
Development of Elementary Education of Muslim Minority in Rural West Bengal

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Abstract: National Minority Commission of India has identified Muslims as religious minority along with Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains. Among these groups Muslims are the largest one. Overall development of any country depends on the development of every segment of its populations. In spite of being the largest minority group Muslims are lagging behind in education sector in comparison to other community. After implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Right to Education Act, 2009 some remarkable progress in elementary education has been noticed. In this context, the researchers attempted to explore the educational development of Muslim minority group, particularly in the field of elementary education. Attempts were also made to compare the above mentioned dimensions between Muslim minority and other community children. Data collected from 250 Muslim and 100 from other community families of the rural areas of South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal by applying multi-stage random sampling technique and using self-made household survey schedule. The study revealed that literacy which is the first step to education is lowest of the Muslim minority. Enrolment of Muslim children is lower than their share in the population. Dropout rate of the community is higher than other communities. Despite of overall improvement in educational status of the Muslim minority after implementation of SSA and RTE Act, 2009; the rate of progress is still slower than other community. The study revealed a ray of hope that parental attitude towards girls' education has been changing in a positive manner and as a result literacy rate and net enrolment ratio became higher and dropout rate became lower for Muslim girls than boys. The study suggests that continuous and comprehensive attention is needed for increasing the literacy rate, enrolment, maintaining teacher pupil ratio, addressing adverse socio-cultural and economic realities as these are the keys in removing educational backwardness of Muslim minority group.

Keywords: *Elementary education, Muslim minority, Enrolment, Dropout, RTE Act, 2009.*

Introduction:

Overall development of any country depends on the development of every segments or groups or communities of its populations. Among the indicators of overall development, education is the most important and significant one having bearing on the achievement in the growth of an individual as well as community. This is perceived to be highly suitable for providing employment and thereby improving the quality of life. India is a multi-religious, multi-linguistic, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic country. The development of education varies among these groups. The minority religious groups (Muslim, Christians, Shikhs, Buddhists and Jains) as identified by the National Minority Commission constitute near about one fifth of total population of the country where Muslims are the principal minority community and second religious community after the Hindus in India, in general and in West Bengal in particular. According to Census of India 2011, they constitute 14.64% and 27.0% of total population in India and in West Bengal respectively. Nevertheless, despite being the largest religious minority, Muslim literacy rate is lowest among all the religious minorities.

Various research studies conducted after the independence of India revealed the educational backwardness of the Muslim minority community. But the issue came into lime light after 2001. After the independence, religion wise data were published for first time in the Census 2001 and educational backwardness of Muslim community was an eye opener for policy makers. Thereafter many initiatives were taken in favour of the education of the Muslim minority group. In spite of several policies and programmes by government, desired progress in education of Muslim minority has not been occurred.

According to the Human Development Report 2011 of Planning Commission of India, urban literacy in general has increased from 69.8% (1999-2000) to 75.1% (2007-08) and rural literacy from 52.1% to 63.5%. However, the rate of increase of literacy amongst Muslims in comparison to other socio-religious groups is also lowest. Urban literacy in the SC group has increased by 8.7 points and among the ST group by 8 points. Among Muslims, it has increased only by 5.3 points.

It is important to note that the enrolment of Muslim children in elementary education is lower than their share in the population across the country. It is also significant that the share of Muslim boys' enrolment is less at the upper primary level as compared to the primary level. Muslim children, by their socio-cultural circumstances, including the occupation of their

parents are quite vulnerable to early drop out. This is particularly so in the semi-urban and urban areas where the attraction of work as against schooling is enhanced due to increased availability of work options. The enrolment of Muslim girls in KGBVs is also a cause for concern. In addition, the lack of opportunity of studying Urdu as an optional language at the elementary school level is also known to push Muslim students out of the schooling system.

The latest initiative taken by the government of India was implementation of Right to Education Act, 2009 for overall development of elementary education of every citizen including minorities of the age group 6 to 14 years. After half decade of enactment of the said act since 01/04/2010, the target of 100% enrolment and retention has not yet been achieved and more backwardness is observed particularly among Muslim minorities.

Emergence of the Problem:

While the Sachar Committee Report agrees that the widespread perception of discrimination among the Muslim community needs to be addressed, nonetheless it admits that there are hardly any empirical studies that establish discrimination (SCR, 239). The term, when associated particularly with the Muslim community, is fraught with negative meanings, imageries and ideas that may trigger further speculation. Most of the previous researches did not treat the Muslim community as a separate socio-religious group. While data for SC/STs and on gaps in development exist, the absence of focus on the Muslim community does not bring to the forefront their specific socio-economic status. The advantage of focusing on the conditions of minorities in terms of standard socioeconomic indices is to clearly highlight their condition, which would have been glossed over if the research were conducted by focusing on the SC/STs only. The purpose of this study is to help the policy makers to draw an action plan for educational, socio-economical, and infrastructural development of the minorities for improving the quality of life of the people and reducing the imbalances among the communities and to perpetuate wider social awareness, among the common people which is essential for the overall growth and advancement of the country.

Objectives of the Study:

The following objectives were taken for the present study.

- To study the present scenario of literacy rate, enrolment, and drop out of elementary education of Muslim Children at elementary level of education.
- To compare literacy rate, enrolment, and drop out between Muslim boys Muslim girl

children.

- To compare literacy rate, enrolment, and drop out between Muslim community and other community children.
- To compare literacy rate, enrolment, and drop out of elementary education of Muslim children between before and after implementation of the RTE Act, 2009.

Methodology:

Sampling Techniques and Sample Size: Multistage stratified random sampling technique was adopted for selecting the sample. The South 24 Parganas district is a mixed populated comprising 35.6% of Muslim minority population (Census 2011). The Muslim population was scattered through the five sub-divisions with varying level of educational standards and practices. Five (5) such mixed populated villages from five sub-divisions were identified from the district with the help of Census, 2011 data. From these villages, only those families which had children of the age group 6 to 14 years were identified. Among them, fifty (50) Muslim families and twenty (20) other community families from each such village were selected randomly for the purpose of the present study. Thus, $50 \times 5 = 250$ (two hundred and fifty) Muslim families and $20 \times 5 = 100$ (one hundred) other community families were taken as the sample.

Tool: Household survey schedule was used. It was prepared by the researchers and finalized on the basis of experts' opinion.

Findings and Discussion:

This section presents findings and discussion of educational development of Muslim minority particularly in the field of elementary education in the district South 24 Parganas of West Bengal using three indicators namely literacy rate, enrolment, and dropout rate in three phases. In order to make a comparative study of literacy rate, enrolment, and dropout rate before and after the implementation of the RTE Act, 2009, children were divided into three age groups- (i) 6-14 years (Phase I: After implementation of RTE Act, 2009), children of this age group were particularly focused to access the impact of the RTE Act, 2009, (ii) 14-22 years (Phase II: Before implementation of RTE Act, 2009), children of this age group availed the benefits of SSA programme but could not avail the benefits of the RTE Act, 2009. (iii) 22-30 years (Phase III: Before implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan), children of this group partly availed the benefit of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) programme as it was being

implemented from the year 2001 and onwards. The year denoted for Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III are 2015, 2007 and 1999 respectively. The researcher conducted the survey during 2015. The details of the three phases are described in the following table.

Table 1: Three Phases

Phase	Year	Importance of the timing	Phase wise Age	Age in 2015
Phase I	2015	After implementation of RTE Act, 2009	6-14 years	6-14 years
Phase II	2007	Before implementation of RTE Act, 2009	6-14 years	14-22 years
Phase III	1999	Before implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan	6-14 years	22-30 years

Literacy

A person aged 7 years and above who can both read and write with understanding in any language has been taken as literate. It is not necessary for a person to have received any formal education or passed any minimum educational standard for being treated as literate. People who were blind and could read in Braille are treated to be literates. A person, who can neither read nor write or can only read but cannot write in any language, is treated as illiterate. Literacy rate of population is defined as the percentage of literates to the total population age 7 years and above.

Literacy rate =	$\frac{\text{Number of Literates} \times 100}{\text{Population aged 7+years}}$
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The following table shows phase wise, community wise and gender wise literacy rate of the sample.

Table-2: Phase-wise, community wise and gender wise literacy rate

Phase	Community	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Phase I	Muslim	94.1	97.6	95.8
	Other	96.7	100.0	98.2
Phase II	Muslim	90.4	89.6	90.0
	Other	95.5	91.4	94.9
Phase III	Muslim	67.1	64.0	65.2
	Other	73.3	82.6	86.0

From the above table, it is found that the literacy rate of Muslim population increased from phase III to phase II and phase II to phase I. Though, in case of literacy rate, Muslims are lag behind than other community, but the gap between Muslims and other community decreased significantly from phase III to phase II and phase II to phase I. It is very interesting and mentionable that the literacy rate of Muslim males was higher than their female counterpart in phase III and phase II, but in phase I the scenario is just opposite to previous and the literacy rate of Muslim females (97.6%) became higher than Muslim males (94.1%). This may be because of parental attitude towards the education of girl children changed significantly in Muslim families. On the other hand, more number of Muslim boys is engaged in child labour and other kind of jobs to earn some money for family expenditures and lifestyle change than Muslim girls.

Enrolment of children at elementary school

“Enrolment” means the entering of one’s name as student in the official register of school, other educational institution, programme, or course. In the present study, Enrolment refers to the entrance of children as registered students in any recognised educational institution of elementary level established, owned or controlled by the appropriate government or a local authority. The Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) is defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics as enrolment of the official age-group for a given level of education expressed as a percentage of the corresponding population.

Table 3: Phase-wise, community-wise, and gender-wise Net Enrolment Ratio (NER)

Phase	Community	Male		Female		Total	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Phase I	Muslim	190(202)	94.1	200(206)	97.1	390(408)	95.6
	Other	59(61)	96.7	51(51)	100.0	110(112)	98.2
Phase II	Muslim	150(163)	92.0	156(164)	95.1	306(327)	93.6
	Other	52(53)	98.1	42(44)	95.5	94(97)	96.9
Phase III	Muslim	60(75)	80.0	62(83)	74.7	122(158)	77.2

Numbers of total children are given in the brackets.

Although the target of 100% enrolment in elementary education was not achieved even after 5 years of enactment of RTE Act, 2009 but it is no doubt about the fact that percentages of non-enrolment at elementary level has definitely decreased from Phase III to Phase I i.e. Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) has increased (table 4). The NER of Muslim children was 77.2%, 93.6%, and 95.6% in Phase III, in Phase II, and in Phase I respectively and for other community it was 86.8%, 96.9%, and 98.2% respectively.

Table 4: Comparison of gender-wise enrolment of Muslim children

Phase	Gender	Total children	Enrolled children	Proportion	Z-value
Phase I	Male	202	190	0.94	1.49 _{ns}
	Female	206	200	0.97	
Phase II	Male	163	150	0.92	1.14 _{ns}
	Female	164	156	0.95	
Phase III	Male	75	60	0.80	0.79 _{ns}
	Female	83	62	0.75	

$Z_{0.05}=1.64$ s = significant, ns = not significant

The Z-values for comparison of gender wise enrolment of Muslim children are presented in the above table. It shows that the Z-values in Phase I (1.49), in phase II (1.14) and in phase III

(0.79) are not significant. The results indicate that in phase III enrolment of male children (80%) was higher than that of female children (74.7%), but in phase II and in phase I the enrolment of female children (95.1% and 97.1%) were higher than that of male children (92% and 94.1%). This is because; the attitude of guardians towards the education of girl child has been changed by this time mainly due to small family size. Average number of family members for both Muslims and non-Muslims was almost same 5% and 4.5% respectively. According to Pande (2001), gender discrimination is declining due to adoption of small family size norm. In comparison to all India trend, we can see a similar picture. The enrolment rate of both the gender category in lower primary (class I- class IV) and upper primary classes (class V- class VIII) increased impressively.

Table 5: Comparison of phase-wise enrolment of Muslim children

Phase	Total children	Enrolled children	Proportion	Z-value
Phase I	408	390	0.96	1.21 _{ns}
Phase II	327	306	0.94	
Phase II	327	306	0.94	5.24 _s
Phase III	158	122	0.77	
Phase I	408	390	0.96	6.67 _s
Phase III	158	122	0.77	

$Z_{0.05}=1.64$ s = significant, ns = not significant

The Z-values for comparison of phase wise enrolment of Muslim children are presented in the above table. It shows that the Z-values between Phase II & Phase III (5.24) and Phase I & Phase III (6.67) are significant, but the Z-value (1.21) between Phase I and Phase II is not significant.

The study results indicate that the enrolment of Muslim children in elementary education increased from phase III to phase II and from phase II to phase I. But the increase in enrolment from phase III to phase II was more than that from phase II to phase I. The probable cause of higher rate of increase in enrolment of Muslim children in phase III to phase II may be because of the effect of implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Programme. According to the research findings of Sil, N.C. (2013), the NER improved in West Tripura district after implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Programme. DISE data

also shows similar results.

Drop out at elementary level of education

UNESCO (1970) has defined dropout as “Leaving school before the completion of a given stage of education or leaving at some intermediate or non-terminal point in a cycle of schooling”. In the present study, dropout refers to those children who enrolled in elementary school but could not complete the class of eighth grade and leave out at any levels in between class-I and class-VIII.

Table 6: Phase-wise drop out at elementary level of education

Phase	Community	Male		Female		Total	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Phase I	Muslim	31(190)	16.3	3(200)	1.5	34(390)	8.7
	Other	1(59)	1.7	1(51)	2.0	2(110)	1.8
Phase II	Muslim	75(150)	50.0	32(156)	20.5	107(306)	35.0
	Other	5(52)	9.6	1(42)	0.7	6(94)	6.4
Phase III	Muslim	46(60)	76.7	48(62)	77.4	94(122)	77.0
	Other	5(9)	55.6	17(24)	70.8	22(33)	66.7

Numbers of total children are given in the brackets.

It was observed from the study (table 7), that the rate of dropout of Muslim children during the implementation of SSA programme (Phase-III) was 77 %, before implementation of RTE Act, 2009 (Phase-II) it was 35 % and 5 years after the enactment of the RTE Act, 2009 (Phase-I) it became almost 9 %. The dropout rate of Muslim boys was approximately 77%, 50% and 16% and that of Muslim girls was about 77%, 21% and only 1.5% for Phase-III, Phase-II and Phase-I respectively. Therefore, the data reveals that, there is a decreasing trend in number of dropout in phase II than phase III and in phase I than phase II. This trend is almost similar to DISE data at all India level. A. C. Mehta (2008) has shown that the dropout rate in 2005-06 was 8.61% in primary grades against 9.96% during 2004-05. On the basis of discussion with children, parents, guardians and other family members of the children during household survey it may be concluded that due to implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

Programme, Right to Education Act, 2009, Kanyashree and Yubashree projects, increasing awareness of parents and guardians, development of financial condition of the families, supply of cooked mid-day meal in school, improvement of infrastructures and physical facilities of school buildings, supply of free textbooks and other materials together contributed to increase the rate of enrolment and retention and decreased the rate of dropout in elementary level of education.

After implementation of the RTE Act, 2009 the dropout rate of Muslim girls decreased more rapidly than that of the boys' (table 7). This trend is almost similar to DISE data at all India level. So, the impact of the RTE Act, 2009 to decrease the dropout rate of Muslim children was noticeably remarkable.

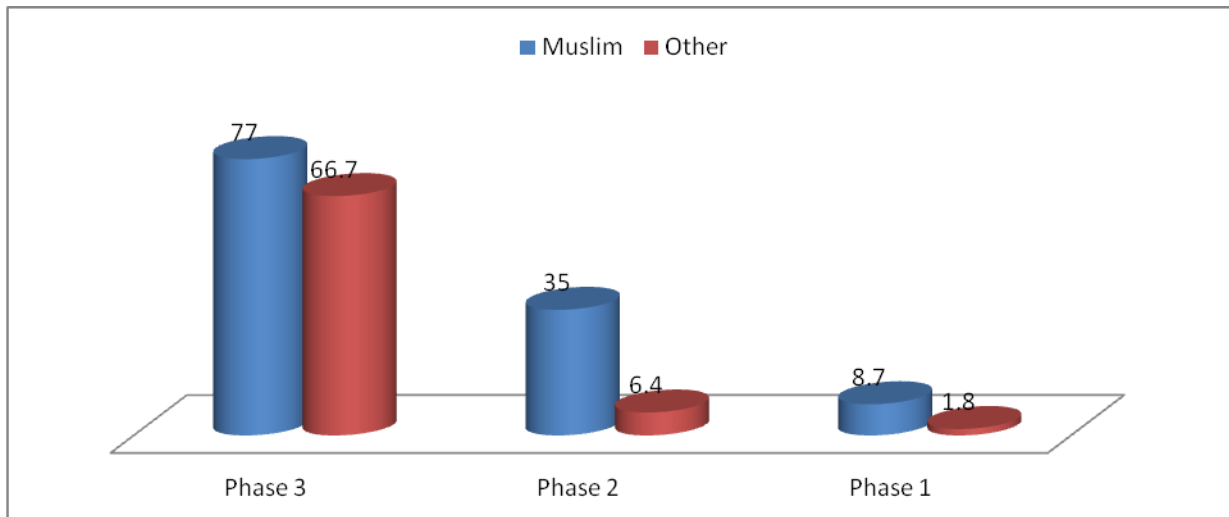


Figure 1: Bar-diagram of phase wise drop out of Muslim and other community children

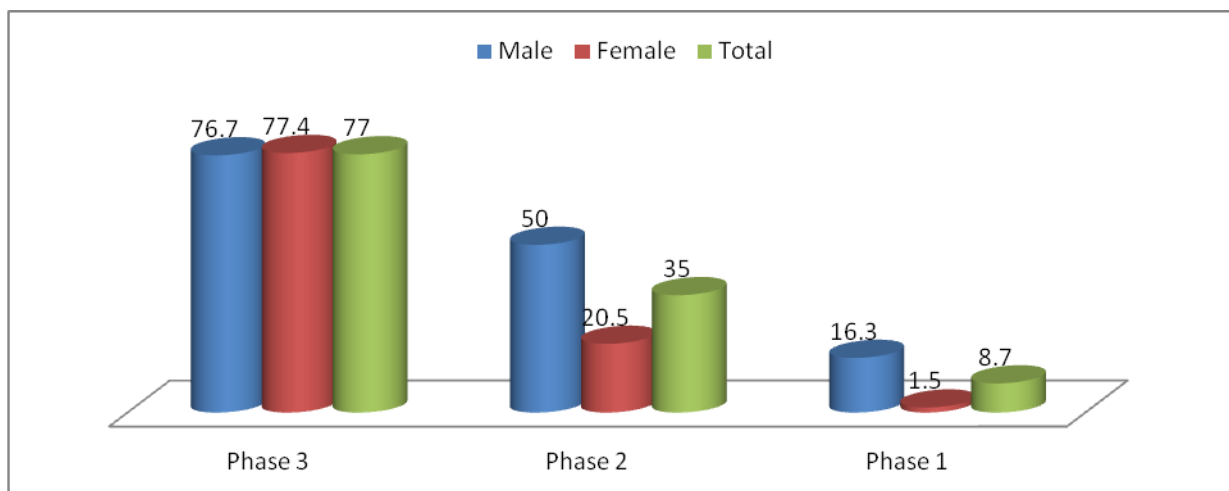


Figure 2: Bar-diagram of phase wise drop out of Muslim children

Causes of Dropout at Elementary Level of Education:

Dropout refers to leaving school before the completion of a given stage of education or leaving at some intermediate or non-terminal point in a cycle of schooling due to some causes. The investigator has identified many reasons for dropout at elementary level of education on the basis of face to face interview during the time of household survey. Data about causes of dropout were collected through checklist prepared by the researcher.

Table 7: Causes of drop out at elementary level of education

Causes	Community	Male		Female		Total	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Poverty	Muslim	105(233)	45.1	41(150)	27.3	146(383)	38.1
	Other	40(61)	65.6	24(60)	40.0	64(121)	52.9
Lack of Interest	Muslim	7(233)	3.0	3(150)	2.0	10(383)	2.6
	Other	11(61)	18.0	6(60)	10.0	17(121)	14.0
Child Labour	Muslim	114(233)	48.9	16(150)	10.7	130(383)	33.9
	Other	4(61)	6.6	1(60)	1.7	5(121)	4.1
Child Marriage	Muslim	3(233)	1.3	85(150)	56.7	88(383)	23.0
	Other	0(61)	0.0	25(60)	41.7	25(121)	20.7
Family Problem	Muslim	0(233)	0.0	2(150)	1.3	2(383)	0.5
	Other	2(61)	3.3	2(60)	3.3	4(121)	3.3
Distance of School	Muslim	1(233)	0.4	1(150)	0.7	2(383)	0.5
	Other	2(61)	3.3	1(60)	1.7	3(121)	2.5
Fail in Examination	Muslim	0(233)	0.0	1(150)	0.7	1(383)	0.3
	Other	0(61)	0.0	0(60)	0.0	0(121)	0.0
Other	Muslim	3(233)	1.3	1(150)	0.7	4(383)	1.0
	Other	2(61)	3.3	1(60)	1.7	3(121)	2.5

Numbers of total children are given in the brackets.

It was also observed (table 8) that, near about 87% drop out was caused due to child labour but interestingly it was found that the economic condition of most of the families of those children was above poverty line and in some cases their economic condition was found to be stronger than the families of school going children. Most of the dropped out children and

their parents mentioned that they observed that in their locality people who are illiterate or just merely educated but are engaged in different types of works like jewellery works (out of the state), garment manufacturing, embroidery, jary work etc are leading a better life than those who are educated. On the other hand, economic condition of the educated youths of their locality is pathetic. They suffer from poverty and some of them spend their life by doing private tuition and even working as factory labour. So, it may be concluded that now-a-days poverty is not only the cause for drop out. Prosperity to earn more wealth, eagerness to be rich in a very short span of time and in a shortcut way may be a major cause of drop out.

The study also found that, nearly 12 % children of Muslim community and none of other community were engaged as child labour. Therefore, it was found that the problem of child labour was more prominent among Muslim children than other community counterpart. Again, among Muslim children, more Muslim boys than girls were found to be engaged as child labour. This lower percentage of engagement of female children as child labour is because; the attitude of guardians towards the education of girl child has been changed by this time mainly due to adoption of small family size. According to Pande (2001), gender discrimination is declining due to adoption of small family size norm. In comparison with all India trend, we can see a similar picture. The findings of Halder, K. (2002) has shown that dropout rates among the Scheduled Castes and Muslim Community are higher than those of general Hindu community. Raj (1979), Pillai, Benjamin and Nayar (1980), Gupta and Srivastav (1981) and Nayantara (1981) found similar results. Sachar Committee Report has pointed out that; the situation of job opportunity for Muslim minority seems to be even worse than that of SCs and STs (Government of India, 2006) which affects the retention rate of Muslim minority children in elementary level of education.

Sachar Committee Report mentioned, lack of access to elementary education was one of the main causes for drop out and non-enrolment of Muslim children but our findings contradicts with this view. Now, distance from home to school is no longer a hindrance to sending children to school. Moreover with the same economic conditions and same access facilities, majority of guardians were sending their children to school whereas only few guardians didn't.

The probable causes of drop out and non-enrolment of Muslim children of the age group 6-14 years may be as follows:

Most of the upper primary schools are situated in non-Muslim dominated areas and are quite away from Muslim populated areas.

Most of the Muslim children are first generation of learners who has no option to get educational support and guidance at home.

- Social environment as well as home environment not at all conducive for study.
- Attitudinal difference of guardians regarding need for education.
- Lack of awareness among guardians about the importance of education.
- Children working as child labour to overcome the poverty and family burden.
- More emphasis on religious education than general education.
- Engagement of female children in household work in absence of mother guardian.

Conclusion:

The scenario of educational development discussed earlier revealed that in spite of several initiatives taken by government over the years to increase the number of educational institutions, literacy rate, enrolment, teachers, and physical facilities in schools; still the community is lagging behind in all the educational indicators. The literacy which is a first step to gain education is found lowest among the Muslim minority in comparison to other community. Likewise, the net enrolment ratio is low and dropout rate is also highest among Muslim children. As they move to higher levels of education ladder, that is, lower primary to upper primary, upper primary to secondary, secondary to higher secondary, higher secondary to degree course and onwards; their representation decreases. Analysis of time trend indicates that despite of overall improvement in educational status of the Muslim minority, the rate of progress is slower than other community. The study revealed a ray of hope that parental attitude towards girls' education has been changing in a positive manner and as a result literacy rate and net enrolment ratio is higher and dropout rate is lower for Muslim girls than boys in elementary education at present scenario. The study suggests that continuous and comprehensive attention is needed for increasing the literacy rate, enrolment, maintaining teacher pupil ratio, addressing adverse socio-cultural and economic realities as these are the keys in removing educational backwardness of Muslim minority group.

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