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INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and Scope of the Study

Women consist of more than half of the world's adult population. In developing countries, they are the primary developers and maintainers of land. In Africa, they produce and market up eighty percent of food grains and do seventy five percent of agricultural works. They account for more than fifty percent of agricultural force in Asia and Eastern Europe while they are largely engaged in family farming in Latin America and Middle East. In Spain and Turkey, women farmers work as long as seventy hours a week. In addition to such works, women throughout the world spend many hours for household affairs and thus ensure critical contribution in familial livelihood and production process of the state (World Ecology Report as quoted by Lucy, 1995:228).

The roles of women also deserve recognition with special importance from environmental perspective. Because, normally they perform vital functions in procuring, managing and utilizing water and fuel resources as producers of foods. According to UNFPA report, women are mainly engaged in child rearing and child education, through which they make highest contribution in constructing worthy future generations. Even in the extreme condition of poverty, they are observed to somehow manage the basic survival of their families. In spite of these, women are not considered with due respect, worth and dignity. Globally speaking, women still make one-third of the paid labour force and two-thirds of the work, while they earn only one-tenth of the income and own one percent of the world's property (Huq, 1995:60).

In the third world countries like India and Bangladesh, the condition of women is very depressing. Here most of the women are secluded within the four walls of their houses and therefore remain out of reach of formal educational institutions. They are neither aware of their status nor they think of their gender equity. The male bias traditional values of the society in general have confined them in thankless familial jobs. From remote past they are made to believe through myths, rituals, customs and social opinions that such odd jobs are the only expression of womanhood. As a result, in maximum cases they are found in unremitting physical toil as if they are constant moving wheels. From early morning to late night they are seen visible in their houses for doing all unpaid household works, such as meal preparation, child rearing, washing cloths, cleaning houses, fetching water, collection of fuel etc. (Siddh, 1991:306).

The outburst of industrial revolution in the eighteenth century by virtue of its subsequent technological development has brought tremendous changes in the status and role of women. After then women are increasingly engaging outside their houses as coworker of males. At the beginning of the new millennium, it is vigorously noticed that in order to supplement the meager income of the family, huge woman are engaged in subsidiary occupations at factories, mills and public or private offices in different positions. From this apparent observation, one may say that women are now enjoying almost all the rights and protection in the fields of human activities which were formerly forbidden to them. But this is not completely a true implication as the sufferings of women behind the screen still are guided by a significant part of the society who bears the traditional values that men are breadwinners and women are homemakers.

In fact, the seemingly positive changes that are normally transpired in the status of women in modern time cannot be used to judge their implicit status throughout the world. Because, women of the developing countries in general and Muslim women of those countries in particular are lagging much behind in respect of their education, health and empowerment than the women of the contemporary developed societies and also in comparison with male members of their own. They are still suffering from a number of problems that need urgent attention of the sociologists for study.

Owing to this, the present study has been designed for the situation analysis of the existing nature of literacy among Muslim women of rural West Bengal and rural Bangladesh. More specifically, the main focus of the inquiry is to assess the educational status and enrolment patterns of Muslim girls and women. And to understand their attitudes as well as the attitudes of influential Muslim males towards education, employment and empowerment of women and other aspects of gender equity and modernization. This study is also an approach to determine the comparative backwardness of the Muslim mass in general and Muslim women in particular in the field of education and modernization. In addition to delineate their comparative backwardness in the field of education, traditional pre-Islamic attitudes of the Muslim mass regarding functional necessities of formal education and other aspects of modernization have also been focused in this study. Moreover, the study is prosecuted to determine the common factors acting as hindrances against the educational growth and modernization of Muslim women and their greater society with a view to eradicating the basic causes of imbalances by supportive policy formulation.

1.2. *The Concept of Education*

The concept of education is, in fact, very broad and comprehensive as it includes the meaning, the aims, the scope and the importance of the conviction. 'Education' as a term is used so widely and at the same time so loosely that it becomes difficult to get a real implication. Socrates, the greatest philosopher and thinker of the ancient world established his motto "know thyself" which in the actual meaning stands 'be educated'. Normally we use the word 'Education' to mean all sorts of intellectual knowledge or information, and generally we consider him or her as 'Educated' who has acquired a considerable amount of bookish knowledge. But in real sense, this does not clarify the true implication of education. Because, education always bears positive implication and mere collection of information or acquisition of knowledge is inconsistent with the wider range of education until its use benefits mankind.

In the words of Swami Vivekhananda, " Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, indigested all your life. If education were identical with information, the libraries would be the greatest sages in the world and encyclopaedias the Rishis" (as quoted by Begum, 1995:154). Herbert Spencer finds education interrelated to all parts of the society and the educational system is reflected in the general pattern of the society (as stated by Islam, 1998:355). G. S. Bhatnagar has opined that education is referred to the bringing up of children both physically and mentally. In accordance with this opinion he also defined the concept of education in a very broad manner. According to him, "Education is a group process by which culture is transmitted from generation to generation" (Bhatnagar, 1972:3).

In the same manner Smith explained it "as a process whereby the socially approved part of the cultural heritage is transmitted from one generation to the following one and whereby newly acquired knowledge is diffused among members of society" (as quoted by Ghosh, 1988:2). However, today's world is the world of 'information imperialism' that recognizes 'education is symmetrical to information and information is power'. From this viewpoint it may be denoted that education is a weapon of the conservative forces of the society to fulfil their vested interest. Thus controversial question about the function of education may sometimes arise. The role of education, therefore, is an issue of long debate that makes it difficult to undertake a comprehensive definition of education. As there are so many great but confusing definitions, it will not be wise for us to enter into a detailed discussion of all of them but to consider the etymological meanings.

Education is derived from the Latin word 'Educare', which means to bring, to rear and to foster. Thus in real sense, mere schooling does not limit the scope of education, rather its scope is included with all the process by which an individual is adjusted to his whole ambit of existence. There is another view about the concept of education. According to this view 'Education' is derived from two Latin roots viz. 'e' means 'out of' and 'duco' means 'I lead'. The word may also be taken from the Latin word 'Educere' which means 'to lead out'. Thus the etymological meaning of 'Education' is 'leading out'. It implies leading out or eliciting the traits and capacities that are inherent or already existed in the minds of the educated persons. In other words, the potentialities of the mind are brought forth into actualities by means of the task of education (Begum, 1995:153-154).

In simple words, the term 'Education' can be considered as the process of developing desirable knowledge, skills and values within an individual so that he can perfectly perform his moral obligations, both personal and social. It is usually defined as the formal process by which a society transmits values, skills and knowledge from one person to another. So, it should be treated in terms of its relation with the society (Durkheim, 1956:70-75). Education is extracted from the cultural heritage of the society and palpably from outside influences to which the society is exposed. It is also influenced by traditions rooted in the society's past. Education is considered as the most powerful instrument and pivotal force for reshaping the society as it contributes to social change by investing new technologies and questioning existing knowledge.

According to the functionalists' views, education has important consequences for individuals and also for societies. For the individual, education is necessary for acquisition and mastering of skills and orientation needed to become a functioning member of social groups, specially work groups. For societies, educational institutions are important for equipping citizens with needed skills. Moreover, it contributes to social stability and integration by transmitting cultural values to a diverse population. Owing to these, the educational leaders of the present era have accepted the broader social idea of education that it must be brought into active and harmonious relations with the environment. The individual is not the only end. Education of this decade must teach cooperation, service and altruism. The educated person must feel his dependence upon society and his obligations for its betterment. His ideals must not be merely personal but social (Wahiduzzaman and Huda, 1998:184-188).

1.3. Purpose and Development of Education

The purpose of education is esoteric as it is vitally linked with the total developmental process. To explain the purpose of education, one says, "it is to form character", another says, "it is to prepare for complete living" and the third one states, "it is to produce a sound mind in a sound body" (Begum, 1995: 154). But most of the sociologists are in the same view that the main purpose of formal education is to transform the heterogeneous and potentially divided communities into one bond together by a common language and sense of common identity (Broom and Selznick, 1968: 340). In fact education is conceived as the most powerful agent of social development and socio-economic transformation that shapes the dominant values of society and contributes to the empowerment of persons by endowing them with knowledge and skills. It is considered not only as an individual's fundamental right but also an investment in human resource development (Duza, 1992:3).

The main purpose of education is linked with its broad importance that is clearly described by Kuan Chung. He said, "If you plan for a year, plant a seed; if for ten years, plant a tree; if for a hundred years, teach the people. When you sow a seed once, you reap a single harvest; when you teach the people, you will reap a hundred harvests" (as quoted by Haq and Haq, 1998:23). The dignified Greek philosopher Plato held that the end of education is to develop in the body and in the soul of the students all the beauty and all the perfection of which they are capable while in the Aristotelian view it is to develop man's faculties, especially his mind so that he may be able to enjoy the contemplation of the supreme truth, goodness and beauty in which perfect happiness essentially consists (Gisbert, 1957:210).

Another widely accepted purpose of education is the harmonious development of all the faculties and powers of human beings viz physical, intellectual, moral and aesthetic. In addition to the above purposes or aims, there are 'individual aims', 'social aims' and 'complete living aims' of education. These aims may be classified into 'proximate aims' and 'ultimate aims'. Proximate aims are general training and discipline, knowledge and culture, skill and efficiency, utility and service, morality and good breeding, happiness and enjoyment of leisure, and so on. Ultimate aims are to turn everybody into a full-fledged individual and make him adjusted with 'artefactual' physical environment for ensuring expected social development (Begum, 1995:156).

However, every scheme of education is at bottom a practical philosophy and necessarily it touches life at every point. The purposes of education are concrete and correlative to the ideals of life. It provides assistance to live a life properly and perfectly. It makes oneself healthy and fit to earn ones own livelihood. It also makes oneself aware of looking after the children carefully, voting intelligently at an election and spending the leisure time in useful activities. For instances, to keep ones body fit, knowledge of physiology and hygiene is essential; to earn ones livelihood by working in an office or factory, in a business firm or agricultural farm, or in a workshop or anywhere else one needs some sort of academic background or scientific skill. To look after the children perfectly, knowledge in child psychology, nutrition and hygiene is essential. Even to vote intelligently knowledge in history and politics is very much required. Lastly, in spending leisure time in a better manner,, scientific hobbies would be more useful than other ones in modern set up (Begum, 1995:157).

History of civilization reveals that the notion of 'Education' is very old as human civilization and its lights are dispersed and accumulated in every nook and corner of human society. But as a special function of a particular group or agency of human society, education did not rise until mankind had invented writing and arithmetic and advanced in agriculture, metallurgy and commerce. History also bears the witness that all the ancient civilizations viz. Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Persia, India, China, Greece and Rome had their own systems of formal education. But primarily the common masses were not included within those systems, rather those were confined to the privileged upper classes. In fact, upper classes tended to stress philosophy and ethics, art and music, mathematics and military arts for the interests of the ruling authority.

In the past epoch of the world's history men trained their younger members in a multiplicity of ways. According to Chandogya Upanishad, the core issues in which students were trained comprised practical arts and military science while literature, history, philosophy, religion, mathematics and astronomy were studied by them as essential subsidiaries. In the famous University of Taxila, we find complete courses in three major heads, viz (i) The Faculty of Science, (ii) The Faculty of Liberal Arts and (iii) The Faculty of *Vedas* and *Eighteen Accomplishments*. In classical Greek, the curriculum was mainly based on logic, history, music, mathematics and gymnastics. But in the heroic times of Rome, the Romans introduced study of grammar, literature and rhetoric as a part of their higher education as philosophy failed to create great appeal to the practical minded (Wahiduzzaman and Huda, 1998:185-186).

History discloses that in ancient India, conservatism of Hindu religion was strongly prevalent in the country's polity. As a result the society was hierarchical and organized around the 'Varna System'. Among the four Varnas the upper two viz *Brahmins* and *Kshatriyas* constituted the ruling class who used to rule the lower two viz *Vaishyas* and *Sudras*. However, hierarchical enumeration of the four Varnas was based on a series of religious propositions. The first three Varnas were given the right to bestowing gifts, offering sacrifice and studying the religious scriptures while the *Sudras* were deprived of any place or position in the Hindu religion and they were ordained to serve their superior classes (Bhatia, 1974:38-39).

During those days listening of *Vedic* hymn by any *Sudra* was a serious offence. Even death penalties were executed against many of them for committing such offence. As an inevitable effect of this *Varna System*, learning was in fact forbidden to the masses belonging to the lower castes. It is also seen that during this time the entire professional educationalist group was belonging to Brahmins. But their system of imparting education was something different. Students in a small number were required to live with each educationalist at his own house as the members of his own family under a set of rules and regulations (Biswas, 1985:821). Actually, the objectives of imparting education were considered to them as a religious duty. That is why those Brahmin 'Gurus' (teachers or trainers) used to emphasize mainly on religious education and practices and for these acts they normally did not take any fees from their 'Shishyas' (students or disciples). But as a common practice the *Sishas* used to help the *Gurus* in their household and farm works (Islam, 1998:356).

If we chronologically analyse the universal development of 'Educational Curricula' and 'Educational System' from ancient period to modern era, we find some interesting stages. It is because the formal education was under the exclusive possession of the ruling class and privileged religious groups throughout the ancient period. Even in the middle ages, the Roman Catholic Church was indeed at the core point of controlling the educational activities in Europe. At that time the Church exercised control chiefly by authorizing its establishment and by supplying members of the clergy as teachers. Scholars rightly pointed, "As long as the Christian tradition was based on specific body of beliefs said to have been revealed, the individual Christian had no alternative but to accept those beliefs literally and as an act of faith" (Wahiduzzaman and Huda, 1998:186).

History also bears the witness that throughout the middle ages the objective of education was semi-religious training to the Chinese and Hindus and purely religious to the Hebrews. It is the Arabs who for the first time led to the rise of secular educational institutions in Spain with Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Medicine (Islam, 1998:356). In Indian context, some Muslim rulers performed great deal in expanding secular education. Among them Firuj Shah Tughluq (1351-88), Alauddin Hussain Shah (1493-1519) and Akbar (1556-1605) deserve special mention. They established many educational institutions, secular as well as religious and also ensured easy access into those institutions for the common masses including the lower classes. In Bengal there were hundreds of indigenous schools during their reign. The number was about one lakh at the time of British take up. According to *Ain-e-Akbari*, Akbar the great, had passed an order that school boys should learn to read and write letters (Sharp, 1920:5).

Actually the serious beginning of modern education, both elementary and higher, have taken place through pacing a long way of rise and fall. Specially for getting higher education, the mass peoples had waited until the Reformation, the important economic changes during the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution. However, these changes freed individuals from serfdom and the feudal mores, and broke the class and theological holds on education. Moreover, from this time the common people began to understand that educated and technically trained individuals are very much essential to run a sound representative government as well as an efficient business or industry (Wahiduzzaman and Huda, 1998:186).

In spite of everything, women were debarred from getting university education up to a significant part of modern era. But finally they had secured this right by dint of their century long hard struggles. The movement for university education for women was first started in America and from there it spread in England in 1840 though no important step was taken until 1865. It was in 1868, that London University examinations were thrown open to women. Two years latter the University College opened its classes to them, yet the Cambridge University refused to admit the girl candidates at their previous examination in 1870. But the examiners allowed them and they passed the examinations too. In spite of these, their names did not appear in the list. The history of the admission of the girl students to Oxford University is almost the same as that of Cambridge University. However, after seven years, King's College established classes to give women learners the university type of instruction. The University admitted girl students to its degree courses in 1878 and gave women graduates the status equal to men graduates in 1882 (Siddiqi, 1971:34).

1.4. Education as Social Development Device

Education is the birthright of all citizens that flourishes their inborn qualities and thereby enriches their ability and efficiency to work. It is supposed to lead upward the social mobility and ensure a positive change in the modern technological society (Wankhede, 1999: 406). Education is also described as a cornerstone of development, a means of conscience and empowerment of people. It largely contributes to establish gender equity in the society. So, there can be no denying that education is a primary requirement for overall development of a society. The level of education is also an important indicator to assess the ability of the concerned society to effectively use its human resources for social and national development.

Education, as a social input, plays a significant role not only in the transformation of individuals, but also in the societies. It establishes close network of relationship with all development activities to ensure active roles of citizens in an uninterrupted pace of development programmes. On account of its introspective attributes and highly pervasive nature, education influences all walks of life. The extent and degree of its impact depend on other socio-economic and cultural factors that are associated with an individual or a society. The advancement in the fields of science, technology or medicine could not have been fully effective if it is not practically accepted and established upon people's perception, understanding and their level of literacy. Thus education is considered as vehicle of social progress and commitment in national development. Countries all over the world are, therefore, laying increasing emphasis on educating their masses (Pant, 2000:66).

Education has been playing an effective role in social development since the beginning of human civilization. As our moral value is awakened, consciousness is expanded, and self-determination is strengthened through education, it can rightly be regarded as a driving force for Human Resource Development. So, it is essential to educate all the citizens of a country for the sake of overall development. The post war Human Rights Declaration of the United Nations in 1948 also stated, "Everyone has the right to get education and it should be free upto primary and basic level". This open declaration made the developing countries obligated and inspired to introduce universal education for all (Begum and Fyzennessa, 1992:9).

In terms of human development objectives, education is an end in itself, not just a means to the end. It is a basic component of social cohesion and national identity. The foundations for a conscious and active citizenship are often laid upon it. Hence, education is not only an opportunity for human beings, rather it's their basic human right. It also plays the key role in the democratization process of the society and opens many economic, social and political doors to the people (Haq and Haq, 1998:24).

Education promotes human capital that ensures access to better employment opportunities and thus increases income. It is, therefore, considered as passport for accelerating economic growth in the context of rapidly globalizing world economy. Gray Becker rightly pointed, "...since human capital is embodied knowledge and skills, and economic development depends on advances in technical and scientific knowledge, development presumably depends on accumulation of human capital" (as quoted in Haq and Haq, 1998:24).

1.5: Women's Education - A Felt Need

Literacy and education both for men and women are equally important, but women's education is specially and specifically significant. It is because women literacy has always lagged behind and has pulled back the overall achievement of national literacy movements (Huq, 1997: 80). Education has rightly been regarded as a powerful vehicle to improve the status of women in modern times. Because, it imparts their values, moulds their aspirations and inculcates their skills and thus encourages and facilitates their performance of both familial and non-familial roles (Jehangir, 1991:53).

According to Giele and Smoke, "Education for women has both microscopic and macroscopic implications, that is, education may transform the attitude and self-image of the individual women, while on a societal level it often alerts the balance in male-female roles and widens sphere of permissible feminine activities". They elucidate it further, "Progressively greater exposure of women to education has generally resulted in an increased sharing of authority with the family, more continuous employment in professional and technical occupations, lower fertility patterns and greater participation in social and political activities" (Giele and Smoke, 1977:401-402). While describing the wider aspects of women education, Duza pointed, "Education of women has been phenomenal in contributing knowledge about prevention of diseases, primary health care, improvement and conservation of energy and nutrition. Educating women could be significantly worthwhile for achieving national goals of food self-sufficiency and increased agricultural and industrial productivity" (Duza, et al, 1992:4).

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Various scholars, policy makers and administrators strongly advocated in favour of education for women. Majumder signifies the urgent need for upliftment in women status and narrated a strong correlation between low status of women and low cultural levels of society (Majumder, 1961:251). To impose high importance on the issue of role and status of women, Menon stated, "a major index of modernization of any society is the position of its women vis-à-vis men. The more balanced the opportunity structure for men and women, the larger the role women have in society and consequently the higher their status" (Menon, 1981:1). While emphasizing the importance of education and the role of women, another renowned scholar wrote, "When you educate a male you invest in only one person. When you educate a female you invest not only in that one person, but all the children she will bear" (Boulding, 1977:25). Emperor Napoleon emphasizes the issue so strongly that he remarked, "Give me an educated mother, I will give you a good nation".

In fact, access to education and training equips women to engage in subsistence farming and enter in high paying jobs. It also strengthens their bargaining capacity and negotiating skills for coping with unexpected situations in public and private spheres. Moreover, skill development and technical training are considered increasingly important for the economic survival and also for arresting the population boom. No one will argue against the needs for training of women for adjusting themselves to various changing socio-economic processes. Virtually, all educational efforts for the women are directly or indirectly directed keeping focus on gender equity that encompasses the idea of proportionate equality of resource distribution between men and women (Duza, 1992:4).

From the viewpoints of human development and social equity the need for women education has been well defined and recognized throughout the world. World development Report states, "investments in female education have some of the highest returns for development and for the environment" (World Bank, 1992:28). As the basis for formulating Strategies to Promote Girls' Education UNICEF declared that girls' education is a necessary pre-condition to ensure social equity and sustainable development (UNICEF, 1992:12).

Hence, education is not only an indicator of higher social status for women, but also a yardstick for measuring the ability of a nation, as to how best its resources can be mobilized and manoeuvred towards social transformation. The linkage between women education and women development is rectilinear and it is parallel to women empowerment and gender equity. We can reasonably expect that if women are given education, their overall development as well as their empowerment will be ensured. If empowerment of women once ensured, it will sweep out all sorts of crimes and atrocities against them and gender equity will be automatically established in the society (Lucy, 1995:229).

On the otherhand, if gender equity is properly achieved and applied to the important arena of education, its potentiality for promoting sustainable social development will be immense. With a good deal of cogency arising out of urgency the Nairobi Report rightly argues, "Education is the base for the full promotion and improvement of the status of women. It is the basic tool that should be given to women in order to fulfil their role as full members of society" (The Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, 15-26 July 1985, New York, United Nations, 1989:41).

1.6: A Note on Undivided Bengal

History reveals that the province of Bengal, as per 1881 Census, was consisted of all the 28 districts belonging to five Bengali-speaking Divisions viz Burduwan, Presidency, Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi (Ahmed, 1974:1). The said territory was rearranged under a resolution promulgated by the Government of India on 19 July, 1905, which came into force on 16 October of the same year. But due to violent opposition and unsparing obstruction made by a significant part of Bengali masses, Government had sanctioned another proposal by repealing the said resolution (Partition of Bengal), which was passed by the King Emperor at the Delhi Durbar on 12 December, 1911 (Ahmed, 1974:245 and 299).

Thus Bengal got its previous shape back which was continued till the end of colonial British rule and ceased in 1947 with the partition of the sub-continent giving birth to the states of India and Pakistan on the basis of two-nation theory i.e. paying supreme heed to the communal dominance of the Hindus and the Muslims upon the population of the dwelling areas. As an inevitable consequence of the said two-nation theory, the greater Bengal was divided into two parts and emerged on the scene with two different identities. The area constituting West Bengal, as a Hindu dominated area became a part of India while Bangladesh, as a Muslim dominated region became a part of Pakistan adopting the name East Pakistan. Another 24 years elapsed with the breakaway of East Pakistan and in the year 1971, Bangladesh, putting off the shackles of pseudo colonial Pakistan, emerged as an independent sovereign country fighting a great and sanguine War of Liberation. So, it is enough evidence to prove that present West Bengal and Bangladesh are the two parts of greater Bengal i.e. the erstwhile undivided Bengal.

According to 1991 Census, with a land area of 88,752 square kilometres, West Bengal is inhabited by a population of 68.08 million while Bangladesh, with an area of 147,570 square kilometres, is inhabited by 111.46 million. In this context it is worth mentioning that though the said two-nation theory has divided the political geography of greater Bengal, it has become simply failure to effect the vast Bengali population so far their cultural integrity and ethnic affiliation concern. As a result, the population of present West Bengal and that of Bangladesh are still bearing a strong lingual bond and a close cultural affinity.

The basic difference between the two regions in respect of population belonging to Muslim community is that the Muslims do not represent sizable middle class in West Bengal whereas they represent a leading middle class in Bangladesh. In fact, West Bengal is a Hindu dominated State where the Muslims constitute 23.61 percent of the population and stand as the largest minority. On the other hand, Bangladesh is a Muslim dominated country where the Muslims constitute 88.3 percent of the country's population and stand as the absolute majority (Census of India, 1991; Census of Bangladesh, 1991).

Apart from the basic difference of minority-majority status of the Muslims, distinct variation has been identified in the state policies of West Bengal and Bangladesh relating to the expansion of female education and establishment of gender equity. Variation also observed in the governmental and non-governmental education programmes that are now executing or have already been executed over the years and decades. Hence, comparative studies on the sociology of education among Muslim women of rural West Bengal and rural Bangladesh would be an interesting issue of exposition.

1.7: Present Situation of Women in Bengal Muslim Society

Despite the fact that Islam has given women as beings of their own rights and also given them an impressive array of claims, the Muslim women all over the world are suffering from various disabilities. They are seen economically dependent, culturally backward and educationally lagging behind in comparison with their male counterpart as well as women belonging to contemporary Non-Muslim communities. It is because the Muslims are in general a backward, tradition bound and conservative community who usually hesitate to response and adapt with the changing situations. Their social and cultural life shows a distinctive character as it bears both the Islamic (Great) as well as local (Little) traditions. It is worth mentioning that in traditional Muslim societies women are deprived of expected social dignity, education, employment, empowerment, gender equity and mental growth. As a matter of fact, the only role that a traditional Muslim woman is expected to play in her living state is the role of a placid and dutiful daughter or an obedient and serving sister or a loving and faithful wife or an affectionate and dedicated mother (Begum, 1992:I and Mondal, 1994:20).

It is generally assumed that modernization in Muslim society has sustained a setback due to various factors of which the insignificant roles played by its women in the dynamics of their social system is the most important one (Begum, 1992:7). However, the importance and need of female education has been recognized universally and the world is now running towards "Education for All" without any gender discrimination. So, let us have a look on the present situation of the Muslim women in West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh to assess their true implications in respect of educational attainments and backwardness.

(a) Situation of Muslim Women in West Bengal (India)

Though there is no formal obstacle to the equal enjoyment of legal rights for Muslim women in West Bengal, yet a major portion of them is not able to enjoy those rights. It is because, they are largely affected by various socio-economic and socio-cultural problems that hinder their self-realization and keep them far away from self-development. As a result, they are lagging far behind in social and educational status and also in the process of modernization. The condition is seemed more depressing for those who live in the rural areas. For instance, Census of India, 1991 reveals that female literacy rate in West Bengal is 38.12 per cent in rural areas and 46.56 per cent at state level. But in the contemporary period, out of an empirical study conducted in six Muslim dominated villages under six different districts in West Bengal, Mondal discloses that the rate of literacy among rural Muslims is only 40.80 per cent for male and 22.89 per cent for female (Mondal, 1997:123). So, in terms of literacy rate, rural Muslim women are about 18 per cent behind from their male counterpart and more than 15 per cent behind in comparison with the overall rural women of the state.

According to the Indian Census of 1991 the number of total Muslim population in West Bengal is 1,60,75,836, which is 23.61 per cent of the total population of the state. Districtwise Muslim Population of West Bengal in 1991 indicates that among the 17 districts of West Bengal, Murshidabad is the only Muslim dominated district, where the Muslims constitute 61.39 per cent of the total population. In addition to this district, there are some other districts, where the number of Muslim population is either significant or sufficient. (See: Table-1.7.1)

Table-1.7.1: Muslim Population in West Bengal in 1991.

Sl. No.	Name of the Districts	No. of Muslim Population	Percentage of total Population
1	Darjeeling	59,140	4.55
2	Jalpaiguri	2,81,054	10.04
3	Cooch Behar	5,06,728	23.34
4	West Dinajpur	11,49,560	36.75
5	Malda	12,52,292	47.49
6	Murshidabad	29,10,220	61.39
7	Nadia	9,59,998	24.92
8	24 Paragona (N)	17,59,839	24.17
9	24 Paragona (S)	17,11,297	29.94
10	Howra	8,28,740	22.22
11	Calcutta	7,79,433	17.71
12	Hoogly	6,32,175	14.51
13	Burdwan	11,82,755	19.55
14	Birbhum	8,44,987	33.06
15	Bankura	1,86,021	6.63
16	Midnapore	8,98,478	10.78
17	Purulia	1,33,119	5.98

(Source: Statistical Abstract of West Bengal 1994-95, p.15, Bureau of Applied Economics & Statistics)

The above table shows that there are four districts in West Bengal in total which are characterized by numerousness of Muslim population (i.e. population above 33 per cent). Those are Murshidabad (61.39%), Malda (47.49%), West Dinajpur (36.75%) and Birbhum (33.06%). But the interesting fact is that both the male and female inhabitants of the said districts are significantly lagging behind in education in comparison with their state level literacy rates. Thus it is reasonably considered that numerous representation of Muslim population is liable for comparative lower rates of literacy in those districts. It is indeed a highly depressing picture in education for the Muslims, because it clearly denotes their comparative backwardness in that field (Table-1.7.2).

Table-1.7.2: Rate of literacy in Numerous Muslim Representing Districts of West Bengal in 1991

State/ Districts	Rate & Gap in Male Literacy (%)		Rate & Gap in Female Literacy (%)	
	Literacy Rate	Literacy Gap	Literacy Rate	Literacy Gap
West Bengal	67.81	00.00	46.56	00.00
Murshidabad	46.42	21.39	29.57	16.99
Malda	45.61	22.20	24.92	21.64
West Dinajpur	49.79	18.02	27.87	18.69
Birbhum	59.26	8.55	37.17	9.39

(Source: Statistical Abstract of West Bengal 1994-95, p.102, Bureau of Applied Economics & Statistics)

It is a fact, after attaining independence India has made considerable progress in education. Yet it must be confessed on the whole, Muslim women react very slowly to the new influences. Because of their long seclusion and life of submission, most of them dislike and even fear the very thought of changes. Another factor which hinders the progress of education among Muslim women is that the majority of Muslim mass still live in joint families where women reside in separate part of the house called *Zanana Mahal* (Menon, 1981:21).

In West Bengal, women of Muslim community are suffering from various social problems and those too hinder the equal access of women with men in availing themselves of the opportunities of self-development through education, employment, social and political participation. As they are mostly confined to their homes and mainly engaged in domestic activities, they are not able to enjoy fair share of benefits coming from the national developmental efforts while their male counterpart are able to do so. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that the prevailing socio-cultural factors are responsible for the backwardness of Muslim women (Begum, 1992:7).

A sample survey on the educational status of Muslim minority in some selected regions of West Bengal reveals the facts that the enrollment figure of the Muslim students at school level is only 46.38 per cent and its drop-out rate is 58.97 per cent (Govt. of India, 1983 as quoted by Mondal, 1994:172). Out of empirical study at an interior Muslim village under the district of Burdwan in West Bengal, Begum has estimated (Begum, 1992:223) that 73.18 per cent Muslim women are totally illiterate and another 3.22 per cent women are literate below the recognizable standard. Thus Muslim women as literate in real sense in that study village stand only 23.6 per cent, and it is significantly lower than the state level female literacy rate in West Bengal. However, from various sample surveys all over India, it is estimated that there are only 30 per cent literate Muslim women which is roughly 10 per cent points behind the rate of female literacy in India. The report of the Gopal Singh Commission also supports the above estimation (Begum, 1998:101).

Even though the government of India has provided girls with equal opportunities for education with boys and has given special consideration for the backward classes in the form of free concessions, scholarships and seat reservations, a large number of Muslim women have kept themselves away from receiving those opportunities. As a result they are performing a miserable state in the enrolment pattern of formal education. Not only this, they are also showing quite alarming state in drop-out and stagnation. For instance, Mondal (1998:146) in his empirical study based on some Muslim dominated villages in West Bengal found that among the girls of school going age only 22.98 per cent are continuing while 22.24 per cent are discontinuing and rest 54.78 per cent are out of enrolment.

In fact, information about educational status of Muslim women in West Bengal is very scanty. But in contemporary times it is easily understood that their educational status is not at all satisfactory. Hamdard Education Society, Delhi, conducted an All India Education Survey few years ago and found only 19 per cent Muslim woman as literate which was far behind the national level of female literacy in India at that time (Siddiqui and Hossain, 1998:18). Hyder has opined that majority of the Indian Muslim girls are taught the rudiments of religion. They are also taught to read the Quran. They usually receive primary education in Maktabas, after that they are mostly confined within the four walls of their houses (Hyder, 1969:8). Peer also notices that Muslim parents consider it as sheer wastage to bestowing education on their daughters (Peer, 1991).

Amongst various reasons of Muslim woman's educational backwardness in West Bengal, major causes are, in rural setting most of them are belonging to the family of landless agricultural laborers or poor cultivators who have very little scope of taking advantage of the modern agricultural technology. At urban sector most of them are belonging under the guardianships of poor artisans, petty traders, hawkers, weavers, tailors, drivers, bidi binders etc. As a result they use to maintain their livelihood in a deplorable manner. According to an estimation based on a sample survey, more than 70 per cent of Muslims in West Bengal live below the poverty line. Hence, the economic condition of the Muslims of West Bengal is not only poor, rather it is unstable and worse. Their earning and expenditure patterns are not balanced. They have to spend more than that they earn. As a result, most of them are in debt that keeps their womenfolk out of the reach of education (Mondal, 1994:170).

However, the socio-economic backwardness of the Indian Muslims and their problems of development and social change have been pointed out by many scholars (Ahmed, 1983; Ansari, 1989; Begum, 1992; Engineer, 1985; Jehangir, 1991; Menon, 1981; Mondal, 1992, 1994, and 1997; Peer, 1991; Roy, 1979; and Siddiqui, 1984 etc.). They all are at the same opinion that educational status of Indian Muslims is highly depressing and disheartening. According to a study conducted by High Power Panel on Minorities under Dr. Gopal Singh, the position of the Muslim mass among the minorities is much lower than that of all India national average in respect of literacy rate, the rate of participation at higher level of education and the rate of employment in government and all India services (Government of India, 1983 as quoted by Mondal, 1994:172).

In India, communities like the Parsis, the Christians and the Hindus had an earlier start in the educational fields while the Muslims entered into the field at a later stage due to some psycho-political reasons. Since the beginning of the British rule they have been lagging far behind in educational attainment than what is expected. In rural areas, the situations of Muslim women are more miserable. Because they are acutely suffering from various social disabilities. As Muslim women, especially the Muslim women of rural West Bengal are isolated, secluded, dependent and educationally backward; they are mainly engaged in domestic activities, and thus their participation in economic, social and political matters are very negligible. Due to prevalent social customs they are also suffering from various health problems. All these make them mentally weak and also lead them towards further backwardness in education and culture (Mondal, 1992:7).

(b) Situation of Muslim Women in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, the condition of women irrespective of religion has traditionally been adverse on account of complex cultural factors shaped by historical evolution and traditional social expectations. As a result majority of them are illiterate, poor and underprivileged. Educational Statistics of Bangladesh discloses that in 1991 only 25.8 per cent adult women (aged 15 years and above) were literate at national level against adult male literacy rate 44.3 per cent. For rural women the adult literacy rate was 21.5 per cent, though in functional sense most of the literate rural females are also illiterate (Huq, 1997:79). Hence, the literacy status of the women in general and rural women in particular may be identified as disappointing and alarming.

In the recent years the government of Bangladesh has shown keen interest to increase female literacy in order to enable them to participate in various socio-economic activities. And in this connection, the government has undertaken elaborate programmes supported by substantial allocation of resources. But it is a tragic reality that in spite of various initiatives to uphold the educational status of women, low literacy rate with higher gender gap still remains unresolved (See: Table-1.7.3).

Table-1.7.3: Literacy Rate (5+ population) in Bangladesh.

Year	Rate of Literacy (%)		
	Male	Female	National
1974	32.9	14.8	24.3
1981	31.0	16.0	23.8
1987	34.6	20.3	27.8
1991	34.2	20.3	32.4
1994	45.0	24.0	34.0

(Source: Bangladesh National Report to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995, p-20 and Bangladesh Educational Statistics, 1991, BANBEIS).

The above table indicates that in 1974 literacy rate for both sexes was 24.3 per cent which was deteriorated to 23.8 per cent in 1981 but finally rose to 34 per cent in 1994. Thus in two decades the total literacy rate increased only 9.7 per cent. So, the rate of progression is very slow. On the other hand, during the same period female literacy progressed from 14.8 per cent to 24.0 per cent as against the male literacy that increased from 32.9 per cent to 45 per cent. Thus the female literacy rate over the last two decades increased 9.2 per cent against the male literacy rate that increased 12.1 per cent. So, the gap in male-female literacy rate further increased 2.9 per cent over the last two decades, and it is quite disheartening indeed.

Actually, education system in Bangladesh is diversified with an English medium modern system for the privileged few, a backward religious system for the prejudiced orthodox and a traditional secular system for the sizeable middle class. But due to institutional dearth, fear of insecurity and lack of consciousness a good number of girls and women belonging to the middle class are often seen non-enrolling to secular institutions. As a result, they are lagging behind in every sphere of education. Even in the field of adult literacy, their participation is not satisfactory (See: Table-1.7.4).

Table-1.7.4: Adult Literacy (15+) by Sex in Bangladesh (1974-1995).

Year	Rate of adult literacy(%)		
	Male	Female	Total
1974	37.2	13.2	25.8
1981	39.7	18.8	29.2
1987	44.0	22.9	33.8
1991	44.3	25.8	35.3
1997	59.4	42.2	51.2
2000 (P)	70.0	52.0	62.0

(Source: *Reaching the Grassroots Through NFE: The Bangladesh Experience*, DNEE, May 1998:17 and *Bangladesh Data Sheet 2000*, B.B.S.)

Table-1.7.4 reveals that the rate of adult literacy has been significantly increased in Bangladesh over the last twenty-six years and projected to be 52 per cent for adult females against adult male literacy rate of 70 per cent and national level adult literacy rate of 62 per cent in 2000. Yet, we may consider the said trend dissatisfactory as it shows wider gender gap (18%) in adult literacy.

Apart from this, distinct gender disparity is observed in the enrolment percentage at different levels of education.

Table-1.7.5: Enrolment by Sex at Different Levels of Education.

CEN- SUS YEAR	Enrolment Percentage							
	PRIMARY		SECONDARY		H. SECONDARY		DEGREE	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1985	59.8	40.2	68.4	31.6	77.3	22.7	81.3	18.7
1991	55.0	45.0	66.2	33.8	70.6	29.4	76.3	23.7

(Source: Bangladesh National Report to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995, p-21).

Table-1.7.5 indicates that in 1985 girls' enrolment at all levels of education was very depressing as they formed only two fifth portion at primary level, about one third portion at secondary level, less than one fourth portion at higher secondary level, and again less than one fifth portion at degree level. But within the period of next six years girls' enrolment at all levels of education has been increased significantly. As a result in 1991 out of total enrollees they occupied 45 per cent at primary level, 33.8 per cent at secondary level, 29.4 per cent at higher secondary level and 23.7 per cent at degree level. Though the above statistics indicates a clear positive trend towards girls' enrolment, we cannot consider it entirely expected in respect of their enrolment into higher level of education. Because, still there lies a large-scale gender gap.

The constitution of Bangladesh has prescribed the introduction of free and compulsory primary education for all and has declared that no citizen shall, on the ground of sex, be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to admission to any educational institution. The constitution further empowers the state to make special provisions in favour of women. Accordingly the Government of Bangladesh has taken some programmes for the educational upliftment of women. As a result, female literacy has significantly increased over the recent years. Yet, a miserable picture is exposed if we cast our eyes over the state of education of rural women (See Table-1.7.6).

Table-1.7.6: Women Literacy by Residence in Bangladesh.

Year	Literacy Rate (aged 5+)			Literacy Rate (aged 7+)		
	Urban	Rural	Difference	Urban	Rural	Difference
1997	52.0	33.7	18.3	53.7	35.3	18.4

(Source: Statistical Pocketbook of Bangladesh, 1998, B. B. S., p.350)

Another table on the percentage of men and women at different levels of education indicates a rising trend of enrolment ratios for both male and female students at higher levels of education. But the table also shows that throughout the last decade enrolment of female students at secondary level has increased faster than male enrolment and reduced the gender gap while at higher secondary level the gap remained unchanged, and at degree and post graduate levels the gap has been further increased (Table-1.7.7).

Table-1.7.7: Men and Women at Different Levels of Education

Level of Education	1981		1985		1991	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Grade I to V	58.9	75.0	56.7	71.7	53.0	65.8
Grade VI to IX	25.8	19.8	25.4	21.4	26.9	24.6
S.S.C. to H.S.C.	12.4	4.5	14.9	6.1	16.0	8.2
Degree and above	2.9	0.7	3.0	0.8	4.1	1.2
Total:	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	99.8

Source: Report of the National Strategic Planning Workshop on Population Education, 1997:93

In fact, "women in Bangladesh bear the brunt of poverty, purdah and patriarchy. For most women, living between poverty line and famine line is the norm- unending thread of extreme poverty carries them from birth to grave. For the millions of women, this means living within a four mud-walled thatch along with husbands, four to five living children including teen-aged children, dependent-in-laws, a goat and a few chickens. Occasional visitors and the rainy day cooking are also taken care of in the same room. Although theoretically implications of poverty are the same for both sexes, born in equal poverty, females in Bangladesh are doubly affected because of their poverty and because of their perceived role and status affecting their health, level of nutrition intake and education. Poverty-stricken females demonstrate not only lesser chance of getting enrolled in school but face greater likelihood of being withdrawn from both the formal and the non-formal education systems" (Islam, 1990:25).

Despite different programmes to eliminate gender disparity, women in Bangladesh are lagging much behind in educational attainment not only in comparison with the male and female of the contemporary developed societies but also in comparison with the male of their own society. Their socio-economic backwardness as well as issue of empowerment with special reference to their education and gender equity have been pointed out by many scholars (Begum, 1990; Chaudhury and Ahmed, 1980; Duza, 1992; Islam, 1990; Jahan, 1995; Khanam, 1990 etc.). They all pointed out the tragic scenario of women suppression, oppression and deprivation in the society. As 88 percent of them are Muslim, we can assume that Muslim women in Bangladesh are at a stake in respect of attaining their educational status.

1.8: Statement of Problems

With the dawn of current year we have already stepped into a new millennium when the world is about to reach the highest level of scientific and technological development as well as social progression. But unfortunately the third world countries (both least developed and developing) are far away to reach the main stream of development. As the issues of overall human development and gender equity are still unresolved, their vast womenfolk are passing an inhuman famine state that has turned the wheels of their national development slow, confined and reversed.

In West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh, women are now considered indispensable part and vital force in national development and their increased involvement is observed in all sectors of economy and society. Their presence is being felt more and more in different areas of life. Yet, a major portion of rural women is still standing on crises in terms of illiteracy, poverty, ill health and various superstitions. Because those opportunities are not equally distributed to them. Hence, educational efforts should be directed keeping focus on rural girls and women to relieve them from those unexpected sufferings. There is now hardly any scope for a "why" but the question of "how, when and how soon" should be raised and addressed.

Incidentally, both West Bengal and Bangladesh are least developed and overhead and ears with massive poverty and severe unemployment problems. So, emphasis on the education of rural women in their national context may be considered high sounding and unnecessarily overcharged unless the implications of women's backwardness and its negative social expenses are assessed with firm national commitment and vigour.

It is firmly revealed from the discussions of the ongoing chapter that neither West Bengal nor Bangladesh has yet been able to promote uniform, mass oriented and universal system of education. Here, the literacy rate for women in general is very low, for Muslim women it is lower and in respect of rural Muslim women it is alarming. But due to absence of adequate statistical information on this issue, the planners and policy makers are generally unaware of this problem. As a result, the critical issues and concerns regarding their educational upliftment are hardly reflected in the national policies which are also terribly hindering their overall national progress.

It is also widely felt that at present the whole nation is facing the risk of gross illiteracy and educational bankruptcy of jeopardizing productivity and progress. Hence, it should be the obligation of the Sociologists and the Social Anthropologists to study the problem with utmost importance so that they can guide the policy makers in the formulation of appropriate policies. But unfortunately inadequate research initiatives are evident in this respect.

As we have already stepped into 21st century, it is assumed that we have to pass over a terrible situation of environmental degradation, the most unpleasant outcome of mechanical civilization. So, it will be difficult on our part to spend and survive if our womenfolk are gripped in illiteracy and superstition. Because they usually sustain close relationship with nature in performing their multiple roles. Hence, the focus of the policy makers should be shifted towards educational development of women. This will not be effective unless and until the real situation of women is assessed through empirical studies. //

However, to identify the basic causes of imbalances, profound and comprehensive studies on the issue of women development with special reference to their education, employment, empowerment and gender equity are very much essential. Findings of such studies will immensely help the policy makers in the process of formulating supportive policy prescriptions for creating a social demand for educating girls and women. These sorts of studies may be stupendous in nature but the researchers' conviction, commitment, patience and judiciousness may make it possible. So, we can reasonably assume that there are now urgent needs for comprehensive studies on various aspects of women education.

To make a positive intervention in the troublesome and scornful state of women and also to establish their justified position in the society with the greater end to upward social mobility and incorporate expected change, researchers should precede policy guidelines. In respect of rural women of the backward Muslim community, they may be dealt with the questions of their educational status and about the reasons hindering their educational attainment. Moreover, the researchers may take an initiative to explain how much the problem of Muslim women's educational backwardness is correlated with their religious sentiment, minority position, historical deprivation, cultural reality and socio-economic condition. Accordingly, the policy makers will formulate genuine policies on the basis of which well-defined and clear-cut decisions should be made, broad action programme should be taken, strategies should be delineated and target should be set to launch the programmes smoothly. But it is a serious problem that despite the burning needs, studies on Muslim women are still scanty.

1.9. Review of Literature

Sociological and Social Anthropological studies on women in Indian sub-continent were very much neglected till 1960's. Thereafter, some scholars have become interested to fill up this gap. But unfortunately most of the studies in Indian context have been conducted on the women of tribal societies. Though a few studies have been conducted on non-tribal women, these are mainly concentrated to assess the roles and status of Hindu women in respect of their religious tradition. The minimum studies that are based on Indian Muslims mainly deal with social organization and stratification, religious life, political behaviour, social change, expectation and problems of modernization. As a result, these studies do not explicate the real implications of Muslim women's education; rather scarcity of empirical data in this regard promotes to stereotyped judgement on the issue. Hence, it is the duty of the social scientists to come forward for better understanding of this problem (Begum, 1998; Madan, 1976; Mondal, 1994).

In the context of Bangladesh, some isolated studies on women were conducted between 1963 to 1966, but a large number of studies covering various aspects of women issues have been emerged after mid 70s. An annotated bibliography on Bangladeshi women (upgraded in 1994) has recorded 320 publications on women. Yet, it is a matter of concern that these studies are fragmentary, uncoordinated and afflicted with duplication in efforts while many important issues are remaining unexplored (Islam, 1994:1). Moreover, no empirical study has been accomplished on the particular issue of Muslim women's education till today though they account for more than 40 percent of the country's population. As a matter of fact, still there is a large-scale vacuum in the field of sociological study on education and status of Muslim women.

However, from the viewpoints of Muslim women's greater society as well as the wider circumference of education, mention can be made about the significant works of some prominent scholars. These are-

(a) *Studies in India with special reference to West Bengal*

- Abdul Kareem (1988) in his study on Education and Socio-Economic Development has examined the developmental implications of educational backwardness of Indian Muslims. This study is based on empirical data collected from five districts under the State of Kerala. It is revealed in the study that education is a crucial factor in determining the economic standards as well as social status among Indian Muslims. In view of the distinct religious and political characteristics of Muslim community in India, the study emphasizes the importance of historical factors in shaping the Muslim attitude towards modern education. The study also emphasizes the need for taking positive steps in bringing about peaceful socio-economic life for the establishment and development of education.
- Ahmed (1981) in his article titled "Muslim Educational Backwardness: An Inferential Analysis" in *Economic and Political Weekly* has examined the educational status of Indian Muslims as well as the socio-cultural constraints in the way of their educational upliftment. Thus the study has unveiled the distress position of Indian Muslims with regard to their socio-economic, cultural and educational attainment. At the conclusion of the study the scholar remarked that the appeal of education is not universal to all social strata of Muslim Community in India.

- Ahmed (1983) has made a contribution on socio-religious and cultural life of the Muslims in India. His work *Modernization and Social Change among Muslims in India* deals with family, marriage, kinship, social stratification and other important issues related to Muslim society. But the study provides very limited information about educational attainment of Muslim women and the effect of modernization on them.
- Ansari (1989) edited a book entitled *The Muslim Situation in India*. The work consists of 22 articles contributed by 21 prominent scholars of the contemporary period. The essays included in this book are mainly on the issues of quantitative analysis of the backwardness of the Muslim community with special reference to their state of education.
- Begum (1992) has conducted an empirical research on Muslim women of rural West Bengal titled *Women in Muslim Society of West Bengal: A Study in Aspects of their Status and Roles*. This study is, in fact, an attempt to analyse the socio-cultural aspects of women in Muslim society where the researcher has critically examined the position of Muslim women on the basis of their status and roles in different social context. The study has also delineated various problems faced by Muslim women and the socio-cultural constraints to their social upliftment. At the conclusion of the study it has been remarked that the major factor for socio-economic and educational backwardness of the Muslim women is the Muslim Community itself as the socio-cultural milieu of the Muslims discourages them from improving their social position through dynamics roles.

- Brijbhushan (1980) in her study *Muslim Women in Purdah and Out of it* has examined the various aspects of practicing 'Purdah' that is widely in vogue amongst Muslim women. The study is based on interviews with women from all regions of India and belonging to all levels of society. The scholar has tried cordially to determine the status and roles of Muslim women in their society. While delineating their educational backwardness she pointed, "The lack of curiosity on the part of the majority is evidently a great hurdle to the acquiring of knowledge. Other factors, of course, would be lack of means to acquire education, a lack of interest on the part of parents and guardians in the education of their children and of course, the lack of conviction that education can provide a better future for everyone" (pp.96-97).
- Devi (1982) has made a significant contribution on *Status and Empowerment of Women in India*. Though this study is mainly designed to assess the role of white-collar employment in contributing to higher status of women but the scholar has examined the role of female education and other related aspects of women status as well. Moreover, this study is not engaged with the women of any particular religion rather it has included the Indian women as a whole. In the study, the scholar, on the basis of critical analysis opined that despite prevailing equal opportunity, women are lagging behind in availing themselves of the opportunities and catching up with the man in the field of education. She also pointed, "The cultural image of a woman, the position occupied by her in the society and the role assigned to her in a particular time are determined to a great extent by her education" (p.13).

- Engineer (1978) has published an article on the role of Muslim leaders in social development of the Muslims. The title of his article is "What have the Muslim Leaders done?" In this article he has delineated the relative backwardness of Muslim masses in the field of literacy and education. In course of discussion he has opined that the influential Muslim leaders are mainly responsible for the economic and educational backwardness of the Muslim community. Because, those leaders in lieu of mobilizing the Muslim masses restricted them from acquiring modern and secular education on account of various psycho-social reasons.
- Engineer (1985) in his book *Indian Muslims: A Study of the Minority Problems in India* has discussed the various problems of Muslim community in general. He puts the whole problem in perspective and traces its origin in the postmutiny period in 1857 when the British rule was consolidated in India. He sincerely observed the various problems of Muslim mass and pointed, "The Muslim masses are an integral part of country's main stream. It is wrong to maintain otherwise. However, one must also admit that they are comparatively more backward, both economically and educationally" (p.6). But he opined that the relative conservatism and educational backwardness of Muslim society are not resulted from their religious doctrines and those should be seen in proper sociological perspective (pp.257-259).
- Engineer (1987) has published an edited volume entitled *Status of Women in Islam*. This volume largely helps us to understand the position of Muslim women from theological, political and sociological point of views.

- Hussain (1989) in "The Muslim Question in India" has analysed the situation of Indian Muslims from the dimensions of socio-political and demographic milieu; political structure and human rights; secular social movements and non-secular expressions etc. Thus he has drawn a sensitive pen picture on politico-ideological bankruptcy of Indian Muslims.
- Jehangir (1991) in his comprehensive study *Muslim Women in West Bengal: Socio-Economic and Political Status* has attempted to deal with the problem from sociological angle. On the basis of empirical data he sincerely delineated that Muslim women are one of the most underprivileged groups in the society and are most backward in educational status. In the preface of this work he remarked, "Educational problems of the Muslim women of younger generation are primary related to economy and lack of institutional facility. Women of older generation was more a victim of the religious and cultural constraints". It is finally revealed in this empirical study that the major portion of Muslim mass in Bengal are very poor and due to poverty they are refraining from sending their girls for education.
- Kamat (1981) has written an article titled "Literacy and Education among the Muslims". In this article he has pointed out some important information regarding educational status of Muslims masses and has attempted to analyse their educational backwardness from sociological perspective. He has noted that due to poor economic condition, Muslim women cannot attain the expected literacy rate and educational standard.

- Kidwani (1976) has studied the exploitation of women under the coverage of major religions (Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam). His study titled *Women under different Religious Laws* has portrayed a doleful picture about how the women folk are being exploited by their male counterpart under those laws through generation after generation.
- Menon (1981) has conducted a study titled *Status of Muslim Women in India: A case study of Kerala*. The empirical data for this study have been collected from four northern districts of Kerala which account for two-thirds of the Muslim population in the State. The study has critically examined the socio-cultural aspects of the status of Muslim women in India with special reference to Kerala situation. It is revealed in this study that education largely upgraded the social status of Muslim women but early marriage and Purdah are acting as barriers in the way of their educational attainment.
- Momin (1973) has studied the educational status of the various Muslim groups of an industrial town in Maharashtra and noted the poor participation of Muslim boys and girls in schools and colleges. His article is titled "Muslim caste in an industrial township in Maharashtra" where he observed different social groups among the Muslims.
- Mondal (1987) in his study on *Human Resource Development: Observation on Muslim in India* has examined the nature of human resources in the Muslim community. In this study the scholar has mainly dealt with the problems of educational development among the Muslims and finally suggested a model of educational development for them.

- Mondal (1989) in his study on *Mobilizing Villagers For Self Development* has presented a case study of a Muslim dominated village in West Bengal where, on the basis of his empirical data, he pointed, "The Muslim women were mostly living in isolation. They were mostly ignorant, illiterate and confined with the home. They were basically engaged in domestic work and child rearing. Instead of equality and justice, their position in the society were exploitative in nature for various reasons" (p.21).
- Mondal (1990) in his study on *Muslim Women from Veil to Virtue* has attempted to determine the situation of women belonging to Muslim society. In this case study, on the basis of empirical observation among Muslim women in a village of West Bengal, the scholar has cordially delineated their overall backwardness. In this context he pointed, "They are ignorant, illiterate and confined in their homes due to strict rules of purdah or seclusion. Due to ignorance and isolation women were not acquainted with their legal rights" (p.8).
- Mondal (1994) has made a significant contribution on *Dynamics of Muslim Society* based on intensive empirical study of the social organizations among the Muslims of West Bengal. This book is a masterly exposition of society and culture of the Muslims of Bengal in particular and India in general. Here the author has examined in detail the interaction of the great tradition of Islam with the little tradition of the region in the framework of Muslim society. The study also highlighted the demographic features, economic condition, educational status and other socio-cultural problems of the Muslims living in West Bengal.

- Mondal (1997) has studied on *Educational Status of Muslims: Problems Prospects and Priorities*. The study is based on an intensive empirical study of education among Muslims of six villages in three different ecocultural zones of West Bengal. Through this study, the author has attempted to expose the state of education among the Muslims of West Bengal in particular and India in general. The study not only presents an analysis of the state of education among the Muslims including Muslim women but also examines the nature and extent of their educational backwardness in different field situations. It analyses the system of religious and informal education that is prevailing among the Muslims and thereby highlighted the factors creating hindrances towards their educational upliftment. Finally this study has recommended a model of policy plan for the educational development of Muslim minorities in India.
- Mujeeb (1965) has made a significant contribution in the study of Muslim society and its traditional values. In this study the scholar has attempted to assess the incidence, impact and effect of traditional values on educational development. His work titled *Education and Traditional Values* delineates the implicit relationship between formal education and traditional values prevailing in the Muslim society. While analyzing the effect of traditional values, the author opined that educational backwardness of the Muslim people of India is due to certain values and attitudes that are attached in their traditional social system. His study is mainly dealing with the social and cultural complexity of Muslim education.

- Peer (1991) in his study based on empirical data has provided a comprehensive and detailed account of the educational growth and constraints on the educational performance of Indian Muslims. More specifically, his work titled *Muslim Education in India: Problems and Prospects* contains detailed pertaining to Muslim education before and after independence. He carefully examined the attitudes of Muslim mass towards modern education and also delineated the educational status of Muslim women. Through this study he has also recommended some remedial measures to improve the educational status of the Indian Muslims.
- Rahmatullah (1989) has conducted a research on the Muslim students of Akbar Peerbhoy College of Commerce and Economics situated at Bombay. His study is titled "The Problem of Poor Academic Performance of Muslim Students". In his study, the scholar, has dealt with academic performances of Muslim students and found that the academic performances (i.e. percentage/grade of marks obtained) of the Muslim students at the college as well as at the university examination is distressingly poor. He critically analysed the problem and discovered that such poor performances of Muslim students are resulted from their poor economic background, inadequate knowledge in English language, disadvantageous academic environment in the family as well as in neighbourhood, unsuitable location and nonacademic environment in the educational institutions etc. He further opined that poor educational input and psychological inhibitions by the vast general Muslims towards secular education have made the situation more depressing.

- Roy (1941) in his book on *Role of Islam in History* has examined the contribution of Islam in the world civilization. He has expressed the view that it was the disability of Indian society not to enrich her by accepting the contributions of Islam. He also highlighted the status and role of Muslim women on the basis of their religious guidelines.
- Roy (1979) in her empirical study titled *Status of Muslim Women in North India* has attempted to measure the effect of modernization on the Muslim families in Delhi and Lucknow and noted the changes occurred in the position of women within three generations. The study also deals with the aspects of social structure of Indian Muslims and highlights the changes that have given the women comparatively better status in the family. Lastly, the author concludes that progression in literacy rate and educational attainment of women led to economic power along with positive change in the spheres of *Purdah*, marriage and socio-cultural life.
- Siddiqui (1984) in his book on *Educating A Backward Minority* has discussed the educational status and the problems in educational upliftment of the Muslims in Calcutta since Muslim rule contemporary period. He has pointed out several remedial measures to improve the educational status of Muslim minority. He has also stated that the main factors of socio-economic backwardness of the Muslims are their ignorance and lack of education. So, he is of the opinion that education of the Muslims as means to improvement has to take note of socio-economic needs and the Muslims should to take the lead in raising the levels of education both technical and non-technical.

- Siddiqui (1998) has edited a volume titled *Muslims in Free India* consisting of eight articles contributed by five scholars. The articles published in this volume have included the issues of stratification and dynamics of Muslim society, the situation of Muslim polity in modern India and quantitative analysis of the backwardness of Muslim community with special reference to the state of women education. Moreover, this volume provides us with recent demographic features of Indian Muslims.
- Sukla (1975) in her article "Indian Muslims and Education" has noted the poor educational status of the Muslim masses. She has pointed out, "At the mass level minimal literacy is likely to include proportionately more Muslims, because most of them belong to such economic and occupational groups which remain handicapped in education" (p.213).
- Sultana (1993) in her study "Muslim Women in a Village of Uttar Dinajpur" has examined the lower status of women in the Muslim community. The scholar has observed the situation of Muslim women in her study village very closely and felt that Muslim women are suffering from lack of awareness. She has also pointed their low enrolment, high drop-outs and stagnation in all levels of education.

From the review of the above literature it is clearly evident that the aforesaid studies are not conducted on the particular issue of Muslim women education in West Bengal or greater India. But all these studies help us ascertain the state of education of Muslim women in a greater context.

(b) Studies in Bangladesh

- Ahmed and Wahab (1997) in their article "Population, Development and Education" have examined the factors that are very much related to education and analyzed their impact on educational development. The authors have argued that Bangladesh is lagging far behind in attaining the goal of Universal Primary Education (UPE). They have also delineated the existing disparity between males and females in respect of school enrolment and accomplishment of courses. Thus lower enrolment ratio of girls together with their higher drop-out and termination rates become clearly evident in this study. The authors have further explained the importance of female education from Human Development perspective and strongly advocated in favour of it. They suggested that in order to strengthen the relationship between education and development of women, stress should be given on involvement of NGOs to achieve UPE goals. Moreover, active involvement of the community, parents and private enterprises should be ensured in the achievement of educational goals. This article provides us with a brief description about educational system and national policy for education in Bangladesh.
- Akhter and Muttaqi (1998) studied on "Socio-Economic Status of Female Students at the Higher Secondary Level". This study is based on empirical data collected from eleven colleges of greater Dhaka district. The scholars have examined the educational qualification, occupational pattern, monthly income and social status of the parents or guardians of both male and female students and also assessed the significance of these attributes on the enrolment trend for higher studies.

- Begum et al. (1990) have edited a volume titled *Women and National Planning in Bangladesh*. It is a compilation of seminar papers presented in the national seminar on women. The papers are included with multidimensional aspects of women development. Six papers along with discussant's notes are published in this volume. Thus the volume provides us ample information on women development.
- Begum (1994) has presented an article titled "The Issue of Literacy and Women's Role in the Development Process". This is a well-devised article where the scholar has attempted to examine the benefits of literacy on the roles of women. The data and information used in this study are originated from her empirical study and other reliable sources as well. The article has delineated a critical implication of literacy and women's role in the process of development.
- Chowdhury and Ahmed (1980) have studied on *Female Status in Bangladesh*. It is an empirical study, but to delineate the real implications of women status, the scholars largely used information gathered from reliable secondary sources. This study unveiled a doleful sketch of women status in respect of their family roles, social dignity, educational status, employment situation and social mobility.
- DNEF (May 1998) has published a report titled *Reaching the Grassroots through NFE: The Bangladesh Experience*. This report provides us ample information about current literacy status of people, achievement of Integrated Non-Formal Education Project (INFEP) and lessons from Bangladesh experience.

- DNFE (September 1998) in observance of International Literacy Day 1998 and Adult Education Week has published their Annual Report providing facts on completed and ongoing programmes at a glance.
- DNFE (February 1999) has published another report on "Non-Formal Education in Bangladesh". This report provides us current primary and mass education scenario of Bangladesh.
- DPE (July 1998) has published a report on "Primary Education in Bangladesh". This report provides us a brief history of primary education. Moreover, it gives us ample statistics on the allocation and achievement of primary education in Bangladesh.
- Duza, Asfia et al. (1992) edited a volume of Women for Women (a leading research and study group in Bangladesh) entitled *Education and Gender Equity: Bangladesh*. This volume consists of a profound introduction presented on behalf of the organization (Women for Women) and four well-devised themes contributed by eight feminist scholars. All the themes presented in this volume are directly concerned with various aspects of women education and gender equity which provide us a keen sketch of women literacy and education in Bangladesh at different levels. In addition to delineate the relative backwardness of women in the field of education, the scholars have attempted cordially to examine the causes of backwardness and to create a positive intervention within the society in favour of women education. Moreover, General Recommendations as well as Policy Recommendations have been added at the end of themes.

- GOB (1995) has presented a national report titled *Women in Bangladesh: Equality, Development and Peace* to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. A working group under the guidance of the National Committee for the preparation of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995, has prepared this report. This report is an attempt to review and appraise the progress of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies. This report has delineated a detailed picture of women situations in Bangladesh with special reference to their empowerment and education. Moreover, it helps us to know the future strategic goals and objectives and corresponding financial arrangements at national level in respect of Women in Development (WID) programmes and projects.
- GOB (1995a) has presented a country paper to the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen held in March 1995. This country paper is titled *Social Development and Development Milieu* and was published by Social Science Research Council under the Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. It provides us with a brief picture of social development in Bangladesh where women and child development has been considered as a vital issue.
- GOB (1997) has presented a country paper to the "Fifth International Conference of Adult Education (CONFINTEA-V)" held in 14-18 July 1997 at Hamburg. This country paper provides ample information about Education System in Bangladesh, Policies, Priorities, Strategies, Target and Achievements of Non- Formal Education etc.

- GOB (1997a) has presented the *Report of the National Strategic Planning Workshop on Population Education: National Plan and Action* organized by National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) and sponsored by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Dhaka, Bangladesh. Along with a background paper titled "Population Education in Bangladesh: The Past and the Future" the report includes two articles viz "Primary Education in Bangladesh" and "Adolescence Education". We get ample statistics on education from it.
- Huq (1997) has studied on "History of Literacy Efforts for Women in Bangladesh: Various Issues and Dimensions". This article is based on a paper presented at the national workshop on "Women and Literacy" organized jointly by Association for Developmental Agencies of Bangladesh (ADAB) and UNESCO Institute of Education, Hamburg, Germany, held in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in March 29-31, 1995. This article provides us with a keen sketch of women literacy in Bangladesh followed by ample statistics.
- Islam (1990), in her seminar paper "Women's Education in Bangladesh: Realities and Challenges", has portrayed the real implications of women situation in Bangladesh in respect of their educational attainments. The subtle observation and scholarly analysis of the author depicted that rural women are more poverty stricken and less privileged in attaining formal and non-formal education. So, the scholar in this paper has attempted to delineate the rural-urban imbalances in terms of women literacy. This paper also provides us with some suggestions to overcome that problem.

- Islam (1998) has studied on "An Inquiry into Primary Education in Bangladesh". This study provides us with ample information on development of primary schools, number of boys and girls enrolled and their drop-out rates, number of teachers engaged and the public expenditure on primary education since independence etc.
- Islam (1994) has made a significant contribution on women studies in Bangladesh. Her study is titled, *Whither Women's Studies in Bangladesh?* This study provides us with an overview and retrospect of women's studies in Bangladesh. Moreover, the scholar has asserted the scope and extent and future needs for research in women issues which helps the researchers to design studies on burning questions related to women.
- Islam and Monjur (1999) have published an article in Dhaka University Patrika (Bengali Journal of the University of Dhaka). The article deals with the issue "Education in Secondary School of Bangladesh". The article provides us with a comparative overview of sexwise student enrolment between urban and rural areas.
- Jahan, et al. (1995) have edited an issue of Women for Women titled *Empowerment of Women: Nairobi to Beijing (1985-1995)* is prepared on the basis of Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (NFLS) adopted in 1985 and published at the threshold of 1995's Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. This issue is an attempt to draw public attention to the crucial linkages that exist between women's empowerment and national development so that public opinion can be mobilized and policy planners sensitized for formulating appropriate policies.

- Khatun (1998) has conducted a study on "Education and Empowerment of Women". This study deals with the demographic profile of working women with special reference to their education. The report of this study is published in a Bengali journal named "Khamotayan" means "Empowerment".
- Ministry of Women and Children Affairs of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (1996) has prepared a guidebook titled "Women in Development: A Guidebook for Planners". This guidebook largely helps us to ascertain the socio-cultural implications of Bangladeshi women with special reference to their health, economy, empowerment and education. Moreover, this guidebook provides us ample information about the national policies and programmes in connection of women development.
- Mostakim (1996) in his article titled "Women in Education and Technical Training in Bangladesh: Problems and Prospects" has studied the position of female education in Bangladesh. This article also examines the on going educational programmes adopted in public sector as well as in private sector and the involvement of NGOs. Lastly the scholar has attempted to delineate the constraints for female education.
- Salauddin and Shamim (1996) have conducted an empirical study on *Rural Women in Poverty: NGO Interventions for Alleviation*. The scholars in order to delineate the real implications of poverty on the rural women from the socio-cultural perspective have critically examined their literacy, levels of education and employment status.

- Women for Women (1975) published a book titled *Women for Women: Bangladesh 1975*. This issue has discovered much information on roles, status and education of Bangladeshi women with special reference to rural areas.
- Women for Women (1978) has made a significant contribution for the educational growth of women in Bangladesh through an outstanding issue *Women and Education, Bangladesh 1978*. This issue deals with various aspects of education for women of all socio-economic background. Themes presented in this issue are the contribution of different prominent scholars where they have unveiled the state of education of both rural and urban women and examined their attitude on different levels of education. Moreover, an attempt to delineate the problems and prospects regarding their educational upliftment has been taken into consideration. Really this issue is included with such aspects which are of special concern in respect of women education. Thus the articles published in it largely helps us to understand the real implications of women education in Bangladesh and to assess the needs for their educational upliftment by supportive policy formulation.
- Women for Women (1995) also published a book in Bengali version titled *Nari-o-Unnayan: Prasanggik Parisangkhan* meaning "Women and Development: Related Statistics". This issue deals with ample statistics related to education, employment, empowerment and other important aspects of Women Development in Bangladesh.

✓ The above review reflects a wide gap in sociological studies on Muslim women education in Bangladesh that deserves urgent attention of the sociologists for empirical study.