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CHAPTER-2

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1: Aims and Objectives of Present Research

This research is exploratory of nature and aimed to situation analysis of the existing nature of literacy and level of education among the Muslim women of rural West Bengal and rural Bangladesh. The general objective as determined in this study is to make a comparison between the rural Muslim women of West Bengal and Bangladesh in aspects of their educational status, problems and prospects. The specific objectives that have been derived from the said general objective are as follows:

1. To find out the rate and level of literacy, net and gross enrolment ratios, age of entry and tenure of schooling and extent of drop-out and stagnation of women belonging to Muslim community in West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh.
2. To identify the religious misconceptions and non-Islamic attitudes of the Muslims and other factors hindering women's educational status, modernization and gender equity.
3. To examine the perceptions of Muslim women and influential Muslim males towards women's right and dignity, employment and empowerment of women, coeducation and institution of purdah, functional necessity of female education etc.
4. To identify the problems of Muslim women education and assess the prospects of their educational upliftment.
5. To make supportive policy formulation suggestions for the educational advancement of rural girls and women belonging to Muslim communities of West Bengal and Bangladesh.

In accordance with the above aims and objectives the present study is a humble attempt to deal with the following set of research questions:

- i. What are the present educational situation and rates of literacy among the peoples belonging to study villages?
- ii. What are the enrollment ratios, drop-out percentages, nature and extent of stagnation among them?
- iii. How far Muslim females are lagging behind in attaining education in comparison with their male counterpart?
- iv. How far they are lagging behind in educational field in comparison with the females of other communities?
- v. What is the economic condition of Muslim villagers and how much it is reflected in the process of female education?
- vi. What sorts of attitudes Muslim girls and women possess towards formal education, coeducation and *purdah* practices?
- vii. Do Muslim girls and women think that formal education is a must for self-development? If so, up to which level?
- viii. What are the aspirations of Muslim parents and guardians towards education for their daughters/female wards?
- ix. What is the notion of Islam towards education? Are Muslim girls and women aware of the real notion?
- x. What type of tenet the orthodox *Mollahs* and *Moulavis* usually propagate regarding female education? Do they discourage secular education for Muslim girls and women?

- xi. Are Muslim girls and women conscious about their relative educational backwardness?
- xii. What problems the rural Muslim girls and women usually face in attaining formal education? Do early marriage and seclusion still prevail among them?
- xiii. What measures the Muslim girls and women think essential for their educational upliftment?
- xiv. What are the suggestions of Muslim guardians/influential males for educational upliftment of girls and women?

2.2: Research Hypotheses

The study is guided by the following set of hypotheses:

1. Muslim girls and women of rural West Bengal and rural Bangladesh are lagging much behind in formal education in comparison with other members of their societies.
2. The state of formal education among rural Muslim girls and women is relatively weak for their poor economic condition and unfavorable attitudes towards modern education.
3. The unfavourable attitudes towards modern education among the Muslims are not resulted from religious injunction or sentiment; rather it is due to their implicit ignorance and lack of functional necessity for formal education in their underprivileged and inartistic socio-cultural life.
4. The minority status and economic insolvency of Muslims in West Bengal jointly hinders their women education while lack of infrastructural facilities, fear of insecurity and insignificant roles of influential males and religious leaders etc are largely liable for educational backwardness of rural Muslim women in both West Bengal and Bangladesh.

2.3: The Concepts Used

Before describing the research design it will be appropriate to explain the concepts that have been examined in this study with utmost importance. The functional definitions of the concepts used in this study are as follows:

1. Sex Ratio: It refers the number of females per 1000 males.
2. Dependency Ratio: It refers the number of dependent persons per each income earner.
3. Agro-based Family: It refers the families which are mainly depending on agriculture or agro-based occupations.
4. Non-agro-based Family: It refers the families which are mainly depending on non-agriculture or non-agro-based occupations.
5. Landless Family: It includes those rural families which possess no household or cultivable land of their own or have cultivable land not exceeding 50 decimals.
6. Civilian Labour Force: It refers workable persons either employed or unemployed belonging to age group 15-65 years.
7. Economically Active Population: Persons from civilian labour force when employed in income earning jobs or in non-paying family farming/enterprise or household works are considered as economically active population.
8. Incomplete and Broken Family: This is usually a simple family. By the term broken family means when either the husband or the wife dies and the alive partner of the family lives alone or with dependent children. In fact this type of family do not form any couple.

9. Nuclear Family: This type of family consists typically of a married man and woman with their unmarried offspring, although in individual cases one or more additional person may reside with them (Murdock, 1960).
10. Joint and Extended Family: It refers to the family that comprises more than one couple. Their married or unmarried offspring and even offspring from later descendents and/or additional members may be included in this category.
11. Literate Person: A person who can both read and write with understanding in any language is to be taken as literate. A person who can merely read but cannot write is not literate. It is not necessary that a person who is literate should have received any formal education or should have passed any minimum literacy standard.
12. Illiterate Person: Generally illiterate person refers to him/her who has no knowledge of letters or alphabet. But in this study we have considered it in a boarder sense. As a matter of fact, persons with very little knowledge of letters or alphabet as to use them only in reading or putting signature but not expressing feelings in written form are also considered functionally illiterate.
13. Primary Education: It refers to the level of education from grade I to V in primary school or in ebtedary madrasha.
14. Elementary Level of Education: It refers to the level of education from grade I to VIII in school or madrasha.
15. Secondary Education: Secondary Education refers to the level of education from grade VI to X. Students receive Madyamik/equivalent certificate after passing this level.

16. Higher Secondary Education: Higher Secondary Education refers to the level of education from grade XI to XII. On successful completion of this level a student receive Uaccha Madyamik/equivalent certificate.
17. Tertiary Education: It refers to the level of education from grade XI to onward. More specifically this Level of education includes Higher Secondary Level, Graduation Level, Post Graduation and other upper levels.
18. Non Schooling Age: It refers to the age up to 5 years.
19. Primary School Age: It refers to age group 6-10 years.
20. Secondary School Age: It refers to age group 11-15 years.
21. Tertiary School Age: It usually refers to the age group 16-23 years. But in the present study age group 16-25 has been considered as tertiary schooling age. It is because students of West Bengal and Bangladesh generally lose two years at this stage due to some unexpected reasons.
22. Combined School Age: It refers to age group 6-25 years.
23. Primary Drop-out Ratio: It indicates the percentage of students who start education in primary school but leave it before completing grade V.
24. Secondary Drop-out Ratio: It indicates the percentage of students who start education in secondary level but leave it before completing the course.
25. Tertiary Drop-out Ratio: It indicates the percentage of students who start education at tertiary level but stop schooling before completing the course.

26. Net Primary Enrolment Ratio: It refers to the ratio of enrolled students belonging to age group 6-10 years in the primary school to the total population of that age group.
27. Gross Primary Enrolment Ratios: It refers to the ratio of children of all ages enrolled in primary school to the total population of primary school-age children.
28. Gross Secondary Enrolment Ratios: It refers to the ratio of children irrespective of age group enrolled in secondary level education to the total population of secondary school-age children.
29. Gross Tertiary Enrolment Ratios: It refers to the ratio of students enrolled in tertiary level to the total population belonging to age group 16-25 years.
30. Gross Combined Enrolment Ratios: It refers to the ratio of total students enrolled at all levels of education to the total population belonging to age group 6-25 years.
31. Literacy Rate of Population (5⁺): Literacy rate for population 5⁺ years has been defined as ratio of literate persons of age over 5 years to population of the same ages and is expressed in percentage.
32. Literacy Rate of Population (7⁺): Literacy rate for population 7⁺ years has been defined as ratio of literate persons of age over 7 years to population of the same ages and expressed in percentage.
33. Adult Literacy Rate of Population (15⁺): Adult literacy rate for population 15⁺ years has been defined as ratio of literate persons aged 15 years and above to population of the same ages and expressed in percentage.

34. Status of Women: The term 'status' refers to sum total of the various culturally ascribed roles one has to play and the rights and duties inherent in a social position (Mukherjee, 1972). Here in the study the status of women has been observed in respect of the roles performed by them and the positions they achieve by virtue.
35. Gender Equity: Gender equity means proportionate equality of access to and control over resources and opportunities by men and women (Duza, 1992:VII). It abolishes all sorts of discrimination between men and women on the basis of sex and establishes their real rights, worth and dignity in the society. So, it is obviously the most essential pre-requisite for civilized, balanced and tranquil family life as well as cohesion and justice in greater society. Gender Equity is as determined in the poem of Poet Nazrul,
'Equally males and females brought
The world's all finest wrought'.
36. Empowerment of Women: Empowerment of Women has surfaced in the development literature as a recent concept, yet it is very much related with social stratification of human civilization. It is a comprehensive and multidimensional term in so far as it relates to women, a segment of human being universally considered disadvantaged. In terms of ensuring women's access to resources for betterment of physical quality of life indicators, empowerment may mean getting them into apex positions that oversee decision-making and affect the society and polity (Husain, 1995:86). In the present study empowerment of women has been considered from the viewpoints of their fundamental freedom, educational attainment, economic opportunity and participation in decision-making process.

2.4: Research Design

'Research Design is nothing but the arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure'— keeping the above statement in mind the design of the present research has been formulated as per the aims and objectives of the inquiry. The main purpose of this study is to gain insights and experience on the problem. The study areas, the people, the tools and techniques of data collection have been chosen on the basis of the nature of the study.

The study has been carried out primarily on the basis of structure-functional approach. It is purely an exploratory study with diagnostic outlook in some cases. The approach of this study is descriptive with an analytical base. Comparative method, both synchronic as well as diachronic over time and space, has been adopted for understanding the present educational situation of rural Muslim women and changes therein. For getting a picture of intra-community and inter-community variations in educational status among rural Muslim women of study villages, the method of comparison has been used. The data for this research have been gathered both from primary as well as secondary sources. The facts on ideal Islamic notion about society, women and education have been gathered through analyzing the textual materials of Islamic great traditions. Published and unpublished materials from various sources have also been consulted for knowing the educational status of Muslim women in the historical retrospect. Besides, the empirical data have been collected through fieldwork in four Muslim dominated villages. Both extensive and intensive methods of investigation were adopted in field study.

2.5. Locales of Study and Fieldwork

Since it is a partial representative study for rural Muslim women, the study villages were selected purposively so that those include numerousness of Muslim population both from West Bengal and Bangladesh. Further, for better understanding of zonal and local variations, an attempt has been taken to ensure their regional representation. As a matter of fact this study has grown out of field research only on four Muslim dominated villages equally selected from different zones of West Bengal and Bangladesh. In West Bengal the villages are Ghoshpara and Nalpur. The first one is an interior village situated under a northern district named Jalpaiguri while the second one is a fringe village situated under a southern district named Howra. Similarly in Bangladesh, the villages are Gangachara and Betuail which have been chosen respectively from its northern district named Rangpur and the capital district Dhaka.

The fieldwork for this study has been conducted at three phases. The first phase (January 1997 to August 1997) was related with census survey at the study villages. At the second phase (September 1997 to April 1998) we have collected data from the influential Muslim males through interview schedule while the female respondents have been interviewed at the third phase (May 1998 to December 1998). Thus our fieldwork has been expanded about two continuous years commencing from January 1997 to December 1998. It is worthy to note that the study has also included surrounding villages for making better comparison of the educational facilities available for the villagers. Further, the regional and infrastructural features of the villages were taken into consideration to understand the different pattern of Muslim education in varied ecological and socio-cultural settings.

2.6: Selection of Informants and Sampling Procedure

The relevant primary data used in this study were gathered from the study villages through observation, census survey and interview of selected respondents. Actually, considering the nature of the inquiry, it was predetermined to conduct empirical and holistic study on every household of all the selected villages. As a result, at the initial phase while filling up the survey census forms, all the household heads were considered as informants (respondents). In few cases where the household heads were found absent or unable to response, the next persons in rank in the family or the persons seemed eligible and reliable were chosen as informants. Thus overall demographic and socio-economic information of the entire household from each of the villages were gathered at the first phase.

At the second phase two separate lists were prepared for each of the villages on the basis of the information gathered from survey census. The first one is a list of Muslim males including fathers/guardians of school going children, influential elite, members of panchayet/union parishad, Imams of mosques, teachers of school/madrasha, heads of the pedigree, representatives of youth clubs and knowledgeable senior persons. And the second one is a list of Muslim females consisting of housewives from different economic category and educational status, school going and drop-out girls, income earning girls/women, female members of panchayet/union parishad and representatives of women clubs. A sample of forty respondents was chosen from each of the list for further comprehensive study. Stratified random sampling techniques were applied to represent every section from the lists. Hence, the number of respondents stood for each of the villages is eighty (forty males and forty females).

2.7: Tools and Techniques of Data Collection

The information for this study has been collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary data is generated mainly through intensive field study. Various conventional anthropological methods, tools and techniques were adopted for the field study. The tools consist of census schedule for the household survey and two sets of structured and pre-tested interview schedules (one for Muslim males and another for Muslim females) for intensive enquiry. The main techniques used for data collection in field situation are interviews, case studies, focus group discussion, participant and non-participant observation etc. Interviews have been conducted by prior appointment. Detailed field notes were maintained at the time of fieldwork to record the specific and related information.

As a supplement to the primary data obtained through field study, secondary data including all sorts of published materials, viz newspapers and magazines, books and journals, articles and annual reports, research monographs, country papers or national reports, planning documents, legal reports, gazette notifications, memoranda, government statistics, evaluation reports, relevant press reports and unpublished materials like dissertation or thesis papers, mimeographed guidelines or guidebooks and occasional papers have been used comprehensively and extensively.

In addition to the above, a survey was made on service oriented government organizations, welfare oriented non-government organizations, formal and non-formal educational institutions along with its teaching staff and students, other infrastructural facilities available in the study villages and its adjacent or nearby villages or towns. Techniques of observation and discussion are followed for this purpose.

2.8: Data Processing, Analysis and Presentation

The data collected through field study were processed after necessary checking and editing. In course of data processing, the completeness and accuracy of data was carefully examined. Tabulation and data processing were mainly done manually though in few cases computer aid was involved. However, at the first stage, frequency counts of each variable was taken and presented in a chart with percentages so that the overall situation can be manifested at a glance. As female education is the main focus of this study, some bivariate tables were also generated with a view to express the relationship between the level of female education and some other selected variables. To assess attitudinal attributes three-point rating scale (based on favourable, favourable on grounds and not favorable) as well as five-point rating scale (based on strongly support, moderately support, neutral, ordinarily oppose and strongly condemn) have been used there.

However, data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. For the presentation of findings simple statistical methods consisting mostly of percentages were calculated. The analyses of qualitative data were made through systematic and analytical description of the collected facts. In course of analysis, methods of comparison have been followed. Data were presented by using different tables into relevant chapters and those were also analysed in a descriptive way. At the last part of the study an attempt has been taken to summarize the findings where no table is presented but diagrams, figures and charts are used to make the issue easy perceptible. Finally the findings proceeded towards recommendation for appropriate policy formulation which was duly presented at the last chapter.

2.9: Organisation of Data and Chapterisation

The material of this study has been presented into ten chapters. Chapter-1 is introductory chapter that deals with theoretical setting of the research including background and utility of the study, statement of problems, review of literature and research hypotheses while Chapter-2 deals with the research methodology.

Chapter-3 is based on religious ideology as it discusses the society, education and women from greater Islamic perspective. Islamic notion on female education as well as status of women in Islam is delineated in this chapter. Chapter-4 reflects an overview on Islam and Muslim education in Bengal. It is mainly based on history of Islam and education in Bengal. Further, an account of Muslim women's educational movement in Bengal along with the contribution of Begum Rokeya is highlighted in this chapter. Chapter-5 is based on Policies and Programmes of Education in West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh. This chapter also focuses their State/country profiles and national literacy contexts.

Chapter 6 is Research Settings in West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh that state brief descriptions of study villages; confers selected demographic characteristics of the Muslim villagers; and makes a note on educational facilities for them. Chapter-7 deals with the State of Muslim Women Education in West Bengal and Bangladesh Villages and presents a comparative overview on it. Chapter 8 and 9 are related with the perception of influential Muslim males and Muslim females on various issues relating to dignity, education and empowerment of women while Chapter-10 confers on General Observation, Discussion and Recommendation.

2.10: Limitations

In spite of every good intention and endeavour, the study is not free from limitations. Firstly, empirical studies on Muslim women covering their educational status and social condition are scanty. So, very limited benefits were found available from earlier studies. Secondly, this is perhaps the first initiative in respect of comparative study on the state of education among the Muslim women of West Bengal and Bangladesh so far it is known from the annotated bibliographies of women studies and works of different scholars. So, as the first step this study has faced some critical problems.

Thirdly, the study was undertaken on only four villages, taking two from West Bengal and the rest two from Bangladesh. Hence, the observations drawn from this study cannot be generalized for whole the State or Country concerned. Fourthly, the main focus of this study is the rural Muslim girls and women who are largely confined within their houses. Normally they refuse to meet and talk with any male outsider or stranger. So, to arrange interview with them was simply impossible unless the researcher was provided with help from his wife and some other enlightened local girls and women. Fifthly, rural women are mostly poor and largely engaged in different household works. So, sometimes it seems unjustified to confine them for interviews and exploit the precious time from their domestic preoccupation without any monetary consideration.

Lastly, the fieldwork for this study was conducted between January 1997 and December 1998. It's a quite long time passed to prepare the report. So, the changes occurred very recently might not be reflected in the present study.