

Muslim Women Education of Malda District : The Status and Challenges

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Geography students collect data such as maps, satellite imagery, and spreadsheets from their own fieldwork. They analyze this Geography data and understand relationships across time and space. Geography investigations are often value laden and involve critical-thinking skills. For example, after examining a map of cotton production in the USA, students investigate the relationship between latitude, altitude, climate, land use, and cotton production. After discovering much cotton is grown in dry regions that must be irrigated, students can then ask "Why is cotton grown in these dry areas? Should cotton be grown in these dry areas? Is that the best use of water and other natural resources?" Finally, students present the results of their investigations using Geography tools such as web GIS and desktop Geography information systems. Their investigations usually spark additional questions, and the resultant cycle is the essence of Geography investigation. Students study geography to understand that the earth is changing. Then they scientifically and analytically think about why it is changing. And they even dig deeper than that. Should the earth be changing in these ways? Is there anything that I can do about it or that I should be doing about it? This not only captures the heart of spatial thinking—inquiry and problem-based learning—but also empowers students to become decision makers, to make a difference in this changing world of ours. Geography therefore is not simply just a "nice to have" subject for an already-crowded educational curriculum. It underpins, in my view, the critical-thinking skills, technology skills, citizen skills, and life skills that underpin all other disciplines. It is essential for grappling with the essential issues of our time.

The villages of Malda have gradually changed. Village does not mean the story of grief and failure. Namita, Chhabi, Arati are identified with their stories of success. They form self help and self dependent group to stand firm on their own feet. Distant villages of Malda exhibit two features. Self dependent groups and deposit loan and insurance. These groups bring changes in the life of backward women especially in the remote villages in this district. Infact, self dependent group means association of 10-15 socially and economically backward women having equal status. This association is area based. Deposit of money and loan help them to form the group. As the group strengthens, the women become self confident. The expansion of primary and basic education in Malda district helps them to give more attention on the education of their children, nurturing of the little girls. The exploitation of women, oppression on women becomes decreased. Women in Malda district are now eager to know the functions and activities of Panchayats. They are participating in the session of Gram Sansad. Group formation, financial management, group based organization formation, relation with bank-these are some developments in the rural sector of this state. The role of self

dependent group may be important in the Gram Unnayan Samity in Malda. At present, there are about 43 thousands groups in the state. 13 thousands families are involved with it. 1 lakh people are attached with this activities. Besides NGOs, the State Government has extended its hands for the development of rural women of Malda district. Swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (2 thousand groups) of Deptt. of Panchayat and Rural Development, Swayangsidha Project (60 groups) of West Bengal Women Development Corporation. NABARD, CO-operative banks, Samabaya Krishi Unnayan Samity have helped a lot. SIDBI and Rashtriya Mahila Kosh have worked well. Cash project of care and its associated organization (110 groups) have done well in this sector. Self Help Group Promotional Forum has arranged with the association of State Panchayat and Rural Development Organization. They have arranged Annual Conferences every year. Women participated in this conference coming from all corners of districts. They attend, participate in the discussion and ultimately frame the future plan of action. As a consequence, gender discrimination and educational discrimination has decreased. Though in a slow rate but decreasing.

Example :

Namita Das is a member of a downtrodden family. Her husband is a rickshaw puller. Namita's son Mukai fell ill one day. Namita had no money to bring her son to a medical practitioner. Namita borrowed Rs.200 from a self dependent group and made necessary arrangements for her son's treatment. Chhabi Kundu and her husband are rice dealers. But the majority share of their profit was consumed to meet the interest of the money lender. The want of the family went on. Chhabi became the member of "Surabhi" – a self dependent group. Now, she has achieved the provision of loan. Now their profit increased. Her economic stability and social establishment have enhanced. Arati Mandal lives in old Malda. Majority of her land was sterile. Her husband was daily wage worker. On day he passed away. There was no option in front of Arati than went to city for searching a new job. But the other members of self dependent group helped her to stay in village.

Some critics advocate that all women are terminal in the male dominating society. Women of Malda district are the worst sufferer of destruction and sexual harassment. Women of lower class are compelled to accept it. They do not know how to protect it. 25th November and 10th December are observed each year as "International Women Oppression Day" and "International Human Rights Day." But the morning newspapers cover the incidents of sexual harassment, rape, wife oppression, Removal of women of Malda district secretly on a daily basis. Effect of gender biasness directly falls on the women. Imbalance deprives women from education, health,

physical and economic resources etc. They are deprived in the field of politics, economics, social and culture even. Rural women Malda district do not work by laptop but in the cropfield. They have to be understood about their rights. Urban women know the language of protest. They have achieved freedom in a considerable degree. But the rural women of Malda district are still in the climate of darkness. Child marriage, dowry system and female foeticide are still happening even in Malda district are treated since their childhood as "You are a woman" not "You are a human being". Boys are still at the top of the priority list than girls. They are fed by nutritious food. The village women do not know about women freedom, women liberty, women emancipation etc. Light of education can only provide the necessary awareness amongst the victimized poor women of Malda district.

The demand for technical and vocational training also reflects the significant gap that exists between agricultural and non-agricultural work participation in the villages surveyed. The predominance of casual workforce in agriculture and allied occupations among the working population clearly displays the lack of skill in both religious groups. Given the findings on educational choices and preferences it is undoubtedly related that the population strongly prefers the supply of such training facilities to replace or add on to the general educational trainings. In fact, the overwhelming demand for computer training epitomizes the awareness, even if incomplete, of the beckoning possibilities in this new era of electronics and information technologies. While a higher literacy rate is a definite precursor for even partial awareness in this regard, the need for technical education is a certain emphasis among the potential workforce that should not be downplayed under any circumstances. The public funds must be allocated towards provision of such facilities in the areas covered in this study.

The literacy rate is generally considered as one of the important indicators of the development of a population, and the educational level of a population is seen as an important determinant of its quality of life. In addition, of course, education interacts with other human development variables in crucial ways. For example, universal education and special attention to the education of women are critical in improving the health practices of a community. Universal education is also likely to be necessary for meaningful and effective decentralization, especially in the coming phase when panchayats are being given greater responsibility for a very wide range of activities. In the last decade, the improvement in literacy has been relatively slow in Malda district, especially for women. However, in the past decade, the state government has been making concentrated efforts through various special schemes such as 'total literacy campaigns', 'non-formal education', etc. apart from formal schooling for children to achieve the goal of 'education for all' as soon as possible. As a result, according to the Census, the literacy rate in Malda district has increased from 48.6 per cent in 1981 to 57.7 per cent in 1991 and to 69.2 per cent in 2001. While rural literacy is predictably lower than in urban areas, it has improved more rapidly in the recent past.

It is encouraging that the largest improvements in literacy in the past decade have been in some of what were the most

"Malda" districts, and especially among females. Increases in the female literacy rate have been in excess more than 15 percentage points in Malda, in the period between 1991 and 2001. So there is substantial improvement in literacy and especially female literacy in the recent period.

By 1998-99, 48 per cent of rural males and 27 per cent of rural females in the age group 15 years and above were estimated to have completed at least primary education, and around one-third of these had completed secondary education or above. In the urban areas, 79 per cent of adult males and 62 per cent of adult females were found by the NFHS-2 to be literate at least up to primary level or above.

The variations in literacy rates across occupational groups in rural Malda district for all the population above 7 years, and separately for females above 7 years. The relatively most deprived occupation group appears to be that of agricultural labour households, of whom more than half of all such population, and nearly two-thirds of the females, are non-literate. Households consisting of the self-employed in agriculture show the highest rates of literacy, for men and women in rural parts of the Malda district. Gender gaps remain substantial and women of rural labour households (both in agriculture and non-agriculture) are the worst off among the rural population in terms of illiteracy. Interestingly, gender gaps in literacy appear to be slightly less marked in urban parts of Malda district. Casual labour households are the worst off, and nearly half the women in such households are illiterate. In urban areas, those households where the main source of income is from regular wages, as well as "other" households, show the lowest rates of illiteracy. Quite obviously, females in the ST households in the rural areas of Malda district need special attention to improve the education levels in the rural Malda district. Next come SC households, where more than half of the women are illiterate. The gender gap seems to be approximately equal across caste category, indicating that gender discrimination is not more marked among any particular caste group, but is shared across all castes. Nor is the gender gap among Muslims higher than it is among Hindus, indicating that the general perception that Muslim women are less likely to be educated than their Hindu counterparts, is not borne out by the data. However, attendance rates for girls aged 6-10 years in rural Malda district were generally better than the all-India average, although in urban areas the rate in Malda district was slightly lower. For girls aged 11-13, attendance rates were higher or the same as the all-India average. Increasing the efforts for resource mobilization to enable more state government spending in necessary areas; and innovating and strengthening institutions and mechanisms to ensure the better delivery of public services. Such a strategy would help to generate a virtuous cycle of human development and economic growth positively reinforcing each other in Malda district. There are particular areas that require specific intervention in Malda district which are mentioned very briefly here. The reversal of employment generation for urban women, and the large male-female wage-gap in urban work, both point to the need for focused intervention. The low nutritional status of women and young children require urgent attention. Areas of public intervention that can be usefully pursued in this regard include the provision of sanitary facilities and campaigns to improve

food consumption practices to ensure adequate nutrition. Targeted interventions in terms of provision, access and raising public consciousness about desirable food intake patterns are especially necessary, given the large production of vegetables, which do not appear to be consumed within the Malda district. In education, certain spatial and social pockets of illiteracy need to be addressed. In occupational terms, agricultural labour households (and especially females in such households) require special policy attention. Scheduled Tribe households (especially females) also require a focused drive to increase literacy. The Constitutional provisions of social equality and justice need to be strengthened by the efforts of common people in villages and cities of Malda district. Efforts to end gender based discrimination should be implemented aggressively. Expansion of education of women in Malda district should be aimed at ending injustice and enhancing the individual potential as well as social contribution of those members of society who have limited opportunities.

Female literacy is one of the important indicators of educational development for any society. A comparative analysis was done between the Muslim female literacy rate and general female literacy rate. The Muslim female literacy level (49.75 per cent) is lower than the general female literacy (59.61 per cent) by 9.86 percentage points. If we see the rank of the state in term of female literacy rate it ranked 8th but in case of Muslim female literacy rate the downed to 10th. That indicates a kind of gap existed among the female literacy rate of Muslim and general population. The Muslim female literacy level (49.75 per cent) is lower than the general female literacy (59.61 per cent) by 9.86 percentage points. In case of state average also, Muslim female literacy rate is accounted for only 49.75 per cent which is much less than the Muslim male literacy rate (64.61). It is an interesting feature that the gap between general literacy rate of the district and Muslim literacy rate of the district varies significantly.

Comparative scenario of Muslim literacy, Muslim population and general literacy in 19 districts of West Bengal

Rank	Female Literacy Rate			Rank	Muslim	
	Districts/state	General	Muslim		Districts/ state	Population (%)
1	Kolkata	77.3	63.61	1	Murshidabad	63.67
2	N.24 Parganas	71.72	58.13	2	Malda	49.72
3	Howrah	70.11	60.78	3	U. Dinajpur	47.36
4	Hooghly	67.21	67.31	4	Birbhum	35.08
5	Medinipur	64.42	54.36	5	S. 24 Parganas	33.24
6	Darjeeling	62.94	37.92	6	Nadia	25.41
7	Bardhaman	60.95	61.39	7	West Bengal	25.25
8	West Bengal	59.61	49.75	8	Howrah	24.44
9	Nadia	59.58	44.03	9	Kooch Bihar	24.24
10	S. 24 Parganas	59.01	50.27	10	N 24 Parganas	24.22
11	Kooch Bihar	56.12	47.11	11	D. Dinajpur	24.02
12	D. Dinajpur	54.28	61.33	12	Kolkata	20.27
13	Jalpaiguri	52.21	45.01	13	Bardhaman	19.78
14	Birbhum	51.55	50.97	14	Hooghly	15.14
15	Bankura	49.43	46.96	15	Mednipore	11.33
16	Murshidabad	47.63	42.76	16	Jalpaiguri	10.85
17	Malda	41.25	38.68	17	Bankura	7.51
18	Uttar Dinajpur	36.51	25.5	18	Purulia	7.12
19	Purulia	36.5	34.14	19	Darjeeling	5.31

Source: Census of India, 2011.

From the above analysis it may be inferred that Muslims are the most backward section of society, standing at bottom position in the educational field and also socio-economic development when compared to the general population of Malda district. Raising the level of literacy is only solution to bring social consciousness among them. No doubt, socio-economic development of Muslim community might diminish the existing human group disparities. It was seen that Muslim dominated regions are bound to remain in low level of development may be due to the irrational allocation resource for and negligence of planners and policy makers towards these regions. Even there is an also societal norm and mind

set of the parents that if we higher educate our daughter, we may have to arrange give much dowry at the time of her marriage because she will prefer to go higher educated laws house. Even in some extent Parda system in Islam leads to lower Female literacy rate in Malda district. One thing we should have to mention here that when a girl born in a family, parents started thinking her as burden. So they do not care for her education or other kind of personal development. Last but not least the major reason for lagging behind of Female literacy rate among Muslim women is the poor socio-economic conditions. Most of the Muslim family

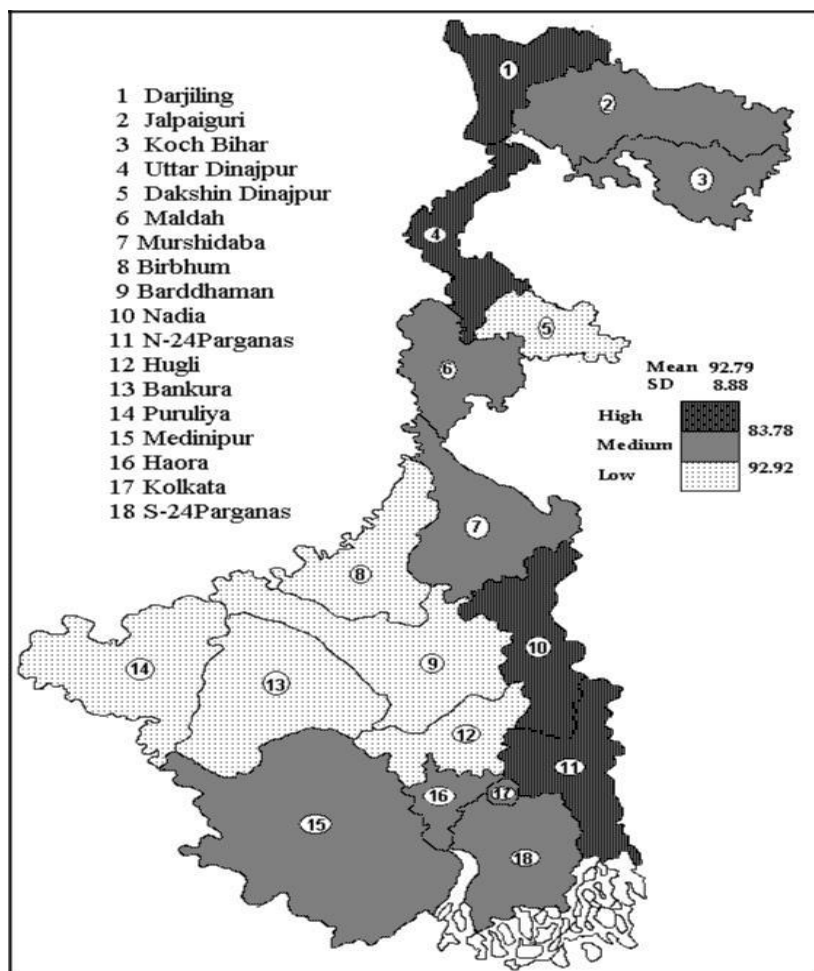


Figure: Pattern of Muslim women Educational Backwardness in Malda in respect of West Bengal

Muslim women community has failed to achieve socio-economic progress even though individually Muslims have, in many ways, made significant contributions to the arts, culture and even politics of the modern society. In addition, the status of Muslim literacy rate needs to be improved in general and female literacy rate in particular. In order to achieve all this enlightened leadership is required along with a great deal of commitment and focused developmental work. The most disheartening fact is that the literacy rates among Muslim women of West Bengal are also lower in Muslim concentrated districts. It may apparently be perceived that Muslim community is the problem for achieving socio-economic development of a region or an area. But from the above analysis it may be inferred that Muslims are the most backward section of society, standing at bottom position in the educational field when compared to the general population of Malda district. No doubt, Muslims are not the main problem; rather mass illiteracy prevailing among them is the root cause of socio-cultural and economic development of the state in general and Muslim women in particular. Immediate conclusion drawn is that, the community needs development and progress which should be about 1.47 times of what exists now, to be at par with the general population of Malda district. Raising the level of literacy is only solution to bring social consciousness among them. No doubt, socio-economic development of Muslim women might diminish the existing human group disparities. Thus Muslim women dominated regions are bound to remain in low level of development may be due to the irrational allocation resource for and negligence of planners

and policy makers towards these regions. Therefore it is explicit that no region is lagging behind solely because of Muslim women habitation as well as deprived but it is implicit in the socio-economically backwardness of the region to which they belongs.

In the district of Malda, despite the presence of school, the percentage of girls dropping out of these institutions is fairly significant. The reasons for this may not be entirely indigenous for our sample households agree that regularity of teachers in taking classes, the maintenance of discipline and teaching overall is to the satisfaction of parents in the sample household. On inquiring about the reasons for such high proportion of dropouts, factors endogenous to school and pedagogy were cited as significant constraints in continuing education. Thus, a fairly large number of our respondents felt that the school was too far. This indicates that all weather road connectivity or adequate transport facilities are poor thus discouraging children desirous of accessing school education. Similarly, a fairly large number of children are employed in various jobs to supplement the household income. A very large percentage of boys and girls do not go to school as they are compelled to work and or their parents are unable to fund their school education.

Almost all the villages have at least one primary school within the village. Absence of secondary school in almost all the villages is prevalent. Number of commercial banks and co-operatives are very few within the district though there are

some credit societies situated in the district. From the village directory data it can be observed that the district and villages within it, is not well connected by bus routes and rail station.

"Geography enables students to understand their world locally to globally, make wise decisions about the planet and its resources, and become critical thinkers," said Kerski (2011). Geography grapples with the key issues of our time—energy, water, biodiversity, climate, natural hazards, population, and much more. Geography questions begin with the why and where; Why are cities, eco-regions, and earthquakes located where they are, and how are they affected by their proximity to nearby things and also by invisible global interconnections and networks? To search out the concept of Geography education I also studied different articles like: Geography Education: How Human-Environment-Society Processes Work of Sibylle Reinfried and Philippe Hertig. To know about the graphicacy (spatial information through maps), world and regional knowledge, regional & international understanding, environmental awareness along with geography education I reviewed the article Geography in Secondary Education of Michael Williams and Simon Catling (June 1985).

Geography education is a scientific discipline grounded in the domains of geography and education. Geography education selects and structures Geography content knowledge, skills and attitudes to enable learners to understand the human-environment-society processes in the world and to achieve Geography literacy. Geography education influences student's understanding of place, the interconnectedness of places and the spatial actions caused by various actors. Geography education also develops and evaluates curricula, teaching and learning objectives, methodologies concerning teaching and learning processes and is involved in initial teacher training and professional development of in-service geography teachers.

Secondary level, because, it is the vital stage of base development of interdisciplinary concept about space-time relation among students.

Average literacy rate of Malda district in 2011 is 61.73 %; which is second lowest district of West Bengal in respect of literacy. So, with the help of this research the problems can be find out at secondary level in geography education which has highly value to attract students to school. The recommendations can be apply to reduce the drop outs and the total education scenario must be improved. Though importance of curriculum in education has studied lots of time yet an open and extensive research on particular need of geography education being a vital curricular in education is not found especially in respect of current status, teacher-student perception and the measures for concrete development of its.

The latitude range is 24°40'20" N to 25°32'08" N, and the longitude range is 87°45'50" E to 88°28'10" E. The district covers an area of 3,733.66 square kilometres (1,441.6 sq mi). The total population (as of 2001 Census) was recorded as 3,290,160. Malda is called the gateway of North Bengal. It was once the capital of Gour-Banga with its 3,733 square kilometres (1,441 sq mi) lay of the land classified into Tal,

Diara, and Barind. Total 137 Secondary Schools are found here. Average literacy rate of Maldah in 2011 is 61.73; which is second least district of West Bengal in respect of literacy.

Today, at the dawn of the 21st century, Geography education has to play a crucial role in the general educational systems of all countries around the world. In the forthcoming years and decades, today's learners need to act as responsible citizens with regard to complex key issues that are of great environmental, social, cultural, economic and political significance. Geography education is one of the educational areas that teach learners the thinking skills required to understand and to act sustainably in the world. Without geography, young people are unprepared for an increasingly global future. Today's conception of Geography education concerns the conception of Geography knowledge, the conception of learning and the epistemology of the discipline, and educational values embedded in the general aims of a school system. With respect to the global problems of the 21st century today's learners will in the future have to act as responsible citizens as regards complex key issues that are of great environmental, social, cultural, economic and political significance. Current trends in Geography education therefore concern integrative Geography concepts that are used to structure educational processes and foster critical thinking, education for sustainable development, citizenship education, the role and teaching of information and communication technology (ICT), the trend to conceive standard- and skill-based curricula, and the increased emphasis on high quality research in Geography education. In the future, geography will continue to play the role of an essential school subject to address controversially discussed issues concerning human-environment-society interactions. Future endeavours in Geography education require a theory-based development of learning environments that foster deep learning and understanding. The learning environments should reflect the state-of-the-research knowledge in psychology, cognitive theory and Geography education of how children at various grade levels acquire process, reason with, and learn geography. Geography education is an interdisciplinary field of knowledge. While grounded in the context of geography, the domain of Geography education must take into account research from a wide area ranging from education to the cognitive science and technology development. It is an applied field in which theory and practice interact. Geography education connects objectives, contents, teaching materials and tools as well as teaching methods with having in mind the function and forms of the Geography knowledge and skills for the learners' recent and future lives. This also includes the theoretical debate on the nature of science of the discipline of geography. Epistemological thinking is necessary for a meaningful Geography education in schools, which has to be consistent with the general educational aims of the school system. Today's conception of Geography education is influenced by four main parameters which also serve as reference frames: 1) The values which are expressed by the general aims of a school system which find expression in the aims assigned to be taught in geography by the educational institutions; 2) the conception of Geography knowledge; 3) the conception of learning; 4) and the epistemology of the discipline (Hertig & Varcher, 2004). In accordance with these

reference frames, the inclusion of geography in the curricula implies that the following three categories of general educational aims are also contained (Audigier, 1995): the aims of heritage and citizenship, aims concerning intellectual and critical discourse, and practical aims. Therefore geography in Secondary and secondary schools plays an essential role in

providing the learners the ability to develop critical thinking skills in order to comprehend the world. Such thinking skills are concerned with learning how to investigate and to answer questions referring to the relationships of human societies with space and the relationships between different human societies across space (Raffestin & Turco, 1984).

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