

# **Chapter– 9**

## **Perception of Muslim Women on Education and Gender Equity in West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh**

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## PERCEPTION OF MUSLIM WOMEN ON EDUCATION AND GENDER EQUITY IN WEST BENGAL (INDIA) AND BANGLADESH

The prime aim of this chapter is to examine the perception of Muslim women towards education and gender equity. However, some additional aspects have been included in this chapter for understanding women's persuasion regarding problems and prospects of education and gender equity in broader perspective.

### 9.1. *The Female Respondents*

We have interviewed and examined 160 females in total taking 40 from each study-village distribution of them according to their social/familial is furnished below:

**Table-9.1.37: Distribution of female respondents according to their social/familial status.**

Social/family status	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghostpara	Naipur	Gangachara	Beluail	Total
Dignified professionals	1 (2.5%)	9 (22.5%)	6 (15.0%)	1 (2.5%)	17 (10.6%)
Self-employed earners	2 (5.0%)	13 (32.5%)	11 (27.5%)	4 (10.0%)	30 (18.8%)
Unpaid homemakers	25 (62.5%)	10 (25.0%)	12 (30.0%)	25 (62.5%)	72 (45.0%)
Continuing students	12 (30.0%)	8 (20.0%)	11 (27.5%)	10 (25.0%)	41 (25.6%)
<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 female respondents are comprised of dignified female professionals (10.6%), self-employed female earners (18.8%), unpaid homemakers (46%) and continuing students (25.6%). It may be noted that here doctors, lawyers, teachers and employees of praiseworthy services have been considered as dignified professionals. On the other hand the female persons who independently earn from self-production or self-controlled business have been treated as self-employed earners while the housewives and housegirls engaged in unpaid domestic services have been classified as unpaid homemakers.

These respondents are also heterogeneous in character with regard to their age group. Distribution of the female respondents according to age group are furnished in the following table:

**Table-9.138. Female respondents in the study villages according to their age group.**

Age group	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betual	Total
Up to 25 years	24 (60.0%)	14 (35.0%)	16 (40.0%)	16 (40.0%)	70 (43.8%)
26-50 years	13 (32.5%)	20 (50.0%)	21 (52.5%)	21 (52.5%)	75 (46.9%)
Above 50 years	3 (7.5%)	6 (15.0%)	3 (7.5%)	3 (7.5%)	15 (9.3%)
<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 43.8 per cent of the female respondents are aged up to 25 years while 46.9 per cent per cent of them belong to the age group 26 to 50 years and rest 9.3 per cent females are above 50 years. Further these respondents have been drawn from all types of population including illiterate females; little literate females and highly literate females to ensure justified representation of women from all educational standards (see table-9.1.39).

**Table-9.139. Female respondents in the study villages according to their educational status.**

Level of education	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betual	Total
Illiterate	11 (27.5%)	8 (20.0%)	4 (10.0%)	17 (42.5%)	40 (25.0%)
Primary (Grades: I-V)	12 (30.0%)	6 (15.0%)	8 (20.0%)	9 (22.5%)	35 (21.8%)
Grades: VI-X	11 (27.5%)	6 (15.0%)	8 (20.0%)	10 (25.0%)	35 (21.9%)
SF and HS	5 (12.5%)	10 (25.0%)	17 (37.5%)	3 (7.5%)	35 (21.9%)
Graduation and above	1 (2.5%)	10 (25%)	3 (7.5%)	1 (2.5%)	15 (9.3%)
<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 9.1.39 reveals that of the total female respondents in the study-villages 25 per cent is totally illiterate and 9.3 per cent is highly literate. Rests are equally drawn from primary, secondary and higher secondary level (21.9 per cent from each standard).

As regards the level of religious education we have 25 per cent of female respondents from ignorant of religious learning category while 38.1 per cent respondents have knowledge up to performing obligatory prayers and 35 per cent have the fluency in reading *Al-Quran*. Only 1.9 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 respondents include none as well-taught in religion from Ghoshpara and Betuail. However, a table is furnished below showing distribution of respondents according to their level of religious education:

**Table-9.1.40. Female respondents according to their stage of religious education.**

Religious education	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuail	Total
No religious learning at all	15 (37.5%)	9 (22.5%)	3 (7.5%)	13 (32.5%)	40 (25.0%)
Up to performing prayer	17 (42.5%)	17 (42.5%)	10 (25.0%)	17 (42.5%)	61 (38.1%)
Fluency in reading Quran	8 (20.0%)	12 (30.0%)	28 (65.0%)	10 (25.0%)	56 (35.0%)
Well taught in religion	-	2 (5.0%)	1 (2.5%)	-	3 (1.9%)
<b>Total Respondents (%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>160 (100%)</b>

As far as respondent's marital status is concerned it may be noted that we have interviewed mainly the married women and a few unmarried continuing girl students/drop-out housegirls from various social positions. As a result married women have occupied more than two-thirds of the total respondents. However, number and percentage of married and unmarried respondents by village are shown below.

**Table-9.1.41. Female respondents in the study villages according to their marital status.**

Marital status	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuail	Total
Married	27 (67.5%)	26 (65.0%)	29 (72.5%)	27 (67.5)	109 (68.1%)
Unmarried	13 (32.5%)	14 (35.0%)	11 (27.5%)	13 (32.5%)	51 (31.9%)
<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 marital age we find that more than three-fourths (76.1%) respondents have got married either at immature age (below 18 years) or at early maturity (18-22 years) while the rest one-fourth (23.9%) female respondents have got married on attaining 22<sup>+</sup> years (see table).

**Table-9.1.42. Female respondents in the study villages according to their marital age group.**

Marital age group	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betual	Total
Before 18 years	13 (48.2%)	8 (30.8%)	10 (34.5%)	10 (37.0%)	41 (37.6%)
18-22 years	11 (40.7%)	8 (30.8%)	11 (37.9%)	12 (44.4%)	42 (38.5%)
Above 22 years	3 (11.1%)	10 (38.4%)	8 (27.8%)	5 (18.6%)	26 (23.9%)
<b>Total Respondents (%)</b>	<b>27 (100%)</b>	<b>26 (100%)</b>	<b>29 (100%)</b>	<b>27 (100%)</b>	<b>109 (100%)</b>

The above table also shows that accomplishment of marriages at immature age concerning the married respondents are 48.2 per cent at Ghoshpara followed by 37 per cent at Betual 34.5 per cent at Gangachara and 30.8 per cent at Nalpur.

We have also examined the level of education of the female respondents who have got married before attaining majority. The findings are furnished in table-9.1.43.

**Table-9.1.43. Percentage of early married females with regard to their level of education.**

Level of education	Percentage of early married respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betual	Total
Illiterate	63.6	37.5	75.0	41.1	50.0
Up to Grade-X	38.4	40.0	40.0	37.5	38.89
SF and HS	33.3	33.3	23.1	-	26.1
Graduation and above	-	14.3	-	-	10.0
<b>Total Respondents (%)</b>	<b>48.1</b>	<b>30.8</b>	<b>34.5</b>	<b>37.0</b>	<b>37.6</b>

Table-9.1.43 reveals that with regard to level of education of the married respondents early marriages have been accomplished by half of the illiterates; 38.89 per cent of the primary and secondary level educated; 26.1 per cent of the school final and higher secondary level literates; and 10 per cent of the graduates and upper degree holders. Thus the findings approve the conviction that girls' education reduces their early marriage to a great extent.

### 9.2. Females Satisfaction for being Female Sex

The life of a woman in West Bengal or in Bangladesh is largely shaped by the patriarchal social system that hinders her ability and also ignores her contribution in the sphere of national development. Recently women have been given the rights and protection in the fields of human activities under constitutional safeguards, yet they are seen disadvantaged than men on almost every walk of life. As a matter of fact, male child is still considered here as future breadwinner and girl child a temporary guest who will leave home at marriage. Different studies reveal that women of these areas are in general less educated; they get less health care and less food; and they die younger than their male counterparts. So, the female respondents were asked about their feelings for being female sex. The findings are:

**Table-9.2.44. Distribution of females with regard to their feelings for being female sex.**

Feelings of sex satisfaction	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuail	Total
Satisfied for being female sex	17 (42.5%)	12 (30.0%)	15 (37.5%)	16 (40.0%)	60 (37.5%)
Dissatisfied as female sex	6 (15.0%)	13 (32.5%)	12 (30.0%)	8 (20.0%)	39 (24.4%)
Cannot determine	12 (30.0%)	11 (27.5%)	9 (22.5%)	11 (27.5%)	43 (26.9%)
Oppose to response	5 (12.5%)	4 (10.0%)	4 (10.0%)	5 (12.5%)	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>

The above table shows that on the whole 37.5 per cent respondents comprising 42.5 per cent from Ghoshpara, 30 per cent from Nalpur, 37.5 per cent from Gangachara and 40 per cent from Betuail feel themselves satisfied for being female sex. But 24.4 per cent respondents comprising 15 per cent from Ghoshpara, 32.5 per cent from Nalpur, 30 per cent from Gangachara and 20 per cent from Betuail are dissatisfied for being female sex. Moreover, 26.9 per cent female respondents have failed to determine their sex satisfaction and rest 11.2 per cent respondents have opposed to answer such question.

Further, attempts have been taken to examine respondents' feelings of satisfaction/dissatisfaction for being female sex with regard to their level of education. Thus it is revealed that the respondents seemed satisfied for being female sex are composed of 47.5 per cent illiterates; 42.8 per cent primary level educated; 37.1 per cent secondary level educated; 28.6 per cent higher secondary level literate; and 20 per cent graduates and upper degree holders (see table-9.2.45).

**Table-9.2.45. Respondents satisfied of sex feelings with regard to their level of education.**

Level of education	Percentage of sex satisfied females by study villages				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuali	Total
Illiterate	63.6	50.0	50.0	35.3	47.5
Primary (Grades: I-V)	41.6	33.3	50.0	44.4	42.8
Grades: VI-X	36.4	33.3	37.5	40.0	37.1
SF and HS level	20.0	20.0	29.4	66.7	28.6
Graduation and above	-	20.0	33.3	-	20.0
<b>Total Respondents (%)</b>	<b>42.5</b>	<b>30.0</b>	<b>37.5</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>37.5</b>

The above table distinctly shows that as less the respondents are educated, so more they are satisfied for being female sex. Hence, we can assume that lack of awareness of girls and women about their actual position prevailing in our society largely increases their feelings of sex satisfaction.

However, these respondents were also asked about the main reasons behind their feelings of sex satisfaction. They have approved five main reasons behind their satisfaction. Following are the reasons with regard to their education.

**Table-9.2.46. Main reasons of sex satisfaction with regard to respondents' education level.**

Reasons of sex satisfaction	Respondents Level of education				
	Illiterate	Up to Grade-X	SF/HS	Graduation/PG	Total
Women are held high honour from God.	1 (5.3%)	3 (10.7%)	2 (20.0%)	1 (33.3%)	7 (11.7%)
Men love women.	6 (31.6%)	10 (35.7%)	2 (20.0%)	-	18 (30.0%)
Women get special privileges.	2 (10.5%)	4 (14.3%)	2 (20.0%)	-	8 (13.3%)
Women possess motherhood.	1 (5.3%)	4 (14.3%)	3 (30.0%)	2 (66.7%)	10 (16.7%)
Do not need to work hard.	9 (47.4%)	7 (25.0%)	1 (10.0%)	-	17 (28.3%)
<b>Total Responses (%)</b>	<b>19 (100%)</b>	<b>28 (100%)</b>	<b>10 (100%)</b>	<b>3 (100%)</b>	<b>60 (100%)</b>

(Note: Respondents include only those girls and women who are satisfied for being female sex.)

Table-9.2.46 shows that most of the illiterate females are satisfied for being female sex because they do not need to work hard as men while the highly literate females are mainly satisfied for their dignity of motherhood. It also reveals, concerning the main reason of sex satisfaction 11.7 per cent of the respondents (belonging to satisfied category) believe that they are given comparatively higher honour from God; 30 per cent of them feel that they are loved by men; 13.3 per cent of them consider that they usually get special privileges in the society; 16.7 per cent of them perceive that they are saluted by motherhood; and the rest 28.3 per cent think that they are satisfied because they do not need to work hard as done by their male counterparts.

With regards to respondents' dissatisfaction for being female sex we see that dissatisfied respondents are comprised of 12.5 per cent illiterates; 14.3 per cent primary level educated; 17.1 per cent secondary level educated; 40 per cent higher secondary level literate; and 60 per cent graduates and upper degree holders. Hence, we find that the more the respondents are educated the more they are dissatisfied for being female sex. We may assume that due to hefty persuasion about gender inequality prevailing in our society and better understanding on undignified social position of women, the educated girls and women usually feel themselves dissatisfied for being female sex.

**Table-9.2.47. Females dissatisfied of sex feelings with regard to their level of education.**

Level of education	Percentage of sex satisfied females by study villages				
	Ghoshpara	Najpur	Gangachara	Beluail	Total
Illiterate	9.1	12.5	25.0	11.8	12.5
Primary (Grades: I-V)	8.3	16.7	12.5	22.2	14.3
Grades: VI-X	9.1	33.3	12.5	20.0	17.1
SF and HS	40.0	40.0	41.2)	33.3	40.0
Graduation and above	100	50.0	66.7	100	60.0
<b>Total Respondents (%)</b>	<b>15.0</b>	<b>32.5</b>	<b>30.0</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>24.4</b>



We have also asked the dissatisfied respondents about the main reasons behind their feelings of dissatisfaction. Similarly they have approved five main reasons behind their feelings of dissatisfaction. The reasons with regard to their level of education are furnished below (table-9.2.48).

**Table-9.2.48. Main reasons of sex dissatisfaction by females with regard to their education.**

Reasons of sex dissatisfaction	Respondents level of education				
	Illiterate	Up to Grade-X	SF/HS	Graduation/PG	Total
Less dignified by God.	-	2 (18.2%)	2 (14.3%)	-	4 (10.3%)
Men exploit women.	1 (20.0%)	3 (27.3%)	2 (14.3%)	2 (22.2%)	8 (20.5%)
Women get less privilege.	1 (20.0%)	2 (18.2%)	4 (28.6%)	4 (44.4%)	11 (28.2%)
Women have less freedom.	-	2 (18.2%)	3 (21.4%)	3 (33.3%)	8 (20.5%)
Parents think burden.	3 (60.0%)	2 (18.2%)	3 (21.4%)	-	8 (20.5%)
<b>Total Responses (%)</b>	<b>5 (100%)</b>	<b>11 (100%)</b>	<b>14 (100%)</b>	<b>9 (100%)</b>	<b>39 (100%)</b>

(Note: Single reason accepted from each respondent considered dissatisfied for being female sex.)

The above table shows that the illiterate females are mainly dissatisfied for being female sex because they feel that their parents think them burden. A small portion of them is aware of the less privileges offered to them by the society while the others experience the exploitation of men on women. On the other hand the highly literate females are mainly dissatisfied due to strong persuasion on their less privileges and less freedom in comparison with men. However, concerning the main reasons of sex dissatisfaction the table reveals that on the whole 10.3 per cent of the respondents (belonging to dissatisfied category) believe that women are less dignified by God; 20.5 per cent of them feel that they are exploited by men; 28.2 per cent of them consider that they usually get less privileges in the society in comparison with men; 20.5 per cent of them perceive that they have less freedom than their male counterparts; and the rest 20.5 per cent think that they are dissatisfied because their parents usually treat them as mere burden.

### 9.3. Females View towards Dignity, Rights and Empowerment

We have earlier discussed 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. But in the present study we find that a significant part of Muslim male is unaware of Islamic notions regarding dignity, rights and empowerment of women. As a result they usually deny equal status of women and try to keep them under subjugation while the Muslim girls and women due to their ignorance approve their inhumane position without protest. Owing to these we have examined the thoughts and beliefs of Muslim women on the issue of women's dignity. The findings are furnished in table-9.3.49.

**Table-9.3.49. Opinions of female respondents 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.	11 (27.5%)	8 (20.0%)	10 (25.0%)	9 (22.5%)	38 (23.8%)
Women are as equal as men.	28 (70.0%)	30 (75.0%)	29 (72.5%)	29 (72.5%)	116 (72.5%)
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 in an aggregate 72.5 per cent of female respondents comprising 70 per cent from Ghoshpara, 75 per cent from Nalpur, 72.5 per cent from each from Gangachara and Betuail believe that women are equal to men by dignity. But 23.8 per cent female respondents comprised of 27.5 per cent from Ghoshpara followed by 25 per cent at Gangachara, 22.5 per cent at Betuail and 20 per cent at Nalpur still bear the belief that women are inferior to men by dignity. The table also reveals that a small portion of the female respondents (3.7%) believe in women's superior position in comparison with men. Thus we find that 27.5 per cent female belonging to Muslim society of West Bengal and Bangladesh still possesses misconception about women's dignity.

As regards the rights and empowerment of women we come to know that the rights of women and their girl children have been recognized as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights throughout the world. The universal nature of women's rights and freedoms is beyond question. But it is revealed in various studies that women in the backward States like West Bengal and Bangladesh are still undervalued. Their work being unseen and unpaid if done within the home, unrecognized and underpaid in the formal employment sectors. All women, regardless of their husbands' or fathers' social standing, can be victims of forms of oppression that include dowry demands, polygyny and arbitrary divorce; violence within and without the home; illiteracy or little literacy; and less food, health care, and material possessions than men. However, it is expected that all sorts of tyrannies and discriminations against women will be abolished if the women themselves become fully conscious of their rights and raise voice to establish it. In the present study we have examined the female respondents about how much they are conscious of their rights and empowerment. The findings are presented in table-9.3.50.

**Table-9.3.50. Opinions of girls and women towards their rights and empowerment.**

Opinions on women's rights and empowerment	Respondents village of residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuali	Total
Women should participate in family decision making process	34 (85.0%)	34 (85.0%)	36 (90.0%)	31 (77.5%)	135 (84.4%)
Girls' should given the rights to choose their husbands	23 (57.5%)	29 (72.5%)	32 (80.0%)	28 (70.0%)	112 (70.0%)
Women should given the scopes to earn and spend independently	16 (40.0%)	25 (62.5%)	26 (65.0%)	24 (60.0%)	91 (56.9%)
Daughter should given equal inheritance right	19 (47.5%)	15 (37.5%)	14 (35.0%)	11 (27.5%)	59 (36.9%)
Women need to be empowered politically	28 (70.0%)	31 (77.5%)	32 (80.0%)	29 (72.5%)	120 (75.0%)
<b>Total Positive Responses (%)</b>	<b>120 (80.0%)</b>	<b>134 (87.0%)</b>	<b>140 (70%)</b>	<b>123 (81.5%)</b>	<b>517 (84.6%)</b>

(Note: Multiple responses accepted.)

Table 9.3.50 has been formed on the basis of positive approvals of the female respondents on five selected points. It shows that on the whole 84.4 per cent of the female respondents comprising 85 per cent from Ghoshpara, 85 per cent from Nalpur, 90 per cent from Gangachara and 77.5 per cent from Betuail support women's participation in familial decision making process. Similarly 70 per cent respondents comprising 57.5 per cent from Ghoshpara, 72.5 per cent from Nalpur, 80 per cent from Gangachara and 70 per cent from Betuail approve the right of a daughter in choosing her own mate. The respondents were asked whether they feel that they should be given the right to earn and spend independently. We find that 65 per cent respondents from Gangachara followed by 62.5 per cent from Nalpur, 60 per cent from Betuail and 40 per cent from Ghoshpara have stated positive approval on this issue.

The table further reveals that three-fourths of the total respondents comprising 70 per cent from Ghoshpara, 77.5 per cent from Nalpur, 80 per cent from Gangachara and 72.5 per cent from Betuail have supported the issue of women's political empowerment. This is of course a positive symptom in women's attitude in the way of establishing their political power by removing traditional outlooks of males. But it is quite surprising that only 36.9 per cent female respondents comprising 47.5 per cent from Ghoshpara, 37.5 per cent from Nalpur, 35 per cent from Gangachara and 27.5 per cent from Betuail have approved the issue of women's equal inheritance rights. However, with regard to the above five points, 64.6 per cent responses made by the female respondents are positive which may be treated encouraging.

#### 9.4. Females Intuition towards Female Education

It is disclosed from various studies that discrimination against women is saturated in our society to a great extent. Repressive age-old traditions, unquestioned social norms, unchallenged economic dependence and financial insecurity, illiteracy and ignorance, the invisibility and silence of women in public life — all these combine to keep women in a lowly state within their families, their communities, and their country. More specifically, as a common practice, a woman in our society is not considered as man's equal working partner, though normally she contributes more than a man in ensuring basic survival of her family (RDRS, 1995:3).

Detestable state of education of the women in West Bengal and Bangladesh is also revealed in the concerned Government statistics. Despite scarcity of information about Muslims, we can assume that the situation of Muslim women is more vulnerable in the field of education. It is reasonably assumed that until these women become aware of their overall educational situation, any attempt to develop their status will be unsuccessful. Hence, to assess their awareness on existing educational situation we have asked them to state their consent on some specific remarks. The findings are:

**Table-9.4.51. Approvals of Muslim women towards their overall educational situation.**

Remarks on women's educational situation	Respondents village of residence				
	Ghostpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuali	Total
Muslim women are educationally lagging behind in comparison with their male counterparts.	34 (85.0%)	35 (87.5%)	37 (92.5%)	34 (85.0%)	140 (87.5%)
Muslim women are educationally lagging behind in comparison with women of Hindu community.	35 (87.5%)	37 (92.5%)	19 (47.5%)	17 (42.5%)	108 (67.5%)
Muslim women are educationally backward both from their male counterparts and Hindu women.	30 (75.0%)	33 (82.5%)	19 (47.5%)	17 (42.5%)	99 (61.9%)
Muslim women are educationally backward either from their male counterparts or from Hindu women.	36 (90.0%)	38 (95.0%)	37 (92.5%)	34 (85.0%)	145 (90.6%)

Table-9.4.51 shows that 87.5 per cent female respondents comprising 85 per cent from Ghoshpara, 87.5 per cent from Nalpur, 92.5 per cent from Gangachara and 85 per cent from Betuail have consented that Muslim women are educationally lagging behind their male counterparts. Again, 67.5 per cent female respondents comprising 87.5 per cent from Ghoshpara, 92.5 per cent from Nalpur, 47.5 per cent from Gangachara and 42.5 per cent from Betuail have expressed that Muslim women are in general lagging behind in education in comparison with the females belonging to Hindu community. Thus we find that the Muslim females of West Bengal are more conscious about their comparative backwardness in education with respect to the women belonging to Hindu community while in Bangladesh they are more aware of their educational backwardness in comparison with their male counterparts.

However, through analysing the approvals of women respondents on the above two remarks we find that 61.9 per cent of them comprising 75 per cent from Ghoshpara, 82.5 per cent from Nalpur, 47.5 per cent from Gangachara and 42.5 per cent from Betuail have admitted Muslim women's educational backwardness in comparison with their male counterparts and Hindu women. It further helps us to understand that 90.6 per cent of the these respondents comprising 90 per cent from Ghoshpara, 95 per cent from Nalpur, 92.5 per cent from Gangachara and 85 per cent from Betuail are aware of Muslim women's educational backwardness either making comparison with their male counterparts or with the women belonging to Hindu community. Yet surprisingly we have noticed that majority of these respondents are not so anxious as we normally expect from them for their lowly state of education as well as lowly status in the community.

### 9.5. Females Awareness on Religion and Education

It is well established that Islam considers 'ignorance' as the most disgraceful curse and provides many guidelines to get rid of it. According to its 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. Actually Islam strongly opposes static social order and provides mechanism of social change through cultivation of new ideas and knowledge. It admits the importance of knowledge for the growth of consciousness and clearly states that a society cannot be developed unless its human resources are properly utilized through cultivation of knowledge. That is why Islam suggests its entire followers irrespective of their sex to develop their human resources through lifelong learning.

It is worthy of note that the Prophet times and again inspires his followers to educate daughters and to get them married at proper age. As a result women have been attending the general assemblies for learning held by the Prophet. 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 female respondents about how much they are acquainted with the Islamic notion on female education. The findings are presented in table-9.5.52.

**Table-9.5.52. Islamic notion on female education as perceived by the Muslim women.**

Mode of acquaintance	Respondents village of residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Befuall	Total
Rightly acquainted	8 (20.0%)	12 (30.0%)	14 (35.0%)	8 (20.0%)	42 (28.3%)
Misconception acquainted	20 (50.0%)	16 (40.0%)	13 (32.5%)	16 (40.0%)	65 (40.8%)
Unaware of any notion	12 (30.0%)	12 (30.0%)	13 (32.5%)	16 (40.0%)	53 (33.1%)
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>160 (100%)</b>

Table-9.5.52 shows that out of 160 female respondents in the study-villages of West Bengal and Bangladesh only 42 are rightly acquainted with Islamic notion on female education. The respondents are composed of 8 persons from Ghoshpara, 12 persons from Nalpur, 14 persons from Gangachara and 8 persons from Betuail. So, on an aggregate only 26.3 per cent female respondents in the study-villages comprising 20 per cent from Ghoshpara, 30 per cent from Nalpur, 35 per cent from Gangachara and 20 per cent from Betuail are rightly acquainted with the Islamic notion with regard to female education. These girls and women are identified as rightly acquainted in Islamic notion, 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 40.6 per cent female respondents comprising 50 per cent from Ghoshpara, 40 per cent from Nalpur, 32.5 per cent from Gangachara and 40 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, 21.9 per cent and 7.5 per cent of the respondents respectively. The above table further reveals that the rest 33.1 per cent of Muslim females from the study-villages comprising 30 per cent from Ghoshpara, 30 per cent from Nalpur, 32.5 per cent from Gangachara and 40 per cent from Betuail are unaware of any religious notion concerning female education. Thus we find that on an aggregate 73.7 per cent of the female respondents in the study-villages are either unaware of Islamic notion on female education or possess misconception on it.



### 9.6. Females View about Aims of Education

It is beyond doubt that education helps an individual in performing the modern roles more efficiently and perfectly. So, an educated person gains more prestige and honour in the family as well as society. Particularly for a woman, the effect of education is more positive. Because, the prestige of family is also enhanced when the women of the family are educated. As a matter of fact, educated women not only can rear their children more scientifically but also likely to take care of the children's early education. It facilitates their employment opportunities and better future prospect. In the event of exigencies of situation when a woman need to take up some job for the basic survival of her family, education becomes her most valuable capital. So, in the present study, we have asked the entire female respondents about their views regarding the main objective of female education. The findings are furnished below:

**Table-9.6.53. Women's opinion regarding the main objective of female education.**

Main objectives stated	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betual	Total
To acquire knowledge	4 (10.0%)	3 (7.5%)	3 (7.5%)	1 (2.5%)	11 (6.9%)
To become independent/solvent	18 (45.0%)	14 (35.0%)	15 (37.5%)	14 (35.0%)	61 (38.1%)
To get a good husband	4 (10.0%)	6 (15.0%)	6 (15.0%)	12 (30.0%)	28 (17.5%)
To increase family status	4 (10.0%)	5 (12.5%)	6 (15.0%)	5 (12.5%)	20 (12.5%)
To educate children	10 (25.0%)	12 (30.0%)	10 (25.0%)	8 (20.0%)	40 (25.0%)
<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 38.1 per cent female respondents feel the main objective of education is 'to become independent' followed by 25 per cent who consider it is 'to educate children'. Similarly 17.5 per cent respondents are in opinion that the main objective is 'to get good husband' while 12.5 per cent respondent believe it is 'to increase family status'. The rest 6.9 per cent respondents think that the main objective of education is 'to acquire knowledge'.

### ***9.7. Females Feelings about Educational Attainment***

It is usually assumed that the Muslims are conservative so far the education of their girls is concerned. Especially in the context of Indian subcontinent, mass education of women was unknown to the common Muslims up to twentieth century. At that time women education was mainly confined to the landlord families and high-class sections of the cities. As a result, Muslim women belonging to middle class or low class families were not only illiterate but also unaware of educational need. By reason of seclusion and subjugation of males they had to lead a cloistered life and practically the busy world was out of their reach. Their work and activity were comprised of cooking, child rearing, catering to the relatives-in-law and husband and there was no place for education. However, under the fast changing conditions in the recent times, increased attention is being paid on women's education throughout the world. At present women from all sections of the society and even from orthodox Muslim families are studying into various educational institutions. The exciting fact is that women in general are now aware about the need of their educational attainment.

For instances, in the present study we have interviewed 160 female respondents out of whom 40 are illiterate and 70 are dropped or terminated from studentship before completing graduation degree. The illiterate and early withdrawn females were asked about their educational satisfaction. Accordingly all the illiterate respondents have expressed their feelings of infliction for remaining illiterate while only one-fifth of the early withdrawn respondents comprising 23.5 per cent from Ghoshpara, 11.8 per cent from Nalpur, 13 per cent from Gangachara and 38.5 per cent from Betuail are seemed satisfied for their educational status (see table-9.7.54).

**Table-9.7.54. Female respondents by feelings of their self- educational accomplishment.**

Respondents Feelings	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuail	Total
Satisfied of self-education	4 (23.5%)	2 (11.8%)	3 (13.0%)	5 (38.5%)	14 (20.0%)
Dissatisfied of self-education	9 (53.0%)	13 (76.4%)	19 (82.6%)	5 (38.5%)	46 (66.7%)
Fail to response	4 (23.5%)	2 (11.8%)	1(4.4%)	3 (23.0%)	10 (14.3%)
<b>Total Respondents (%)</b>	<b>17 (100%)</b>	<b>17 (100%)</b>	<b>23 (100%)</b>	<b>13 (100%)</b>	<b>70 (100%)</b>

(Note: Respondents include the females who are either dropped out or terminated from studentship before attaining graduation degree.)

The above table reveals that out of 70 early drop-out respondents only 14 women are satisfied for their self-educational attainment while 46 women have expressed their dissatisfied and rest 10 women could not response on this issue. So, on an aggregate 66.7 per cent of the early dropped out female respondents comprising 53 per cent from Ghoshpara, 76.4 per cent from Nalpur, 82.6 per cent from Gangachara and 38.5 per cent from Betuail are dissatisfied of their educational status.

Contextually it may be mentioned that while the said illiterate female respondents were asked about the main reasons of their non-enrolment into educational institution, two-fifths of them blamed there parents for not sending them to school at their early boyhood; 35 per cent of them blamed their familial poverty for which they were engaged in child labour instead of attending the school; rest 25 per cent of them stated other minor reasons. Similarly 40 per cent of the early dropped out respondents blamed their familial poverty for which they were compelled to leave their school and engaged in familial work or income earning job; 27.1 per cent of them blamed their early marriage for which they were withdrawn from school; 14.3 per cent of them blamed their parents for showing indifferent attitude towards their education and rest 18.6 per cent of them stated other minor reasons behind their early withdrawal.

### 9.8. Females Aspirations towards Girls Education

Education is considered as the most important factor of women's involvement into development. It is not only viewed as her fundamental right but also as an investment in human resource development. The United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali judiciously stated, "Without progress in the situation of women, there can be no true social development. Human rights are not worthy of the name if they exclude the female half of humanity. The struggle for women's equality is part of the struggle for a better world for human beings, and all societies." Today the level of women's education has been established an indicator of the status of women as well as yardstick for measuring the ability of a nation, as to how best could it manipulate human resources towards social progress. In the present study the entire female respondents have also approved the need of female education. But they have mentioned distinct variation in suggesting the level of education for womenfolk while they were asked about it. The findings are stated in the following table.

**Table-9.8.55. Level of education as suggested for girls by the female respondents.**

Suggested level of education	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghosipara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betwall	Total
Primary (Grades: I-V)	6 (15.0%)	4 (10.0%)	3 (7.5%)	7 (17.5%)	20 (12.5%)
Grades: VI-X	12 (30.0%)	7 (17.5%)	8 (20.0%)	13 (32.5%)	40 (25.0%)
SF and HS	12 (30.0%)	11 (27.5%)	11 (27.5%)	11 (27.5%)	45 (28.1%)
Graduation and above	10 (25.0%)	18 (45.0%)	18 (45.0%)	9 (22.5%)	55 (34.4%)
<b>Total Respondents (%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b>	<b>160 (100%)</b>

It is revealed in the above table that primary level of education for women has been suggested by 20 females which is 12.5 per cent of the female respondents while secondary level of education for women has been suggested by 40 females which is one-fourth of the total female respondents.

Table-9.8.55 also shows that school final and higher secondary level of education for the girls have been suggested by 45 females which is 28.1 per cent of the total female respondents while the rest 55 females (34.4%) have suggested graduation and upper level of education for females. Thus we find that about two-thirds of the female respondents have suggested at least secondary level of education for their fellow sisters.

In the above connection it is important to note that the major portion of our female respondents is either illiterate or literate up to grade-x. Further only 15 female respondents which is less than one-tenth (9.3%) of the total have completed graduation or upper level of education. It is felt that suggesting higher education by 55 respondents is very encouraging. So, these female respondents were asked to justify their suggestions. The findings are furnished below.

**Table-9.8.56. Justifications of females towards suggesting higher education for girls.**

Justifications towards higher education	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betual	Total
Higher education helps a girl to become self-dependent.	2 (20%)	5 (27.8%)	5 (27.8%)	3 (33.3%)	15 (27.3%)
Providing higher education to girls increases family status.	1 (10%)	2 (11.1%)	2 (11.1%)	1 (11.1%)	6 (10.9%)
No/less dowry is needed for highly educated girls.	2 (20%)	3 (16.7%)	2 (11.1%)	1 (11.1%)	8 (14.5%)
Highly educated mothers play better role in child rearing.	3 (30%)	3 (16.7%)	5 (27.8%)	2 (22.2%)	13 (23.6%)
Highly educated wives can earn to help their husband.	1 (10%)	2 (11.1%)	2 (11.1%)	2 (22.2%)	7 (12.7%)
Higher education of girls is encouraged in religion.	-	2 (11.1%)	1 (5.5%)	-	3 (5.5%)
Higher education of girl is a need for social development.	1 (10%)	1 (5.5%)	1 (5.5%)	-	3 (5.5%)
<b>Total Respondents (%)</b>	<b>10 (18.2%)</b>	<b>18 (32.7%)</b>	<b>18 (32.7%)</b>	<b>9 (16.4%)</b>	<b>55 (100%)</b>

(Note: Respondents include the females who have suggested graduation and upper degrees for girls and women.)

The above table discloses that out of the said 55 respondents 27.3 per cent believe higher education helps the girls to become independent followed by 23.6 per cent who think highly educated girl can play better role in child rearing.

Table-9.8.56 also shows, to defend the suggestions made in the direction of girls higher education, 14.5 per cent of these respondents have stated that parents of highly educated girls need no or less dowry during the marriage of such girls; 12.7 per cent of them have perceived that highly educated women can earn more to help her husband; 10.9 per cent of them feel that providing higher education to girls increases family status; 5.5 per cent of them think that higher education of girls is encouraged in religion and another 5.5 per cent of them consider that higher education of girls is a must for social development.

The entire female respondents were also asked about their suggestion towards level of religious education for the women. The findings are furnished in table-9.8.57.

**Table-9.8.57. Level of religious education for girls as suggested by the female respondents.**

Level of religious education suggested for the girls	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuail	Total
Up to performing prayer	23 (57.5%)	16 (40.0%)	8 (20.0%)	22 (55.0%)	69 (43.1%)
Fluency in reading Quran	14 (35.0%)	17 (42.5%)	22 (55.0%)	15 (37.5%)	68 (42.5%)
Well taught in interpretation of Quran	3 (7.5%)	7 (17.5%)	10 (25.0%)	3 (7.5%)	23 (14.4%)
<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 reveals that 43.1 per cent of the total female respondents comprising 57.5 per cent from Ghoshpara, 40 per cent from Nalpur, 20 per cent from Gangachara and 55 per cent from Betuail have suggested religious education for girls up to the level of performing prayer. But another 42.5 per cent respondents comprising 35 per cent from Ghoshpara, 42.5 per cent from Nalpur, 55 per cent from Gangachara and 37.5 per cent from Betuail have suggested the level of fluency in reading the Quran. Only 14.4 per cent of these respondents have suggested that women should be well taught in religious education.

### **9.9. Females Attitude towards Purdah and Coeducation**

The institution of 'Purdah' as we have known from the cultural history was completely non-existent in the social life of ancient Bengal. Presumably, this culture penetrated into this area with the advent of Islam. Initially the reason for adopting of such an alien custom by the women of converted Muslims was a religious practice but later on the purpose of the custom of purdah has shifted to a status symbol. The custom of purdah actually consolidated during the Mughal rule which lasted for several centuries. However, seclusion of women including purdah system as we have come to know from 'Aborodh Bashini' means 'Dweller of Harem' of Begum Rokeya was rigidly observed in the Muslim society of Bengal up to a long extent of twentieth century. At that time few wealthy Muslim girls were taught to the private tutors in their homes. But the Muslim gentry in general were refrained from enrolling their girls into formal education. However, this condition gradually changed with the growth of feminist movements. As a result the number of Muslim girls attending in unlike coeducational institutions is increasing day by day. Yet, we notice that enrolment ratio among the Muslim girls is not satisfactory. Hence, it seems to us as an important issue of investigation to judge the impression of Muslim girls and women on the custom of purdah practice. Owing to this, we have asked the female respondents to state their opinions on the issue of Burkha or strict purdah observance. Accordingly 25 per cent female respondents have expressed their supports on strict purdah observance in terms of Burkha or Veil. But it is an interesting note that none of these respondents are found observing strict purdah in terms of Burkha. However the detail findings are shown in the following table (table-9.9.58).

**Table-9.9.58. Females opinions towards the custom of purdah prevailing in Muslim society.**

Opinions towards purdah	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuali	Total
Support the custom of strict purdah in terms of Burkha/Veil.	10 (25%)	7 (17.5%)	11 (27.5%)	12 (30%)	40 (25.0%)
Support moderate purdah in terms of modest dressing.	11 (27.5%)	12 (30%)	9 (22.5%)	12 (30%)	44 (27.5%)
Feel advantage and disadvantage alike in practicing purdah	9 (22.5%)	13 (32.5%)	10 (25%)	10 (25%)	42 (26.2%)
Ordinarily oppose any custom that secludes women	6 (15%)	4 (10%)	6 (15%)	4 (10%)	20 (12.5%)
Strongly oppose the custom of purdah prevailing in Muslim society	4 (10%)	4 (10%)	4 (10%)	2 (5%)	14 (8.8%)
<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 27.5 per cent female respondents are the supporters of moderate purdah in terms of modest dressing while 26.2 per cent of them experience advantage and disadvantage alike in practicing purdah. On the other hand 8.8 per cent female respondents in the study villages have expressed their strong disliking towards purdah observance and another 12.5 per cent have expressed their ordinary disliking on it. Thus 21.3 per cent female 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 women of Bangladesh are more fascinated towards practicing purdah than that of West Bengal.

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

**Table-9.9.59. Opinions of girls and women towards co-education.**

Opinions on coeducation	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuali	Total
Totally favourable	21 (52.5%)	25 (62.5%)	24 (60.0%)	20 (50.0%)	90 (56.2%)
Favourable on certain condition	12 (30.0%)	10 (25.0%)	11 (27.5%)	13 (32.5%)	46 (28.8%)
Not favourable at all	7 (17.5%)	5 (12.5%)	5 (12.5%)	7 (17.5%)	24 (15.0%)
<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-9.9.59 shows that 56.2 per cent female respondents comprising 52.5 per cent from Ghoshpara, 62.5 per cent from Nalpur, 60 per cent from Gangachara and 50 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 28.8 per cent of the total female respondents comprising 30 per cent from Ghoshpara, 25 per cent from Nalpur, 27.5 per cent from Gangachara and 32.5 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.

The table further reveals that 15 per cent of the female respondents comprising 17.5 per cent from Ghoshpara, 12.5 per cent from Nalpur, 12.5 per cent from Gangachara and 17.5 per cent from Betuail have expressed completely unfavourable attitude towards coeducation. The unfavourable attitude is ascertained on the basis of few antagonistic opinions viz. (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.

### 9.10. Females Attitude towards Women's Employment

Economic independence of women has a bearing on their overall status. It not only improves their position within the family but also at outside. According to Smith (1946:80), "if women are taking part in productive activities of the society, they would soon have that economic independence without which they cannot be truly free and with which they will necessarily find freedom". Different studies in the context of West Bengal and Bangladesh disclose that women's participation in socio-economic activities has increased to a great extent in the recent years. As employment of women bring positive changes in the greater society, an effort was taken to examine the attitude of the female respondents on this issue based on three-point itemized rating scale.

**Table-9.10.60. Women's opinions towards their employment outside their locality.**

Opinions on women's employment	Number and percentage of respondents by residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuail	Total
Totally favourable	24 (60.0%)	29 (72.5%)	30 (75.0%)	22 (55.0%)	105 (85.6%)
Favourable on ground	9 (22.5%)	7 (17.5%)	6 (15.0%)	9 (22.5%)	31 (19.4%)
Not favourable at all	7 (17.5%)	4 (10.0%)	4 (10.0%)	9 (22.5%)	24 (15.0%)
<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 65.6 per cent of the female respondents comprising 60 per cent from Ghoshpara, 72.5 per cent from Nalpur, 75 per cent from Gangachara and 55 per cent from Betuail have expressed totally favourable opinion towards women's employment outside home while 19.4 per cent respondents comprising 22.5 per cent from Ghoshpara, 17.5 per cent from Nalpur, 15 per cent from Gangachara and 22.5 per cent from Betuail have expressed favourable opinion but it depends on some grounds and rest 15 per cent of them comprising 17.5 per cent from Ghoshpara, 10 per cent from Nalpur, 10 per cent from Gangachara and 22.5 per cent from Betuail have expressed totally unfavourable opinion on it.

### 9.11. Females View on Barriers of Education

Many scholars from different standpoint have ascertained retrogressive position of women belonging to Muslim society. The present study too reveals their comparative backwardness with regard to education in the context of West Bengal and Bangladesh, statistical presentation of which has already been laid in the table-6.2.8 and discussed in the chapter-7. It is further noticed that 90.6 per cent of the female respondents of the present study comprising 90 per cent from Ghoshpara, 95 per cent from Nalpur, 92.5 per cent from Gangachara and 85 per cent from Betuail have distinct understanding on Muslim women's educational backwardness (see table-9.4.51). These female respondents were also asked to mention the barriers as they perceive in the way of women's educational growth. Accordingly they have explained their views on various points which are classified and presented in the following table:

**Table-9.11.61. Barriers against Muslim women's educational growth as identified by them.**

Reasons of backwardness	Respondents village of residence				
	Ghoshpara	Nalpur	Gangachara	Betuail	Total
Lack of learning curiosity/ Self-apathy of Muslim girls'	4 (11.1%)	3 (7.9%)	2 (5.4%)	2 (5.9%)	11 (7.6%)
Illiterate parents/ Unconsciousness of parents.	7 (19.4%)	9 (23.7%)	6 (16.2%)	5 (14.7%)	27 (18.6%)
Familial poverty/ Shortage of study materials.	8 (22.2%)	9 (23.7%)	9 (24.3%)	6 (17.6%)	32 (22.1%)
Engagement in familial work/ Income earning job.	5 (13.9%)	4 (10.5%)	2 (5.4%)	6 (17.6%)	17 (11.7%)
Early marriage/ Unresponsive husband.	2 (5.6%)	3 (7.9%)	9 (24.3%)	4 (11.8%)	18 (12.4%)
Strict purdah observance/ Lack of girls' school.	3 (8.3%)	3 (7.9%)	4 (10.8%)	3 (8.8%)	13 (9.0%)
Too far distance of schools/ Lack of transport facilities.	2 (5.6%)	-	-	2 (5.9%)	4 (2.8%)
Feelings of insecurity/ Fear of immodesty.	2 (5.6%)	2 (5.3%)	2 (5.4%)	2 (5.9%)	8 (5.5%)
Lack of government initiative/ Less employment opportunity.	3 (8.3%)	2 (5.3%)	2 (5.4%)	2 (5.9%)	9 (6.2%)
Indifferent role of religious leaders/ Hindrances from religious leaders.	-	3 (7.9%)	1 (2.7%)	2 (5.9%)	6 (4.1%)
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>36 (100%)</b>	<b>38 (100%)</b>	<b>37 (100%)</b>	<b>34 (100%)</b>	<b>145 (100%)</b>

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

Table 9.11.61 shows that the main barriers against Muslim women's educational growth as stated by the entire female respondents of the study-villages have been presented by 10 couple of remarks. The table also reveals that more than one-fifth of the female respondents (22.1%) in the study-villages think that Muslim women are lagging behind in education due to their familial poverty and shortage of study materials followed by 18.6 per cent who believe that illiterate and unaware Muslim parents are mainly liable for the educational backwardness of Muslim women.

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 12.4 per cent of respondents while 11.7 per cent of them conceive 'engagement in familial work or income earning job is the main barrier'. Another 9 per cent respondents assume that 'strict purdah observance in general and lack of girls' school in particular are the main causes' while 7.6 per cent of them grasp 'lack of learning curiosity and self-apathy of Muslim girls' are mainly liable for their educational backwardness'. Further, 6.2 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 are the prime reasons of women's educational backwardness' while 5.5 per cent respondents describe the main barrier is derived from 'feelings of insecurity and fear of immodesty'. Another 4.1 per cent respondents deliberate that indifferent roles of religious leaders is the main reason while the rest 2.8 per cent respondents assert 'too far distance of the school in general and lack of transport facilities for the girls in particular are the prime barriers against women education'.

### 9.12. Females Suggestions for upholding Their Educational Status

The nature of the present study is explanatory and the relative backwardness of Muslim women residing at the rural areas of West Bengal and Bangladesh with regard to their education and empowerment has already been determined by it. Thus it becomes evident that in spite of radical changes occurred in the social structure, Muslim women belonging to the said region are continue to be victims due to financial insolvency of the Muslim families in general; traditional outlooks and religious misconception of themselves as well as their male counterparts in particular. However, the encouraging fact is that today majority of the Muslim women are sensible of their educational backwardness and also able to identify the barriers of their educational growth. So, the female respondents were asked to make suggestion for upholding their educational status. Accordingly they have conveyed us the following suggestions (see table-9.12.62.).

**Table-9.12.62. Suggestions of Muslim women for upholding their educational status.**

Suggestions	No. and percentage of females by residence				
	Ghoshpara (n=36)	Nalpur (n=38)	Gangachara (n=37)	Betual (n=34)	Total (n=145)
Specific programme should be initiated to encourage more girls' towards education.	12 (33.3%)	10 (26.3%)	10 (27.0%)	8 (23.5%)	40 (27.6%)
Programme should be taken to develop educational awareness of Muslim parents.	10 (27.8%)	11 (28.9%)	12 (32.4%)	7 (20.5%)	40 (27.6%)
Religious leaders should take the liability to canvass in favour of female education.	7 (19.4%)	4 (10.5%)	5 (13.5%)	4 (11.8%)	20 (13.8%)
Free studentship, study materials, stipend should be provided to all girls' at all levels.	11 (30.6%)	15 (39.4%)	16 (43.2%)	14 (41.2%)	56 (38.6%)
Girls should be provided special transport facility to attend schools and return home.	2 (5.6%)	-	-	2 (5.9%)	4 (2.8%)
More girls' school and college should be established at different levels.	11 (30.6%)	13 (34.2%)	14 (37.8%)	13 (38.2%)	51 (35.2%)
Early marriage of girls' should be banned by enacting strict provision of punishment.	5 (13.9%)	7 (18.4%)	12 (32.4%)	6 (17.6%)	30 (20.7%)
Government should ensure firm environs for girls' inside and outside the school.	4 (11.1%)	5 (13.2%)	4 (10.8%)	2 (5.9%)	15 (10.3%)
Women's quota according to numerical ratio should be protected in all services.	8 (22.2%)	7 (18.4%)	8 (21.6%)	7 (20.6%)	30 (20.7%)
Government should make it obligatory for girls to attain at least primary school level.	5 (13.9%)	6 (15.8%)	3 (8.1%)	3 (8.8%)	17 (11.7%)

(Note: Respondents include only those females who realized Muslim women's comparative backwardness in education. Multiple suggestions accepted.)

Table-9.12.62 shows that about two-fifth (38.6%) of the entire female 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. It also reveals that more than one-third (35.2%) of these respondents possess the opinion in favour of establishing more schools and colleges for the girls; 27.6 per cent of them have recommended to initiate special type of motivational programmes for the girls to encourage them more and more towards education and another 27.6 per cent of them proposed similar programmes for the Muslim parents with a end to remove gender inequality in this field. On the other hand 20.7 per cent respondents have advocated to restrict early marriage of girls by enacting strict provision of punishment and another 20.7 per cent have suggested introducing women's quota in government services at the state/national level according to their ratio of numerical representation. Interestingly we notice that 13.8 per cent of the entire female respondents think Muslim religious leaders should take the liability of canvassing in favour of women education while 11.7 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 10.3 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 2.8 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.

### **9.13. Observations**

From the foregoing analysis it is evident that this chapter involves the opinions of 160 females equally drawn from the study-villages. These respondents are heterogeneous in character with regard to their social and family position, age, education and marital status. On the whole 37.5 per cent of these respondents think themselves satisfied for being female sex while 24.4 per cent are dissatisfied; 26.9 per cent fail to determine their sex satisfaction and rest 11.2 per cent oppose to answer such question. It is found that the more the respondents are educated the more they are dissatisfied for being female sex. Due to hefty persuasion on gender inequality and better understanding on humiliating social position of womenfolk, the educated girls and women usually feel themselves unhappy for being female.

The respondents are seemed conscious of their rights, dignity and empowerment. Because, on the whole 72.5 per cent of female respondents belonging to the Muslim community of West Bengal and Bangladesh believe that women are equal to men by dignity while 23.8 per cent think themselves inferior to men by dignity and the rest 3.7 per cent believe in women's superior position in comparison with men.

As regards the rights and empowerment of women 84.4 per cent of the female respondents in total have supported women's participation in familial decision making process while 75 per cent have expressed urge towards political empowerment of women; 70 per cent have argued for the right of a daughter in choosing her own mate; 56.9 per cent have expressed positive feelings towards women's economic independence and 36.9 per cent have pleaded for share of each daughter equal to each son in parents property.

On the whole 87.5 per cent female respondents realize that they are educationally lagging behind their male counterparts while 67.5 per cent comprehend their educational backwardness in comparison with Hindu females. But Muslim females of West Bengal are seemed more conscious about their comparative backwardness in education with respect to the women of Hindu community while in Bangladesh they are more aware of their educational backwardness in comparison with their male counterparts.

On an aggregate only 26.3 per cent female respondents in the study-villages are rightly acquainted with the Islamic notion on female education while 40.6 per cent of them possess misconception on it and rest 33.1 per cent are unaware of any religious notion concerning female education. Thus we find that 73.7 per cent of the female respondents are either unaware of Islamic notion on female education or possess misconception on it.

As regards the aims of education 38.1 per cent female respondents feel that the main objective of education is to become independent followed by 25 per cent who consider it is to educate children. Similarly 17.5 per cent respondents are in opinion that the main objective is to get good husband while 12.5 per cent believe it is to increase family status and 6.9 per cent think it is to acquire knowledge.

The entire illiterate female respondents are unhappy for remaining illiterate and two-fifths of them blame their parents for not sending them to school. On the other hand two-thirds of the respondents withdrawn before completing graduation degree are seemed dissatisfied for their educational status and majority of them think either familial poverty or early marriage is liable for this.



The entire female respondents have approved the need of female education. But they have mentioned distinct variation in suggesting the level of education for womenfolk. As a matter of fact 12.5 per cent of them suggested primary level of education for women while 25 per cent enticed secondary level; 28.1 per cent argued for higher secondary level and rest 34.4 per cent pleaded higher level of education (graduation and above) for women. The majority of the female respondents who have pleaded for higher education think that it will help girls to become independent and make them able to play better role in child rearing.

Women respondents are surprisingly unaware about the need of religious education because only 14.4 per cent of them think that women should be well taught in interpretation while 85.6 per cent have suggested the level of performing prayer or fluency in reading the Quran.

One-fourth female respondents comprising 21 per cent from West Bengal and 29 per cent from Bangladesh support rigidity of purdah institution in terms of Burkha; 27.5 per cent support moderate purdah in terms of modest dressing; 26.2 per cent experience advantage and disadvantage alike in practicing purdah; 12.5 per cent simply oppose this custom and the rest 8.8 per cent comprising 10 per cent from West Bengal and 7.5 per cent from Bangladesh strongly condemn it. Yet, 56.2 per cent of these respondents possess totally favourable attitude towards coeducation while 28.8 per cent impose certain conditions to accept it and the rest 15 per cent hold completely unfavourable attitude towards it. However, Muslim women of west Bengal and Bangladesh are equally fascinated towards coeducation while the Bangladeshi girls and women are more fascinated towards observing purdah.

About two-thirds of female respondents have completely positive attitude towards women's employment outside home while 19.4 per cent support it under special consideration and rest 15 per cent hold totally unfavourable opinion on it.

Regarding main barriers against educational growth of Muslim women 22.1 per cent of the female respondents in the study-villages think that Muslim women are lagging behind education due to their familial poverty and shortage of study materials while 18.6 per cent believe illiterate and unaware Muslim parents are mainly liable for the educational backwardness of Muslim women; 12.4 per cent indicate early marriage of Muslim girls is hindering women education; 11.7 per cent conceive engagement in familial work or income earning job is the main barrier; 9 per cent assume strict purdah observance in general and lack of girls' school in particular are the main causes; 7.6 per cent grasp lack of learning curiosity and self-apaty of Muslim girls are mainly liable for their educational backwardness; 6.2 per cent guess lack of government initiatives for expanding girls education as well as less employment opportunity provided for them by the government are the prime reasons of women's educational backwardness; 5.5 per cent describe the main barrier is derived from feelings of insecurity and fear of immodesty; 4.1 per cent deliberate indifferent roles of religious leaders is the main reason while the rest 2.8 per cent assert too far distance of the school in general and lack of transport facilities for the girls in particular are the prime barriers against women education.

However, the female respondents have proposed various suggestions for the advancement of Muslim women education in accordance with the barriers identified by them.