marginal to change the fate of community. After long period of time in 2010, the Left Front government has again formed another major positive initiative that is 10% reservation for Muslim OBCs in West Bengal. It is generally believed that it was the policy of left front to secure their Muslim vote bank. And during the rule of left front, the situation of Muslims were worse than SCs/STs and other socio-religious communities, which has been detected by the report of various high level committee and commission of government. Even though the present government failed to meet the imperious needs of the community, still it adhere to promote the socio-economic status of the community.

Recently, a report of Kundu committee on the status of Muslim in India was set up in 2013 to evaluate the conditions of Muslims on parameters such as demography, employment, live hood, consumption, living standards, poverty, management of wakf property and general policy issues apart from education and health. It means that to measure the change in the condition of Muslims or to scale the improvement of the Muslims after the implementation of major recommendation of sachchar committee. This committee stated that there is improvement in the condition of Muslim but it is marginal. Other studies among various scholars also stated the same review.

The public report suggests that there is a capability deprivation-the lack of opportunity for self-emancipation-that is responsible for the poor socio-economic condition of Muslims. Muslims should also come ahead and participate in growth inclusive programmes and help their poor also by informing them about their problems and supporting, encouraging and helping theme in such

Socio Economic Conditions of Muslims of West Bengal: An Enquiry to Their Md Zinarul Hoque Biswas endeavours (Ghaffar, 2010.Eastern post). However, the present condition of Muslims is little better after the implementation of 10% reservation for Muslims in govt job and it could pave the way to change the fate of the community.

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