

**Chapter– 8**  
**Perception of Muslim Men towards**  
**Women Education in West**  
**Bengal (India) and Bangladesh**

**The Male Respondents**

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**PERCEPTION OF MUSLIM MEN  
TOWARDS WOMEN EDUCATION IN  
WEST BENGAL (INDIA) AND BANGLADESH**

The main focus of this chapter is to examine the perception of Muslim men towards education of their women. But the issue of women education in the context of modern society is so broad and comprehensive that one cannot get its real implication unless it is discussed and examined with other related issues. So, this chapter is also intended to examine men's perception on women's dignity, employment, empowerment, gender equity and other related issues.

**8.1. The Male Respondents**

Keeping the above facts in view we have interviewed 160 influential Muslim males taking 40 from each study-village. Distribution of these respondents is furnished below:

**Table-8.1.20: Social Status of the Male Respondents in the Study-villages.**

Social/family status	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Najpur	Gangechera	Betual	Total
Head of the households	16 (40%)	10 (25%)	12 (30%)	12 (30%)	50 (31%)
Head of the khandans	6 (15%)	5 (12.5%)	6 (15%)	5 (12.5%)	22 (14%)
Dignified professionals	4 (10%)	12 (30%)	14 (35%)	5 (12.5%)	35 (22%)
Other influential residents	14 (35%)	13 (32.5%)	8 (20%)	18 (45%)	53 (33%)
<b>Total Respondents (%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>160 (100%)</b>

Table 8.1.20 shows that the respondents are comprised of 33 per cent influential residents followed by 31 per cent household heads, 22 per cent dignified professionals and 14 per cent khandan heads. It may be noted that here dignified professionals are teachers, doctors, advocates and employees in praiseworthy services while influential residents include youth leaders, religious leaders, *morols* and representatives of local government etc. Thus the male respondents have been drawn from all the influential sections of the society.

These respondents are also heterogeneous in character with regard to their age group (see table-8.1.21).

**Table-8.1.21. Male respondents in the study-villages according to their age group.**

Age group	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuail	Total
Up to 25 years	9 (22.5%)	8 (20.0%)	2 (5.0%)	1 (2.5%)	20 (12.5%)
26-50 years	27 (67.5%)	18 (45.0%)	25 (62.5%)	20 (50.0%)	90 (56.2%)
Above 50 years	4 (10.0%)	15 (35.0%)	13 (32.5%)	19 (47.5%)	50 (31.3%)
<b>Total Respondents (%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>160 (100%)</b>

The table reveals that only 12.5 per cent of the male respondents are aged up to 25 years while 56.2 per cent of them belong to the age group 26 to 50 years and rest 31.3 per cent males are above 50 years.

Further we have attempted to draw equal respondents from totally illiterate, little literate and highly literate population to ensure an agreeable representation of males from all educational standards. But due to existing reality of the study villages we cannot ensure equal representation from all educational standards. As a matter of fact we have examined very few males as highly literate from Ghoshpara and Betuail (see table-8.1.22).

**Table-8.1.22. Male respondents in the study-villages according to educational status.**

Level of education	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuail	Total
Illiterate	17 (42.5%)	4 (10.0%)	7 (17.5%)	14 (35.0%)	42 (26.2%)
Up to Grades-X	16 (40.0%)	11 (27.5%)	7 (17.5%)	13 (32.5%)	47 (29.4%)
SF and HS	6 (15.0%)	10 (25.0%)	13 (32.5%)	8 (20.0%)	37 (23.1%)
Graduation and above	1 (2.5%)	15 (37.5%)	13 (32.5%)	5 (12.5%)	34 (21.3%)
<b>Total Respondents (%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>160 (100%)</b>

Table 8.1.22 reveals that among the male respondents in the study-villages 26.2 per cent are totally illiterate while 29.4 per cent are literate up to grade-x; 23.1 per cent have completed school final or higher secondary level; and rest 21.3 per cent are highly educated (at least graduate).

As regards the level of religious education of the male respondents, we find 25.7 per cent of them from ignorant of religious learning category while 35 per cent of them have knowledge up to performing obligatory prayers and 33.1 per cent have the fluency in reading *Al-Quran*. Only 6.2 per cent respondents are found well taught in religion as they have studied the interpretation of Quranic verses and some of selected Hadiths. Contextually it may be noted that no respondent well-taught in religion has been included from Ghoshpara. However, a table furnished below is showing distribution of respondents according to their level of religious education:

**Table-8.1.23. Level of religious education of the male respondents in the study-villages.**

Religious erudition	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuall	Total
No religious learning at all	20 (50.0%)	10 (25.0%)	5 (12.5%)	6 (15.0%)	41 (25.7%)
Up to performing prayer	11 (27.5%)	15 (37.5%)	12 (30.0%)	18 (45.0%)	56 (35.0%)
Fluency in reading the Quran	9 (22.5%)	13 (32.5%)	16 (40.0%)	15 (37.5%)	53 (33.1%)
Well taught in religion	-	2 (5.0%)	7 (17.5%)	1 (2.5%)	10 (6.2%)
<b>Total Respondents (%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>160 (100%)</b>

With regards to respondents' marital status it is important note that we have interviewed men from various social positions, age groups and literacy standards. Except some youth leaders at Ghoshpara (17.5%) and Nalpur (27.5%), these respondents are married. As a result, married males have occupied 88.2 per cent of the total respondents. However, the number and percentage of married and unmarried respondents of the study-villages are furnished below.

**Table-8.1.24. Male respondents in the study-villages according to marital status.**

Marital status	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuall	Total
Married	33 (82.5%)	29 (72.5%)	40 (100%)	40 (100%)	142 (88.8%)
Unmarried	7 (17.5%)	11 (27.5%)	-	-	18 (11.2%)
<b>Total Respondents (%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>160 (100%)</b>

### 8.2. Males View on Women's Dignity, Rights and Empowerment

Dignity of women is not a controversial issue in Islam. It is well stated and well established as we have earlier settled that Islam recognizes the human status of women, and conferred on them the highest dignity and glory, and granted them equal rights with men in every respect, and abolished all sorts of discriminations on the basis of sex. The Holy Quran itself bears the witness that women are not originated from lower species and therefore, not inferior to men, rather they are as vital to the life and society as men themselves are. But in the present study we find that a large number of Muslim males are not acquainted with this divine declaration. As a result they denied equal status of women in comparison with men when they were asked about their beliefs on this issue (see table-8.2.25).

**Table-8.2.25. Opinions of Muslim males towards dignity of women.**

Opinions towards Dignity of women	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuail	Total
Women are inferior to men.	17 (42.5%)	15 (37.5%)	12 (30.0%)	19 (47.5%)	63 (39.4%)
Women are equal to men.	22 (55.0%)	23 (57.5%)	27 (67.5%)	19 (47.5%)	91 (56.9%)
Women are superior to men	1 (2.5%)	2 (5.0%)	1 (2.5%)	2 (5.0%)	6 (3.7%)
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>160 (100%)</b>

The table shows that 47.5 per cent Muslim male in Betuail followed by 42.5 per cent Muslim male at Ghoshpara, 37.5 per cent at Nalpur and 30 per cent at Gangachara bear the belief that women are inferior to men by dignity. Thus we see that on the whole 39.4 per cent male belonging to Muslim society of West Bengal and that of Bangladesh deny the equal dignity of womenfolk. The table also reveals that a small portion of male respondents (3.7%) believe in women's superior position in comparison with men. Thus we find that 43.1 per cent male belonging to Muslim society of West Bengal and Bangladesh have some misconception about women's dignity.

Now let us discuss whether the said misconceptions or negative attitudes of the Muslim males are originated from their religious feelings or any other social reason. As regards the religious dictum we find that God has clearly defined and guaranteed the rights of women in the Holy *Quran* so that they could no more be subjected to those oppressions or injustices which had been inflicted on them since the beginning of the human species. Virtually, Islam is very much in favour of women's interest that inspires men to recognize their womenfolk with proper worth and dignity. But due to traditional outlooks as well as age old superstition a significant part of Muslim males consider their womenfolk as mere secondary citizen of the state. As a result the females belonging to Muslim society all over the world are suffering from a lot of discriminations and injustice imposed by their counterparts.

We have learned from profound religious study that the role of man and woman is not identical as God has designed their different psycho-physical make up to fulfil His purpose of creation. It doesn't determine ones superiority on other; rather it settles that both man and woman are performing essential roles towards the same end. Hence, in the spirit of Islam, women are treated as responsible human beings with full independent entity. Islam addresses her directly and does not approach her through the agency of male. According to this religion, women take over full capacity and liability on attaining maturity and receiving the message of Islam. Islam not only endorses the objectives of equality, development and peace for them but also strongly advocates and stands for these rights. So, we can logically assume that Muslim women are being exploited by their males not for their religious feelings but for their ignorance in Islam.

As regards the women's rights and empowerment we find that since the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations' Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, held at Nairobi in 1985, and the adoption of Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, the world has experienced profound political, economic, social and cultural changes, which have had both positive and negative effects on women. The World Conference on Human Rights recognized that the human rights of women and their girl children are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. The full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on the ground of sex are priority objectives of the said international community. This means that the principles of shared power and responsibility should be established between men and women at home, in workplace and in the wider circumference. So, in the present study we have examined the male respondents about how much they are ready to accept those global decisions for the welfare of their womenfolk. The findings are presented in table-8.2.26.

**Table-8.2.26. Approvals of Muslim males towards women's rights and empowerment.**

Approvals on women's rights and empowerment	Number and percentage of respondents by village				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuali	Total
Women should participate in family decision making process	28 (70.0%)	32 (80.0%)	31 (77.5%)	30 (75.0%)	121 (76.6%)
Daughters should be given the right to choose their husbands	27 (67.5%)	28 (70.0%)	29 (72.5%)	28 (70.0%)	112 (70.0%)
Wives should be given the scope to earn and spend independently	16 (40.0%)	23 (57.5%)	25 (62.5%)	20 (50.0%)	84 (52.5%)
Daughters should be given right of inheritance equal to son	9 (22.5%)	10 (25.0%)	13 (32.5%)	6 (15.0%)	38 (23.8%)
Women need to be empowered politically	13 (32.5%)	12 (30.0%)	20 (50.0%)	9 (22.5%)	54 (33.8%)
Total positive responses (%)	93 (46.5%)	105 (52.5%)	118 (59.0%)	93 (46.5%)	409 (51.1%)

(Note: Multiple responses have been collected from each respondent while percentages have been calculated on the basis of the number of maximum probable responses.)

Positive approvals made by the respondents of the study-villages on five selected points have been presented in Table-8.2.26. It shows that in an aggregate 76.6 per cent of the total male respondents of four study-villages comprising 70 per cent from Ghoshpara, 80 per cent from Nalpur, 77.5 per cent from Gangachara and 75 per cent from Betuail support women's participation in familial decision making process. Similarly 70 per cent respondents comprising 67.5 per cent from Ghoshpara, 70 per cent from Nalpur, 72.5 per cent from Gangachara and 70 per cent from Betuail approve the right of a daughter in choosing her own husband. Thus we find that about three-fourths males in the study villages have expressed positive approvals on the first two points.

Regarding the third point of the above investigation, each of the respondents was asked whether wife should be given the scopes to earn and spend independently. We find that 62.5 per cent respondents from Gangachara followed by 57.5 per cent respondents from Nalpur, 50 per cent respondents from Betuail and 40 per cent respondents from Ghoshpara have stated a positive answer on this question. Thus 52.5 per cent males from the study-villages in total which is a bit more than the half are found in favour of women's economic empowerment. The fourth and fifth points of this series are related with women's inheritance right and their political empowerment respectively. Surprisingly we have noticed that most of the male respondents of the study-villages are against these rights. Because, only 23.8 per cent of the total respondents have expressed positive approval on women's right to inheritance while 33.8 per cent of them have approved women's political empowerment. However, on the whole 51.1 per cent responses of the male respondents about the five above points may be treated a positive one.



### 8.3. Males Perception on Women's Educational Situation

A woman in our society is generally perceived as a placid and dutiful daughter or an obedient and serving sister or a loving and faithful wife or an affectionate and dedicated mother but not as man's equal working partner. Men are usually engaged in productive activities outside and accordingly they receive better education or training while women as homemakers are usually engaged in household chores and do not get the scope to attain such training or education. As a matter of fact, the women in our society are still inferior to that of the men with regard to their genuine position. For all kinds of scopes or benefits, particularly in the rural areas, they always get the second preference. We have learnt from government statistics of West Bengal and Bangladesh that women of these areas are distinctly lagging behind education than their male counterparts. Despite scarcity of relevant information about Muslim women we can assume from our observation and study reports of few scholars that the situation of Muslim women is more vulnerable in the field of education than the women belonging to other communities (preferably the Hindu community). In the present study the male respondents were asked about their opinions relating the above problems. The findings are stated below:

**Table-8.3.27. Muslim males perception towards Muslim women's educational situation.**

Statement on women's educational situation	No. and percentage of consent giving males by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Beluail	Total
Muslim women are educationally lagging behind in comparison with their male counterparts.	30 (75.0%)	33 (82.5%)	35 (87.5%)	34 (85.0%)	132 (82.5%)
Muslim women are educationally lagging behind in comparison with women of Hindu community.	35 (87.5%)	36 (90.0%)	20 (50.0%)	15 (37.5%)	106 (66.2%)
Muslim women are educationally backward both from their male counterparts and Hindu women.	30 (75.0%)	33 (82.5%)	20 (50.0%)	15 (37.5%)	98 (61.2%)
Muslim women are educationally backward either from their male counterparts or from Hindu women.	35 (87.5%)	36 (90.0%)	35 (87.5%)	34 (85.0%)	140 (87.5%)

Table-8.3.27 shows that 82.5 per cent male respondents comprising 75 per cent from Ghoshpara, 82.5 per cent from Nalpur, 87.5 per cent from Gangachara and 85 per cent from Betuail have consented that Muslim women are educationally lagging behind their male counterparts. Again, 66.2 per cent male respondents comprising 87.5 per cent from Ghoshpara, 90 per cent from Nalpur, 50 per cent from Gangachara and 37.5 per cent from Betuail have expressed that Muslim women are in general lagging behind education in comparison with the females belonging to Hindu community. Thus we find that the Muslim males of West Bengal are more conscious about Muslim women's comparative backwardness in education with respect to women of Hindu community while in Bangladesh the Muslim males are more aware of the educational backwardness of their womenfolk in comparison with themselves.

However, analysis of the consents approved by the male respondents proves that 61.2 per of them comprising 75 per cent from Ghoshpara, 82.5 per cent from Nalpur, 50 per cent from Gangachara and 37.5 per cent from Betuail have admitted Muslim women's backwardness of education in comparison with Muslim males and Hindu females. It further helps us to understand that 87.5 per cent of the Muslim males in the study-villages comprising 87.5 per cent from Ghoshpara, 90 per cent from Nalpur, 87.5 per cent from Gangachara and 85 per cent from Betuail are aware of Muslim women's educational backwardness either making comparison with themselves or with the women belonging to Hindu community. Yet, surprisingly we have noticed that majority of this respondents are not so vigilant as we expect from them for solution of the existing disparity in education between the genders as well as Hindu-Muslim communities.

#### 8.4. Males Awareness on Religion and Female Education

We have discussed earlier that Islam has opened the door of ongoing education system and suggests its entire followers irrespective of their sex and position to become enlightened through educational attainment. Islam considers 'ignorance' as the most disgraceful curse and provides a lot of guidelines to get rid of it. Its recommendation with regard to the acquisition of knowledge is evidently referred to all human beings. According to Islamic prescription, "Acquisition of knowledge is compulsory for all Muslim men and women". The Prophet of Islam also declared that good education and training of sons as well as daughters, is the best gift from a father to his children. Even though an Ummi (unlettered), he exhorted the Muslims (both males and females) to receive knowledge and even if they had to go far distant as China.

The *Quran* stressed the need of universal education for all human beings. The Prophet inspired the believing men and women to seek knowledge time and again as if no other sufferings or sacrifice seemed to him too great than its fulfillment. Yet we notice that the Muslims in general and particularly their womenfolk are lagging much behind in education. So, in the present study we have examined the male respondents about how much they are acquainted with the Islamic notion on female education. The findings are presented in the following table.

**Table-8.4.28. Islamic notion on female education as the Muslim males is acquainted with.**

Mode of acquaintance	Respondents village of residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuall	Total
Rightly acquainted	6 (15.0%)	14 (35.0%)	16 (40.0%)	8 (20.0%)	44 (27.5%)
Misconceptually acquainted	21 (52.5%)	19 (47.5%)	9 (22.5%)	23 (57.5%)	72 (45.0%)
Unaware of any notion	13 (32.5%)	7 (17.5%)	15 (37.5%)	9 (22.5%)	44 (27.5%)
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>160 (100%)</b>

Table-8.4.28 shows that out of 160 respondents in the study-villages of West Bengal and Bangladesh only 44 persons are rightly acquainted with Islamic notion on female education. The respondents are composed of 6 persons from Ghoshpara, 14 persons from Nalpur, 16 persons from Gangachara and 8 persons from Betuail. So, on an aggregate only 27.5 per cent male respondents in the study-villages comprising 15 per cent from Ghoshpara, 35 per cent from Nalpur, 40 per cent from Gangachara and 20 per cent from Betuail are acquainted with the Islamic notion on female education. These people are identified as rightly acquainted in Islamic notion with regard to female education, because they know the religious prescription in which acquisition of knowledge has been declared obligatory for all Muslims men and women.

The table also shows that 45 per cent respondents comprising 52.5 per cent from Ghoshpara, 47.5 per cent from Nalpur, 22.5 per cent from Gangachara and 57.5 per cent from Betuail possess misconception on Islamic notion with regard to female education. The misconceptions are: Islam instructs nothing on female education; Islam instructs women only to receive religious education; Islam prohibits women to receive higher (secular) education, which are possessed by 11.3 per cent, 25.6 per cent and 8.1 per cent of respondents respectively. The above table further reveals that the rest 27.5 per cent of Muslim males from the study-villages comprising 32.5 per cent from Ghoshpara, 17.5 per cent from Nalpur, 37.5 per cent from Gangachara and 22.5 per cent from Betuail are unaware of any religious notion concerning female education. Thus we find that on an aggregate about three-fourths of the male respondents in the study-villages are either unaware of Islamic notion on female education or possess misconception on it.

### 8.5. Males Aspirations towards Female Education

Education is an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality and development. Non-discriminatory education benefits both girls and boys and thus contributes to more equal relationships between women and men. Equality of access to and attainment of educational qualifications is necessary if more women are to become agents of change. But gender equity in any society in terms of education mainly depends on the outlooks and aspirations of its influential male members towards womenfolk. So, in the present study, we have asked the male respondents about their thinking and aspiration towards female education. They all have admitted the necessity of female education though distinct difference is evident in their level of aspiration (table-8.5.29).

**Table-8.5.29. Level of female education as suggested by the Muslim males.**

Suggested level of Education	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghostpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuail	Total
Primary (Grades: I-V)	9 (22.5%)	4 (10.0%)	4 (10.0%)	7 (17.5%)	24 (15.0%)
Grades: VI-X	18 (45.0%)	13 (32.5%)	11 (27.5%)	20 (50.0%)	62 (38.8%)
SF and HS	9 (22.5%)	9 (22.5%)	12 (30.0%)	10 (25.0%)	40 (25.0%)
Graduation and above	4 (10.0%)	14 (35.0%)	13 (32.5%)	3 (7.5%)	34 (21.2%)
<b>Total Respondents (%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>160 (100%)</b>

The above table shows that on the whole 15 per cent of the male respondents in the study villages have suggested primary level of education for their womenfolk while 38.8 per cent of them have suggested secondary level of education for the girls. The above table also shows that school final and higher secondary level of education for the girls has been suggested by 25 per cent Muslim males while 21.2 per cent of them have suggested at least graduation level of education for females. Thus we find that about four-fifths of the total respondents have denied suggesting higher education i.e. graduation or any level above.

Contextually it may be noted that the major portion of the male respondents at Ghoshpara and Betuail is either illiterate or literate up to secondary level. Most of this illiterate and little-literate respondents denied suggesting higher education for girls. On the other hand the major portion of the male respondents at Nalpur and Gangachara is either highly literate or at least passed the matriculation or school final examination. So, the male respondents of Nalpur and Gangachara in comparison with those of Ghoshpara and Betuail are better educated. Most of these better-educated respondents have expressed their aspiration towards higher education of women. But interestingly we have noticed that majority of the respondents irrespective of their educational status showed more interest in educating the boys than the girls, which is divulged in following table:

**Table-8.5.30. Level of male education as suggested by the Muslim males.**

Suggested level of Education	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuail	Total
Primary (Grades: I-V)	4 (10.0%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	3 (7.5%)	9 (5.6%)
Grades: VI-X	10 (25.0%)	5 (12.5%)	5 (12.5%)	5 (12.5%)	25 (15.6%)
SF and HS	11 (27.5%)	11 (27.5%)	9 (22.5%)	15 (37.5%)	46 (28.8%)
Graduation and above	15 (37.5%)	23 (57.5%)	25 (62.5%)	17 (42.5%)	80 (50.0%)
<b>Total Respondents (%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>160 (100%)</b>

The above table shows that as regards education of boy children 21.2 per cent male respondents have expressed their aspiration up to secondary level while 50 per cent of them have pleaded for higher level. Thus we notice very positive attitude of Muslim males as regards higher education of their male children. So, in comparison with their aspiration towards education of girl children we can assume that Muslim males in both West Bengal and Bangladesh possess discriminatory attitude towards boys and girls. This is perhaps the strongest barrier in the way of gender equity in education.

However, in the cases where the respondents denied suggesting higher education for girls, we have asked them to state the reasons. A table is furnished below to show the main reasons as stated by the male respondents.

**Table-8.5.31. Reasons stated by the Muslim males against women's higher education.**

Reasons stated by the male respondents	Number of percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuali	Total
Our society does not favour higher education of girls.	6 (16.7%)	5 (19.2%)	4 (14.8%)	6 (16.2%)	21 (16.7%)
It's hard to get suitable groom for highly educated girls.	4 (11.1%)	4 (15.4%)	5 (18.5%)	4 (10.8%)	17 (13.5%)
Women as homemakers do not need higher education.	13 (36.1%)	8 (30.8%)	6 (22.2%)	13 (35.1%)	40 (31.7%)
Investment on girls is wastage as they leave parents after marriage	6 (16.7%)	3 (11.5%)	8 (29.6%)	9 (24.3%)	26 (20.6%)
Higher education of girls is not supported by religion.	7 (19.4)	6 (23.1%)	4 (14.8%)	5 (13.5%)	22 (17.5%)
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>36 (100%)</b>	<b>26 (100%)</b>	<b>27 (100%)</b>	<b>37 (100%)</b>	<b>126 (100%)</b>

(Note: Respondents include the males who suggested below graduation level of education for females.)

The above table shows the 16.7 per cent males who denied suggesting higher education for female feel that the society where they live does not favour higher education of girls. Similarly 13.5 per cent of them find it difficult to get suitable groom for highly educated girls and 31.7 per cent of them believe that women as homemaker do not need higher education. It is quite interesting to note that 20.6 per cent of the respondents think it mere wastage to make investment for higher education of daughters as daughters usually leave their parents after marriage. The rest 17.5 per cent respondents have not only denied suggesting higher education for girls but also tried to establish their standings by religious sentiment that higher education of girls is not supported by religion. But with respect to our discussion stated in chapter-4, we may logically assume that respondents belonging to this category are not acquainted with the direction of *Al-Quran* as well as the spirit of Islam rather are simply guided by the traditional misconceptions existing in the society.

### **8.6. Males Attitude towards Purdah and Coeducation**

History reveals that seclusion of women including purdah system was once rigidly observed in Muslim society all over the world. And due to this reason Muslim guardians were not interested to send their girls into school. At that time few wealthy Muslim in this region used to arrange private tuition in their homes for teaching religious learning to their women. But the Muslim gentry in general were refrained from enrolling their girls into formal education. However, this condition gradually changed with the disappearance of purdah system. The number of Muslim girls attending in unlike coeducational institutions is increasing day by day. Yet, we guess a significant part of Muslim parents are still refraining their daughters from attending such institutions.

We have known from the government statistics that most of the educational institutions in West Bengal and Bangladesh are coeducational. Further the few girls' school that are founded there are mainly in urban areas. As a result, most of the rural parents do not get the opportunity to enroll their daughters into girls' school. Hence, impression of Muslim guardians and influential Muslim males of the study-villages regarding the custom of purdah prevailing in the Muslim society as well as their conviction on coeducation may be considered as essential determinants in realizing educational problems and prospects of their womenfolk. Owing to this, we have asked the male respondents to state their opinions on the issue of Burkha or strict purdah observance. Accordingly 21.3 per cent respondents have expressed their supports on strict purdah observance in terms of Burkha or Veil. But it is an interesting note that strict purdah in terms of Burkha is rarely observed in the houses of these respondents during the long period of our fieldwork.



**Table-8.6.32. Males opinions towards custom of purdah prevailing in Muslim society.**

Opinions towards purdah	Respondents village of residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuali	Total
Support the custom of strict purdah in terms of Burkha/Veil.	6 (15.0%)	8 (20.0%)	10 (25.0%)	10 (25.0%)	34 (21.3%)
Support moderate purdah in terms of modest dressing.	18 (45.0%)	12 (30.0%)	15 (37.5%)	18 (45.0%)	63 (39.4%)
Feel advantage and disadvantage alike in practicing purdah	11 (27.5%)	13 (32.5%)	9 (22.5%)	12 (30.0%)	45 (28.1%)
Ordinarily oppose any custom that secludes women	4 (10.0%)	5 (12.5%)	4 (10.0%)	-	13 (8.1%)
Strongly oppose the custom of purdah prevailing in Muslim society	1 (2.5%)	2 (5.0%)	2 (5.0%)	-	5 (3.1%)
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>160 (100%)</b>

The above table also shows that on an aggregate 39.4 per cent male respondents are the supporters of moderate purdah in terms of modest dressing while 28.1 per cent of the total respondents experience advantage and disadvantage alike in practicing purdah. On the other hand 3.1 per cent male respondents in the study villages have expressed their strong disliking towards purdah observance and another 8.1 per cent have expressed their ordinary disliking on it. Thus 11.2 per cent male respondents expressed their disliking towards the custom of purdah observance prevailing in the Muslim society. However, analyzing the above table we may conclude that Muslim males of Bangladesh are more fascinated towards practicing purdah than that of West Bengal.

Further, an effort was taken to examine the attitude of the male respondents on the issue of coeducation. Three-point itemized rating scale is used for this purpose. The findings are stated below:

**Table-8.6.33. Muslim males' attitude with regard to coeducation.**

Attitude towards coeducation	Number and percentages respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuali	Total
Totally favourable	21 (52.5%)	24 (60.0%)	14 (35.0%)	19 (47.5%)	78 (48.8%)
Favourable on ground	10 (25.0%)	8 (20.0%)	22 (55.0%)	16 (40.0%)	56 (35.0%)
Not favourable	9 (22.5%)	8 (20.0%)	4 (10.0%)	5 (12.5%)	26 (16.2%)
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>160 (100%)</b>

Table-8.6.33 shows that 48.8 per cent male respondents comprising 52.5 per cent from Ghoshpara, 60 per cent from Nalpur, 35 per cent from Gangachara and 47.5 per cent from Betuail have expressed totally favourable attitude towards coeducation. The favourable attitude is measured on the basis of few helpful opinions. Those are: (i) coeducation establishes gender equity in the field of formal education, (ii) it helps both the sexes to know each other and drive away false curiosity, (iii) it develops positive feelings towards opposite sex to work cooperatively, (iv) it helps in sound mental development, (v) it involves low cost.

The above table also discloses that 35 per cent of the total respondents comprising 25 per cent from Ghoshpara, 20 per cent from Nalpur, 55 per cent from Gangachara and 40 per cent from Betuail have expressed favourable attitude towards coeducation on some grounds. According to them girls may attend coeducation (i) if there is no girls' school at the vicinity, (ii) if the environment of the institution is religious, (iii) up to primary level, (iv) if girls maintain proper purdah, (v) when the girl has not exceeded ten years.

Moreover, it is revealed from the table that about one-sixth in total respondents comprising 22.5 per cent from Ghoshpara, 20 per cent from Nalpur, 10 per cent from Gangachara and 12.5 per cent from Betuail have expressed completely unfavourable attitude towards coeducation. The unfavourable attitude is ascertained on the basis of few antagonistic opinions. The opinions are: (i) religion does not support coeducation, (ii) attitude of the society towards coeducation is negative, (iii) coeducation makes a girl shameless, (iv) it may lead a girl to sex crime, (v) it is a threat for girls chastity.

### 8.7. Males Attitude towards Women's Employment

Women's status in their family as well as in greater society is very much related to whether they are engaged in gainful economic activity or not. Exclusion of women from economic activity and restriction on conjugal relationship are the two most important elements of the traditional family system that put women in a subordinate position. But different studies disclose that women's participation in socio-economic activities has increased to a great extent in the recent years. In fact, the adoption of planned economy has helped in the advancement of women in various fields. It is very important in planned economy that women participate to promote the progress of the country. This assumption holds equally valid for the Muslim women as well. Because, employment and economic independence of Muslim women also bring positive changes in the greater society, especially in the areas of age at marriage, standard of living, husband-wife relation, decision-making pattern, family and social norms etc.

Hence, impression of the influential Muslim males in any society regarding women's employment outside their home is an important factor in realizing the present position and future prospects of their womenfolk. Owing to this, we have examined the attitude of the male respondents on the issue of women's employment. Three-point itemized rating scale is used for this purpose. The findings are stated below:

**Table-8.7.34. Muslim males' attitude towards women's employment outside home.**

Opinion towards women Employment	Number and percentages of respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuali	Total
Totally favourable	25 (82.5%)	23 (57.5%)	26 (65.0%)	19 (47.5%)	93 (58.1%)
Favourable on ground	13 (32.5%)	12 (30.0%)	10 (25.0%)	16 (40.0%)	51 (31.9%)
Not favourable	2 (5.0%)	5 (12.5%)	4 (10.0%)	5 (12.5%)	16 (10.0%)
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>160 (100%)</b>

Table-8.7.34 shows that 58.1 per cent male respondents comprising 62.5 per cent from Ghoshpara, 57.5 per cent from Nalpur, 65 per cent from Gangachara and 47.5 per cent from Betuail have expressed totally favourable attitude towards employment of women outside home. The favourable attitude is determined considering the following opinions: (i) an employed daughter makes financial help to her family, (ii) an employed wife shares husband's economic liability, (iii) employment of women ensures familial economic solvency, (iv) women's employment in praiseworthy services increases family status, (v) employed women contribute more in social development.

The above table also discloses that 31.9 per cent respondents comprising 32.5 per cent from Ghoshpara, 30 per cent from Nalpur, 25 per cent from Gangachara and 40 per cent from Betuail have expressed favourable attitude towards women's employment on some grounds. According to them a woman may work outside the house (i) when it is essential for her livelihood, (ii) if it is a teaching profession, (iii) if it is in women's organization, (iv) if there is opportunity of purdah observance, (v) if her husband does not oppose.

Moreover, it is revealed from the table that one-tenth of the total respondents comprising 5 per cent from Ghoshpara, 12.5 per cent from Nalpur, 10 per cent from Gangachara and 12.5 per cent from Betuail have expressed completely unfavourable attitude towards women's employment. The unfavourable attitude is ascertained on the basis of a few antagonistic opinions. These are: (i) religion does not support women's employment outside home, (ii) attitude of the society towards such employment is negative, (iii) it may bring familial unhappiness, (iv) it may ruin to women's chastity, (v) it results children's maternal deprivation.

### 8.8. Males View on Barriers of Muslim Women Education

The accounts of Muslim women's educational status as depicted in our empirical investigation clearly determine their backwardness in the said field (a comparative mention of which has been laid in chapter-7). We have also seen that in an aggregate 87.5 per cent of the Muslim male respondents comprising 87.5 per cent from Ghoshpara, 90 per cent from Nalpur, 87.5 per cent from Gangachara and 85 per cent from Betuail admit Muslim women's educational backwardness (see table-8.3.27). Consequently we find it quite interesting to examine those respondents about how much they are conscious about this problem. So, they were asked to explain their views on the main barrier as they feel acting against Muslim women's educational growth. Accordingly the male respondents have explained their views on various points which are classified and presented in the following table:

**Table-8.835. Barriers against Muslim women education as identified by the Muslim males.**

Barriers against women's educational growth	No. and percentage of male respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuail	Total
Lack of learning curiosity/ Self-apathy of Muslim girls'	4 (11.4%)	5 (13.9%)	3 (8.6%)	4 (11.8%)	16 (11.4%)
Illiterate parents/ Unconsciousness of parents.	4 (11.4%)	4 (11.1%)	4 (11.4%)	4 (11.8%)	16 (11.4%)
Familial poverty/ Shortage of study materials.	7 (20.0%)	9 (25.0%)	8 (22.8%)	5 (14.7%)	29 (20.7%)
Engagement in familial work/ Income earning job.	6 (17.1%)	5 (13.9%)	4 (11.4%)	5 (14.7%)	20 (14.3%)
Early marriage/ Unresponsive husband.	2 (5.7%)	3 (8.3%)	8 (22.8%)	4 (11.8%)	17 (12.1%)
Strict purdah observance/ Lack of girls' school.	3 (8.6%)	3 (8.3%)	5 (14.3%)	3 (8.8%)	14 (10.0%)
Too far distance of schools/ Lack of transport facilities.	3 (8.6%)	-	-	2 (5.9%)	5 (3.6%)
Feelings of insecurity/ Fear of immodesty.	3 (8.6%)	2 (5.6%)	1 (2.9%)	2 (5.9%)	8 (5.7%)
Lack of government initiative/ Less employment opportunity.	3 (8.6%)	2 (5.6%)	1 (2.9%)	3 (8.8%)	9 (6.4%)
Indifferent role of religious leaders/ Hindrances from religious leaders.	-	3 (8.3%)	1 (2.9%)	2 (5.9%)	6 (4.3%)
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>35 (100%)</b>	<b>36 (100%)</b>	<b>35 (100%)</b>	<b>34 (100%)</b>	<b>140 (100%)</b>

(Note: Single response accepted from those who perceived Muslim women's comparative backwardness in education.)

Table 8.8.35 shows that the main barriers against Muslim women's educational growth as stated by the entire male respondents of the study-villages have been presented by 10 couple of remarks. The table also reveals us that one-fifth male respondents (20.7%) in the study-villages think Muslim women are lagging behind education due to their familial poverty and shortage of study materials while one-seventh (14.3%) of the them believes involvement of Muslim girls in familial work or any other earning job is mainly liable for their educational backwardness.

However, arranging the remarks in ascending order we find that 'early marriage of Muslim girls and their unresponsive husband is hindering women education' is supported by 12.1 per cent of respondents while 11.4 per cent of them conceive 'lack of learning curiosity of Muslim girls and dearth in their self-apathy is the main barrier'. Another 11.4 per cent respondents assume that 'illiterate and unaware Muslim parents are liable for their daughters' education' while 10 per cent of them grasp strict 'purdah observance by the Muslim girls in general and lack of girls' school in particular is the main cause'. Further, 6.4 per cent respondents guess that 'lack of government initiatives for expanding girls education as well as less employment opportunity provided for them by the government is the prime reason of women's educational backwardness' while 5.7 per cent respondents describe the main barrier is derived from 'feelings of insecurity and fear of immodesty'. Another 4.3 per cent respondents deliberate that indifferent roles of religious leaders is the main reason while the rest 3.6 per cent respondents assert 'too far distance of the school in general and lack of transport facilities for the girls in particular is the prime barrier against women education'.

### 8.9. Males Suggestions for upholding Women's Education

The objective of the present study is not only to identify the barriers of Muslim women's educational growth but also to make supportive policy formulation suggestions for the educational advancement of Muslim girls and women of rural West Bengal and Bangladesh. So, the male respondents, who have identified the barriers of Muslim women education, were asked to make suggestion for upholding the educational status of their womenfolk. Accordingly they have conveyed us the following suggestions (see table-8.9.36).

**Table-8.9.36. Suggestions of Muslim males for upholding women's educational status.**

Suggestions	No. and percentage of females by residence				
	Ghoshpara (n=35)	Nalpur (n=36)	Gangachara (n=35)	Beluail (n=34)	Total (n=140)
Specific programme should be initiated to encourage more girls' towards education.	8 (22.9%)	13 (36.1%)	14 (40.0%)	9 (26.5%)	44 (31.4%)
Programme should be taken to develop educational awareness of Muslim parents.	8 (22.9%)	12 (33.3%)	12 (34.3%)	7 (20.6%)	39 (27.9%)
Religious leaders should take the liability to canvass in favour of female education.	6 (17.1%)	6 (16.67%)	8 (22.8%)	5 (14.7%)	25 (17.8%)
Free studentship, study materials, stipend should be provided to all girls' at all levels.	11 (31.4%)	16 (44.4%)	18 (51.4%)	14 (41.2%)	59 (42.1%)
Girls should be provided special transport facility to attend schools and return home.	4 (11.4%)	-	-	2 (5.9%)	6 (4.3%)
More girls' school and college should be established at different levels.	10 (28.6%)	14 (38.9%)	16 (45.7%)	13 (38.2%)	53 (37.9%)
Early marriage of girls' should be banned by enacting strict provision of punishment.	6 (17.1%)	8 (22.2%)	12 (34.3%)	7 (20.6%)	33 (23.6%)
Government should ensure firm environs for girls' inside and outside their school.	5 (14.3%)	7 (19.4%)	6 (17.1%)	4 (11.8%)	22 (15.7%)
Women's quota according to numerical ratio should be protected in all services.	4 (11.4%)	8 (22.2%)	10 (28.6%)	7 (20.6%)	29 (20.7%)
Government should make it obligatory for girls to attain at least primary school level.	6 (17.1%)	7 (19.4%)	5 (14.3%)	4 (11.8%)	22 (15.7%)
<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>332</b>

(Note: Respondents include only those females who perceived Muslim women's comparative backwardness in education. Multiple responses accepted and percentages are calculated with regard to 'n' i.e. number of respondents)

The above table presents us the multiple suggestions made by the male respondents for upholding Muslim women education. We see, more than two-fifth (42.1%) of the entire male respondents in the study-villages have proposed stipend along with free studentship and cost-free study materials for the girls to ensure their educational upliftment.

Table-8.9.36 also reveals that more than one-third (37.9%) of these respondents possess the opinion in favour of establishing more schools and colleges for the girls while 31.4 per cent of them have recommended to initiate special type of motivational programmes for the girls and women to encourage them more and more towards education with a end to remove gender inequality in this field. On the other hand 27.9 per cent respondents have advocated to introduce special type of programmes for the development of educational awareness among the Muslim parents while about one-fourth (23.6%) of them have pointed to restrict early marriage of girls by enacting strict provision of punishment.

The above table further discloses that more than one-fifth (20.7%) of the total respondents are in opinion that more girls and women will be encouraged towards education if the provision of women's quota in government services according to their ratio of numerical representation at the state level is ensured. So, they suggested introducing women quota in all the government services at local and national levels. Interestingly we notice that 17.8 per cent of the entire male respondents think Muslim religious leaders should take the liability of canvassing in favour of women education while 15.7 per cent of them have suggested that government should make strict provision for educating each and every girl of the country at least up to primary school level. In addition to the above 15.7 per cent respondents have laid importance on girls security both inside and outside schools and have opined that government should ensure firm atmosphere for girls at the said levels while 4.3 per cent of them have canvassed for special type of transport facilities for the school going girls to secure their safe arrival at schools and returning back to houses.



### 8.10. Observations

On the whole 39.4 per cent male respondents belonging to the Muslim community of West Bengal and Bangladesh deny the equal dignity of their womenfolk while another 3.7 per cent believe in women's superior position than men. So, with regard to Islamic notion of gender equality, 43.1 per cent male respondents belonging to Muslim society of West Bengal and Bangladesh have misconception about women's dignity. Hence, Muslim women are being exploited by their men not for religious feelings but for ignorance in Islam.

The World Conference on Human Rights recognized that the human rights of women and girl children are inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. Yet, about half of the male respondents in the study villages of West Bengal and Bangladesh do not possess positive feelings on the key issues of women's right and empowerment. As a matter of fact, more than one-fourth male respondents have denied women's participation in familial decision making process and right of a daughter in choosing her own husband; about half of them have opposed women's economic independence; two-thirds of them have disagreed the need of their political empowerment and more than three-fourths have disapproved daughter's equal share in parents property.

Muslim males of West Bengal are more conscious about their women's comparative backwardness in education with respect to the women belonging to Hindu community while in Bangladesh the Muslim males are more aware of the educational backwardness of their womenfolk in comparison with themselves. Yet, majority of them does not pay any heed to minimize the existing disparity.

On an aggregate only 27.5 per cent male respondents in the study-villages are acquainted with the Islamic notion on female education while 45 per cent possess misconception on it and rest 27.5 per cent are unaware of any religious notion concerning female education. Thus on the whole about three-fourths of the male respondents in the study-villages are either unaware of Islamic notion on female education or possess misconception on it.

The entire male respondents of the study villages have admitted the necessity of female education but they showed more interest in educating the boys than the girls. As a matter of fact half of the total male respondents have suggested higher education for the boys while only one-fifth (21.2%) of them have suggested higher education for their girls and women.

Of the total male respondents in the study villages 21.3 per cent support strict purdah observance in terms of Burkha or Veil; 39.4 per cent supports moderate purdah in terms of modest dressing; 28.1 per cent experience advantage and disadvantage alike in practicing purdah and the rest 11.2 per cent dislike the custom of purdah observance prevailing in the Muslim society. On the other hand, 48.8 per cent male respondents possess completely favourable attitude towards coeducation while 35 per cent of them grasp favourable attitude towards coeducation on some grounds and the rest 16.2 per cent hold completely unfavourable attitude towards coeducation. However, Muslim males of Bangladesh in comparison with that of West Bengal are more fascinated towards observing the institution of purdah and less fascinated towards coeducation.

Though employment and economic independence of women bring positive changes in the greater society, Muslim males of the study villages of West Bengal and Bangladesh are not expectedly aware of it. As a matter of fact 58.1 per cent of the total male respondents support it without raising any question but one-third of them impose condition before suggesting women employment while one-tenth of them possess completely unfavourable attitude on it.

Regarding main barriers against education of Muslim women education one-fifth of the male respondents identifies familial poverty and shortage of study materials while 14.3 per cent of them denotes involvement of Muslim girls in familial work; 12.1 per cent indicate early marriage of girls; 11.4 per cent conceive lack of learning curiosity of Muslim girls; 11.4 per cent assume lack of awareness of Muslim parents; 10 per cent grasp strict purdah observance; 6.4 per cent guess less employment opportunity; 5.7 per cent describe feelings of insecurity and fear of immodesty; 4.3 per cent deliberate indifferent roles of religious leaders; and the rest 3.6 per cent assert distance of the school and lack of transport facilities for the girls.

In accordance with the barriers of women education the male respondents have proposed suggestions comprising stipend along with free studentship and cost-free study materials for the girls; establishment of more girls schools; special type of motivational programmes for the Muslim girls and their parents; restriction of girls' early marriage; provision of women's quota in government services; imposing liability on religious leaders; girls security in both inside and outside schools; transport facilities and after all enacting strict legal provision for educating the girls.