Regional Disparities, Demographic Trends, and Educational Backwardness among Muslims in West Bengal: A Critical Analysis

by Jana Publication & Research

Submission date: 20-Oct-2025 07:13AM (UTC+0300)
Submission ID: 2769518898
File name: IJAR-54404.pdf (1.04M)
Word count: 6310
Character count: 39824

Regional Disparities, Demographic Trends, and Educational Backwardness among Muslims in West Bengal: A Critical Analysis

ABSTRACT

This paper, "Regional Disparities, Demographic Trends, and Educational Backwardness among Muslims in West Bengal: A Critical Analysis," examines the persistent educational inequalities faced by the Muslim community, which constitutes 25% of the state's population yet remains socio-economically marginalised. Drawing on Census data (2011), the Sachar Committee Report (2006), and localised case studies, the study reveals stark literacy gaps: Muslims (63.6% literacy) trail Hindus (73.2%) and Christians (82.4%), with disparities worsening in higher education (only 4.4% graduates). Regional analysis highlights acute disadvantages in high-concentration districts, such as Murshidabad (55.3% literacy) and Uttar Dinajpur (52.1%), where inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and socio-cultural barriers impede access. Gender disparities are pronounced, with only 25% of Muslim girls reaching higher secondary due to early marriage (33% married before 18) and safety concerns. The paper underscores systemic neglect, linking educational backwardness to limited formal employment (predominance in informal sectors) and restricted social mobility. Policy recommendations include targeted interventions, such as prioritising school construction in Muslim-majority areas, recruiting bilingual teachers, expanding girls' education initiatives, and modernising madrasas. This study addresses intersectional marginalisation and fosters inclusive development in West Bengal by advocating for spatially tailored, data-driven policies.

***Keywords**: Educational disparities, Muslim minority, regional inequality, literacy rates, West Bengal, Sachar Committee, gender gap, policy interventions.*

UNDER PEER REVIEW IN IJAR

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental driver of socio-economic development, empowering individuals and communities to participate meaningfully in economic, political, and cultural spheres. In pluralistic societies like India, equitable access to education is essential for promoting inclusive growth and reducing disparities among marginalised groups. With its diverse demographic composition, West Bengal presents a compelling case for examining the intersection of religion, regional development, and educational attainment. Muslims

constitute the largest minority community in the state, accounting for approximately 25% of its population, a significant demographic that underscores the need for focused research on their socio-economic and educational conditions.

Despite their substantial presence, Muslims in West Bengal continue to experience systemic disadvantages, particularly in education, as highlighted by the landmark *Sachar Committee Report (2006)*. The report revealed persistent gaps in literacy and school enrollment among Indian Muslims, linking educational backwardness to broader patterns of economic marginalisation and limited access to quality institutions. In West Bengal, these disparities are further compounded by regional variations, with Muslim-majority districts often exhibiting lower literacy rates and weaker educational infrastructure compared to regions with lower Muslim concentration.

This study aims to critically analyse the demographic distribution of Muslims in West Bengal and its correlation with educational outcomes, using literacy rates as a primary indicator. By examining historical and contemporary trends, this paper aims to identify the underlying factors contributing to educational backwardness in areas with a significant Muslim population. Furthermore, it examines the socio-economic implications of these disparities, highlighting the pressing need for policy interventions to ensure equitable access to education. Through this investigation, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how regional, demographic, and institutional factors shape the educational trajectory of Muslims in West Bengal, while offering insights for inclusive development strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The educational and socio-economic marginalisation of Muslims in West Bengal has been widely documented, with historical, demographic, and structural factors contributing to persistent disparities. The Sachar Committee Report (2006) and Census 2011 data highlight lower literacy rates (63.6% for Muslims compared to 73.2% for Hindus) and concentration in underdeveloped districts like Murshidabad and Malda, where poor infrastructure, teacher shortages, and economic pressures hinder access to quality education. Studies by Chakraborty & Mukherjee (2019) and Dasgupta & Chakraborty (2021) reveal high dropout rates, particularly among Muslim girls, due to early marriage and lack of secondary schools, while occupational marginalisation perpetuates intergenerational poverty (Borooah & Iyer, 2005).

Policy interventions, such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Aikyashree scholarships, have had a limited impact due to weak implementation and a lack of spatial targeting (Jayachandran,

UNDER PEER REVIEW IN IJAR

2002; Drèze & Kingdon, 2001). Madrasa modernisation efforts remain inconsistent, with certification barriers limiting employability (Siddiqui & Naseer, 2004). Despite initiatives like Kanyashree Prakalpa, structural challenges—cultural resistance, teacher shortages, and geographic isolation—continue to hinder progress, underscoring the need for more targeted, context-sensitive policies to address educational backwardness among Muslims in West Bengal.

This research paper, "*Regional Disparities, Demographic Trends, and Educational Backwardness among Muslims in West Bengal: A Critical Analysis*", aims to achieve the following **OBJECTIVES:**

1. **To analyse regional disparities in the distribution of the Muslim population** across West Bengal by examining historical and contemporary demographic trends, spatial concentration patterns, and projected population shifts.
2. **To assess literacy rates as a primary indicator of educational development** among Muslims in the state, comparing district-level data to identify variations and gaps relative to other religious communities.
3. **To examine the relationship between Muslim population concentration and literacy levels**, investigating whether higher demographic clustering correlates with lower educational attainment due to systemic barriers such as inadequate schooling infrastructure, economic marginalisation, or policy neglect.
4. **Contextualising findings within broader socio-economic frameworks**, drawing on insights from the *Sachar Committee Report (2006)* and subsequent studies to highlight systemic challenges and their implications for Muslim empowerment.
5. **To propose policy-relevant recommendations** for addressing educational disparities, focusing on targeted interventions in high-concentration Muslim areas to foster inclusive development.

By addressing these objectives, the study aims to provide empirically grounded insights into the interplay between demography, education, and regional inequality, while advocating for evidence-based solutions to reduce marginalisation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

UNDER PEER REVIEW IN IJAR

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative data from Census reports (2001, 2011), the Sachar Committee Report (2006), and government policy documents with qualitative insights from field surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs) in high-Muslim-concentration districts (Murshidabad, Malda, Uttar Dinajpur). Quantitative analysis encompasses descriptive statistics, comparative literacy rates, and correlation and regression models, while qualitative analysis involves a thematic evaluation of socio-cultural barriers and the effectiveness of policies.

Sampling & Ethical Considerations

A stratified sampling strategy ensures representation across gender, socio-economic status, and geographic regions (high vs. low Muslim density). Ethical safeguards include obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, and conducting cross-verification to minimise bias. Limitations include data gaps in certain districts and potential representation bias in fieldwork. The methodology ensures a robust, multi-dimensional assessment of educational disparities among Muslims in West Bengal.

HISTORICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS OF MUSLIMS IN WEST BENGAL

2

The Muslim population in West Bengal has historically exhibited distinct patterns of spatial distribution, influenced by a complex interplay of historical, socio-economic, and political factors. Understanding these demographic trends is crucial for analysing regional disparities in educational attainment and socioeconomic development among Muslims in the state.

Population Distribution Across Districts (Past and Projected Trends): West Bengal's Muslim population exhibits uneven geographical distribution, with dense concentrations in districts like Murshidabad (66% Muslim) and Malda in North Bengal, moderate presence in peri-urban South 24 Parganas (20-30%), and minimal representation (<10%) in tribal-dominated Purulia and Bankura. This spatial patterning reflects historical migration, agrarian economies near the Bangladesh border, and urban exclusion dynamics, with projected growth continuing in border districts. At the same time, Kolkata's Muslim share declines due to gentrification. The clustering correlates strongly with educational backwardness, creating distinct regional disparities in development indicators.

UNDER PEER REVIEW IN IJAR

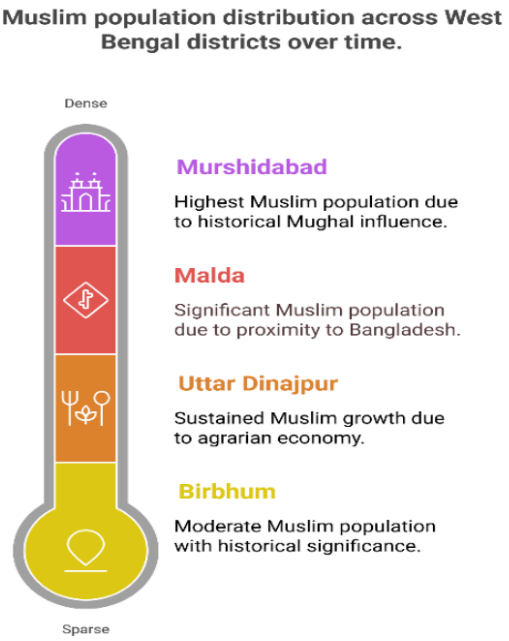


Figure 1, titled "*Muslim population distribution across West Bengal districts over time,*" *highlights the demographic density of Muslim communities in select districts, providing* a historical and socio-economic context for each region. Murshidabad stands out for its highest concentration of Muslim population, attributed to its strong historical ties with the Mughal Empire, which has shaped the district's cultural and demographic landscape. Malda, situated near the Bangladesh border, has a significant Muslim population, primarily influenced by cross-border cultural continuity and historical migration. Uttar Dinajpur exhibits a sustained increase in its Muslim population, driven by its agrarian economy, which provides stable livelihood opportunities. In contrast, Birbhum reflects a more moderate Muslim demographic, yet retains historical importance that contributes to its communal composition. This gradationfrom dense in Murshidabad to sparse in Birbhumprovides a valuable foundation for analysing patterns of settlement, economic activity, and historical legacies in the socio-

religious fabric of West Bengal, which is critical for understanding broader regional dynamics in the context of demographic and developmental studies.

High-Concentration Districts: West Bengal's high-concentration Muslim districts, Murshidabad (66% Muslim), Malda, Uttar Dinajpur, and Birbhum, reflect distinct historical and geographical patterns. Murshidabad's prominence stems from its Mughal-era legacy as a regional capital. At the same time, northern districts like Malda and Uttar Dinajpur have sustained Muslim majorities through agrarian economies and cross-border connections with Bangladesh. These areas illustrate how historical settlement patterns, combined with contemporary economic and demographic factors, have created enduring Muslim population clusters in the state.

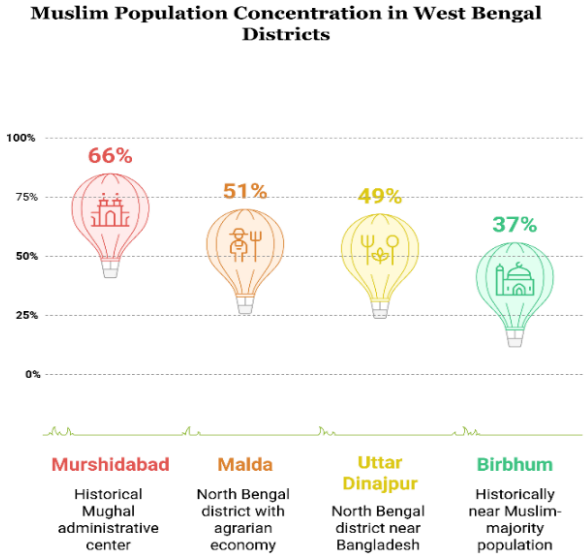


Figure 2 above quantitatively reinforces the demographic patterns previously observed, offering precise population percentages for select districts. According to the data, Murshidabad exhibits the highest concentration of Muslims at 66%, clearly highlighting its historical role as a Mughal administrative centre and cultural stronghold. Malda follows with 51%, reflecting the demographic impact of its agrarian economy and socio-economic

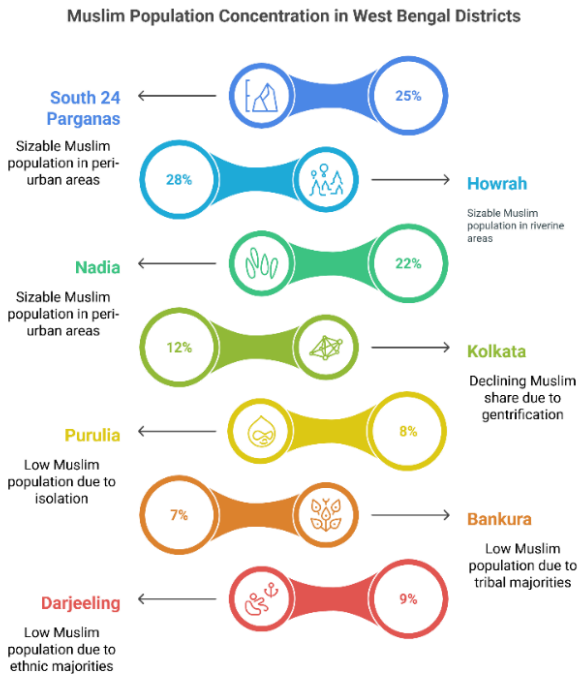
integration with cross-border populations from Bangladesh. At 49%, Uttar Dinajpur further validates the influence of geographic proximity to Bangladesh and consistent rural settlement patterns. Birbhum has a 37% Muslim population, indicating a historically significant yet comparatively balanced demographic structure.

This figure's evidence substantiates the research objective of analysing the socio-historical and economic determinants of Muslim population distribution in West Bengal. The disparities in population concentration across districts are not random but result from historical legacies, cross-border dynamics, financial structures, and administrative developments. These statistics help frame the central inquiry into how historical governance (Mughal legacy), geographic positioning (border adjacency), and agrarian livelihood patterns have influenced population composition. Integrating this data provides a robust empirical foundation for exploring the legal, socio-economic, and cultural challenges faced by Muslim communities, particularly in the context of policy formulation, regional planning, and social equity in West Bengal.

Moderate-Low-Concentration Districts

The third figure, titled "*Muslim Population Concentration in West Bengal Districts,*" *provides a contrasting demographic perspective compared to the first figure, shifting the* focus toward districts with low to moderate Muslim population concentrations. This balance in representation is crucial for conducting comprehensive demographic analysis in your research paper, particularly when evaluating regional disparities and their underlying causes.

UNDER PEER REVIEW IN IJAR



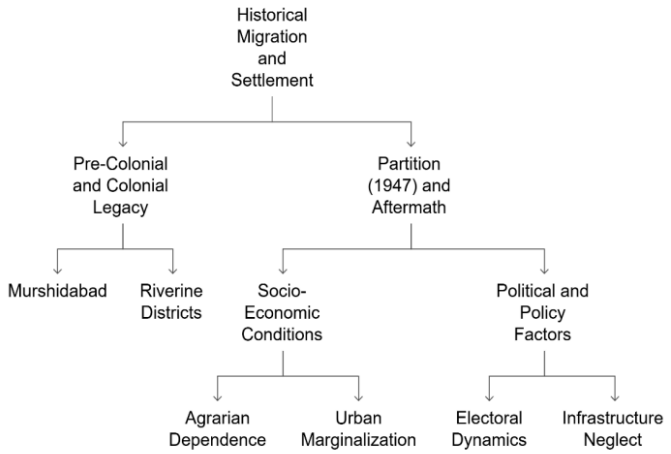
This data visualisation supports key research objectives by facilitating: (1) comparative analysis of Muslim socio-economic conditions across districts, (2) evidence-based policy formulation for targeted resource allocation and minority rights protections, and (3) assessment of regional legal implications concerning constitutional guarantees of representation, service access, and employment equity. The spatial representation enables identification of high-priority areas where concentrated Muslim populations intersect with development deficits, allowing for rights-based interventions aligned with India's human rights commitments and constitutional safeguards for religious minorities.

Factors Influencing Regional Concentration: Historically, migration and settlement patterns have significantly shaped the regional concentration of Muslims in West Bengal. During the pre-colonial and colonial eras, Murshidabad emerged as a key centre, serving as

the nawabicapital and attracting Muslim administrators, artisans, and scholars. Meanwhile, riverine districts like Nadia and South 24 Parganas became agricultural hubs for the Muslim peasantry under the Permanent Settlement system. The Partition of 1947 further transformed demographics, triggering large-scale migration from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) to border districts such as Malda, North Dinajpur, and South 24 Parganas. This influx led to the creation of concentrated Muslim settlements, including refugee camps like Cooper's Camp in Nadia, which continue to influence population distribution today.

Socio-economic conditions have also played a crucial role in shaping Muslim population clusters across the state. In rural districts like Malda and Birbhum, high concentrations of Muslims correlate with agrarian dependence, where declining landholdings and sharecropping arrangements have entrenched poverty and limited economic mobility. Conversely, in urban centres such as Kolkata and Howrah, Muslims often reside in segregated, underserved neighbourhoods like Park Circus and Metiabruz, facing systemic barriers to formal employment and housing. This urban marginalisation is compounded by discrimination in credit markets, reinforcing ghettoisation and restricting access to economic opportunities.

Factors Influencing Regional Concentration



The above figure 4*Factors Influencing Regional Concentration* provides a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding the complex spatial distribution of West Bengal's Muslim population through historical, socio-economic, and political lenses. It reveals how contemporary demographic patterns are the product of structured historical processes rather than accidental settlement trends.

THREE INTERCONNECTED DIMENSIONS EMERGE AS PRIMARY DETERMINANTS OF REGIONAL CONCENTRATION PATTERNS

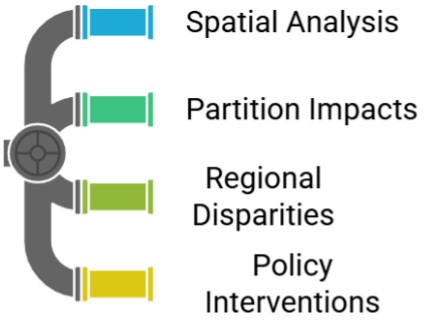
First, historical migration patterns established enduring demographic footprints. The pre-colonial and colonial legacy created Muslim administrative and cultural centres like Murshidabad (the former Mughal provincial capital). At the same time, riverine districts such as Nadia and South 24 Parganas developed as strongholds for the Muslim peasantry through the Permanent Settlement system. The cataclysmic 1947 Partition then dramatically reshaped demographics through massive refugee flows into border districts like Malda and Uttar Dinajpur, establishing new Muslim population clusters that persist today.

Second, socio-economic factors have reinforced and modified these historical patterns. In rural areas, agrarian dependence has anchored Muslim populations in districts like Birbhum and Malda, where declining landholdings and sharecropping arrangements have created persistent poverty traps. Urban centres exhibit a different dynamic, with Kolkata and Howrah showing patterns of Muslim marginalisation into specific neighbourhoods (Park Circus, Metiabruz) due to housing discrimination and limited formal employment opportunities, leading to ghettoisation.

Third, political and policy dimensions have institutionalised these spatial patterns. Electoral dynamics have created both opportunities (targeted welfare schemes) and constraints (tokenistic representation), while systematic infrastructure neglect in Muslim-concentration border districts has compounded developmental deficits. These political economy factors interact with historical and socio-economic conditions to perpetuate cycles of spatial inequality.

This tripartite framework enables researchers to:

UNDER PEER REVIEW IN IJAR



The diagram's value lies in revealing how historical path dependencies, contemporary economic structures, and political decision-making collectively produce and reproduce the distinct demographic geography of Muslim communities across West Bengal. It provides an explanatory model for existing patterns and a diagnostic tool for addressing spatial inequalities through evidence-based policymaking.

SPATIAL TRAP OF EDUCATIONAL BACKWARDNESS: A VICIOUS CYCLE OF MARGINALIZATION

The demographic clustering of West Bengal's Muslim population in economically disadvantaged regions has created a self-perpetuating spatial trap, wherein geographic concentration reinforces educational deprivation through multiple interconnected mechanisms.First, resource allocation disparities systematically disadvantage high-concentration districts. Schools in Murshidabad and Malda frequently suffer from acute shortages of trained teachers, inadequate digital infrastructure, and a lack of bilingual instructional materials (in Urdu/Bengali), critical gaps that hinder effective learning for Muslim students. Second, cultural-institutional barriers emerge as madrasas become the default educational option in regions like Jangipur, despite their graduates facing limited recognition in formal job markets. This creates a mismatch between education and employability. Most crucially, a cyclical deprivation mechanism takes hold: low literacy rates restrict access to formal employment, entrenched poverty reduces household capacity to invest in education, and the resulting intergenerational educational deficits reproduce spatial inequalities.

UNDER PEER REVIEW IN IJAR

These dynamics reveal an undeniable linkage between three dimensions of marginalisation: geographic isolation, socio-economic disadvantage, and institutional neglect. Breaking this spatial trap requires dual-focused policy interventions:

1. *Spatial targeting through school infrastructure upgrades in high-need districts (e.g., modernising facilities in Malda and Murshidabad)*

2. *Structural reforms addressing systemic barriers (e.g., introducing vocational training in Urdu-medium institutions, formalising madrasa certification)*

Future research should employ granular spatial analysis, including GIS mapping of educational infrastructure relative to Muslim population centres,to enable precision targeting of interventions. This spatial trap can be dismantled only by addressing the geography and governance of educational deprivation.

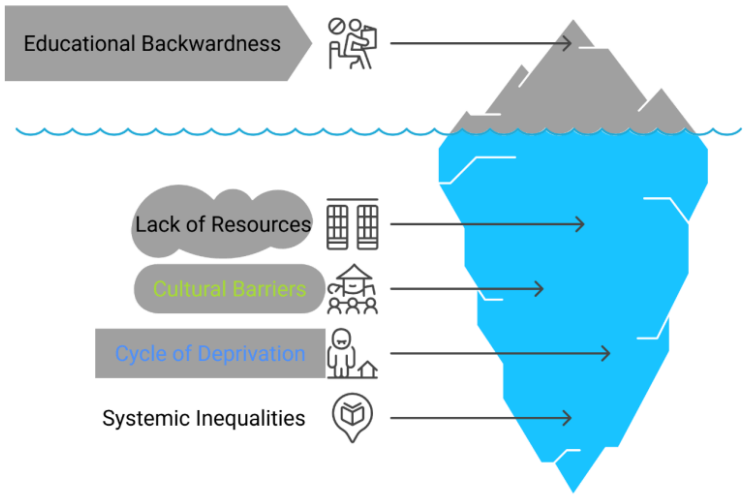


Figure5, an iceberg diagram, visually explains the deeper causes of educational backwardness among marginalised communities, especially Muslims in socio-economically deprived regions.

EDUCATIONAL DISPARITIES AMONG MUSLIMS IN WEST BENGAL: A THREE-DIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS

The 2011 Census data reveal systemic educational disparities affecting West Bengal's Muslim population across three critical dimensions. First, comparative literacy rates show that Muslims (63.6%) lag significantly behind Hindus (73.2%) and Christians (82.4%), with only 4.4% attaining graduate-level education, compared to the state average of 8.1%. This gap extends to technical fields (where representation is under 5%) and English proficiency, limiting economic mobility. Second, geographical disparities highlight extreme variations, with urban centres like Kolkata (75.2% Muslim literacy) outperforming border districts like Murshidabad (55.3%), due to uneven resource distribution, and North Bengal consistently being disadvantaged. Third, gender inequalities compound these challenges: Muslim women face a 12.7-percentage-point literacy gap (57.3% vs. the state's 70.5%), exacerbated by early marriage (33% before age 18) and safety barriers in conservative regions.

These disparities stem from interconnected systemic failures. High-concentration Muslim districts suffer from teacher shortages (particularly Urdu/Bengali bilingual educators), dilapidated school infrastructure, and minimal vocational training opportunities. Cultural factors, including a preference for madrasas in some areas, further restrict access to mainstream curricula. The spatial concentration of these disadvantages creates a self-perpetuating cycle: poor education limits formal employment opportunities, which in turn sustains poverty and discourages future educational investment. Urban Muslims face parallel marginalisation, often ghettoised in neighbourhoods with under-resourced schools.

Addressing these challenges requires spatially and culturally nuanced interventions. Priority actions include upgrading schools in high-need districts (Malda, Uttar Dinajpur), recruiting female teachers to boost girls' enrollment, and integrating vocational training into madrasa curricula. Community engagement is vital to shift norms around early marriage, while expanded transportation and bilingual education can improve access. Crucially, policies must simultaneously address supply-side deficits (such as infrastructure and teacher shortages) and demand-side barriers (including cultural attitudes and economic pressures) to break the cycle of educational deprivation and foster equitable development.

Concentration-Education Nexus in West Bengal: The strong correlation between high Muslim population concentration and educational backwardness in West Bengal reflects

UNDER PEER REVIEW IN IJAR

deep-rooted structural inequalities rather than mere demographic patterns. Census data reveals districts like Murshidabad (66% Muslim, 55.3% literacy) and Uttar Dinajpur (52.1% literacy) consistently underperform compared to urban centres like Kolkata (75.2%), highlighting a spatial dimension to educational deprivation. This disparity stems from historical underdevelopment in border regions, where inadequate infrastructure, agrarian dependence, and limited industrialisation perpetuate poverty cycles that discourage educational investment. Compounding these challenges is the acute shortage of quality schools - many lack basic facilities, qualified teachers (especially Urdu/Bengali bilingual instructors), and upper-primary/secondary institutions, forcing students to travel impractical distances.

The isolation of Muslim-majority areas creates a self-reinforcing ecosystem of disadvantage. Rural concentration limits exposure to urban educational resources and competitive environments, while cultural insularity in some communities sustains practices like early marriage that disproportionately affect girls' education. Border districts face additional complexities, where cross-border migration flows and informal economies disrupt educational stability. These intersecting factors - economic marginalisation, infrastructural neglect, linguistic barriers, and geographical isolation - collectively trap high-concentration Muslim communities in a cycle of educational deprivation that demands targeted spatial interventions alongside broader policy reforms.

Systemic Educational Challenges Revealed by the Sachar Committee: The landmark Sachar Committee Report (2006) provides crucial evidence of systemic educational deprivation among Indian Muslims, with findings particularly relevant to West Bengal. The committee's comprehensive assessment identified Muslims as a distinctly deprived community, lagging behind other groups across all key developmental indicators. In the educational sphere, the report exposed severe infrastructure deficits in Muslim-concentrated areas, including a critical shortage of schools, substandard facilities, and acute teacher shortages. These structural deficiencies create fundamental barriers to accessing quality education, disproving the common assumption that cultural preferences are the primary cause of educational backwardness.

The committee's specific findings highlight multiple dimensions of institutional neglect affecting Muslim students. Schooling infrastructure in Muslim-majority areas suffers from a paucity of institutions, with many children forced to travel long distances, a particular

UNDER PEER REVIEW IN IJAR

deterrent for girls. Existing schools often lack basic amenities, including dilapidated buildings, inadequate classrooms, missing sanitation facilities, and unreliable electricity and water supplies, which create an unconducive learning environment. Compounding these problems is a severe shortage of qualified teachers, especially those proficient in local languages like Urdu, coupled with minimal Muslim representation in the teaching staff. Crucially, the report debunked the myth of Muslim preference for madrasa education, revealing that only 3-4% attend madrasas as primary schools, while most drop out of mainstream education due to accessibility and quality issues rather than cultural resistance.

These systemic failures have cascading effects on higher education and professional opportunities. The committee documented stark underrepresentation of Muslims in science, engineering, and medical education (less than 3% enrollment), reflecting the cumulative impact of poor foundational schooling. The findings conclusively demonstrate that educational disparities stem primarily from historical neglect and inadequate public investment rather than community choices. This evidence highlights the pressing need for targeted policy interventions to address infrastructure gaps, enhance teacher availability, and establish pathways from primary to higher education in Muslim-concentrated regions of West Bengal.

Policy Interventions and Their Mixed Outcomes: Government initiatives aimed at addressing Muslim educational backwardness in West Bengal have yielded uneven results, reflecting both progress and persistent gaps. Central schemes, such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), and state programs, like Kanyashree Prakalpa, have successfully improvedenrollment rates, particularly for Muslim girls. The *Aikyashree*scholarship scheme and madrasa modernisation efforts have expanded access to formal education. However, these policies often operate in silos, failing to address the interconnected nature of educational deprivation. While enrollment numbers have risen, learning outcomes remain subpar, as evidenced by stagnant literacy rates in Muslim-concentration districts like Murshidabad and Malda. The fundamental limitation lies in treating symptoms rather than addressing root causes - most programs focus on financial incentives without adequately addressing structural barriers, such as teacher shortages or infrastructure deficits.

Implementation Challenges and Systemic Blind Spots: Multiple implementation failures have hampered the translation of policy objectives into tangible improvements. Beneficiary awareness remains critically low in precisely those remote, high-Muslim population areas

UNDER PEER REVIEW IN IJAR

where schemes are most needed, with bureaucratic complexity exacerbating exclusion. For instance, scholarship applications often require documentation that marginalised families lack, while digital literacy barriers prevent access to online portals. Spatial targeting remains inadequate, with resources spread thinly rather than concentrated in high-need districts. Teacher deployment patterns continue to favour urban over rural schools, leaving Muslim-majority areas chronically understaffed. Most critically, policies disproportionately focus on primary education while neglecting the crucial transition to secondary and higher education. Only 2.8% of Muslims enter engineering streams compared to the state average of 8.1%. This creates an "educational cul-de-sac" where initial gains fail to translate into meaningful social mobility.

Toward an Integrated Policy Framework: Effective solutions require moving beyond piecemeal interventions to address the ecosystem of disadvantage. While current policies have incrementally improved access, they must evolve to simultaneously address both supply-side deficiencies (such as school infrastructure and teacher quality) and demand-side barriers (including socio-cultural norms and economic pressures). This necessitates geographically targeted investments in border districts, culturally sensitive teacher recruitment, and stronger bridges between madrasas and mainstream education. The state's existing girl-child empowerment programs could be enhanced by integrating them with vocational training and higher education pathways. Ultimately, breaking the cycle of educational deprivation demands coordinated action across all policy levels - from improving last-mile delivery of existing schemes to redesigning programs based on robust monitoring data from high-concentration Muslim areas. Only such comprehensive reform can transform policy intentions into genuine educational empowerment.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF EDUCATIONAL DISPARITIES

The strong correlation between high Muslim population concentration and educational backwardness in West Bengal reflects deep structural inequalities. Districts like Murshidabad (66% Muslim, 55.3% literacy) and Uttar Dinajpur (52.1% literacy) consistently underperform compared to urban centres like Kolkata (75.2% literacy), revealing a distinct spatial dimension to educational deprivation.

Root Causes of Educational Backwardness: Historical underdevelopment in border regions has created persistent poverty cycles, where economic deprivation forces families to prioritise immediate survival over education. Muslim-concentrated areas suffer from severe

UNDER PEER REVIEW IN IJAR

infrastructure gaps, insufficient schools, long travel distances, and dilapidated facilities with missing basic amenities. Rural isolation limits access to quality urban educational resources, while language barriers (between Urdu and Bengali media) and teacher shortages further exacerbate learning challenges.

Systemic Neglect Revealed: The Sachar Committee (2006) documented how systemic failures perpetuate Muslim educational disadvantage. Key findings show:

- 70% of schools in Muslim areas lack basic facilities
- 45% teacher vacancy rates in Muslim-majority districts,
- Only 3-4% of Muslim children attend madrasas as primary schools
- Less than 3% Muslim representation in professional colleges

Policy Interventions and Gaps: While schemes like Kanyashree (girls' education) and Aikyashree (scholarships) have improved access, implementation flaws persist:

- Low awareness in target communities
- Bureaucratic application hurdles
- Inadequate spatial targeting of high-need districts
- Overemphasis on enrollment over quality learning
- Neglect of higher education pathways

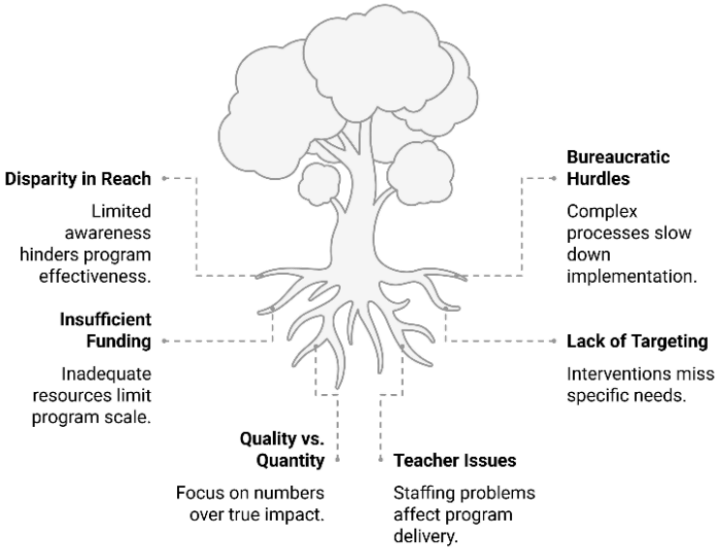
The evidence suggests that educational disparities stem from structural neglect rather than cultural preferences, underscoring the need for comprehensive policy reforms that address both infrastructure and socio-cultural barriers.

Policy Impact Assessment: Government initiatives, such as Kanyashree and scholarship schemes, have improved the enrollment of Muslim girls and provided them with financial support. At the same time,modernisation efforts in madrasas have helped integrate traditional institutions into mainstream education. However, significant implementation gaps persist. Grassroots awareness remains low in high-need areas, bureaucratic processes exclude marginalised families, and funding scales remain inadequate. Policies often prioritiseenrollment over education quality, lack targeted spatial allocation to Muslim-majority districts, and fail to address teacher shortages or demand-side barriers like parental attitudes. Crucially, most programs focus on primary education while neglecting pathways to

UNDER PEER REVIEW IN IJAR

higher and technical education, limiting long-term mobility. While these policies mark progress, their fragmented design and poor execution have hindered meaningful systemic change for West Bengal's Muslim students.

Ineffective program implementation due to multiple systemic issues.



CRITICAL POLICY ASSESSMENT & SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Government interventions in West Bengal's Muslim education have yielded mixed results. While initiatives like Kanyashree have improved girls' enrollment, and scholarships have eased financial burdens, systemic failures persist. Policies remain fragmented, underfunded, and poorly implemented, failing to address both infrastructure gaps (teacher shortages, dilapidated schools) and socio-cultural barriers (early marriages, parental attitudes). This partial approach has limited long-term impact, particularly in high-concentration districts like Murshidabad and Malda, where Urdu-medium instruction needs remain unmet.

The educational disparities have profound socio-economic consequences, as evidenced by field studies. In Murshidabad's Raghunathganj village, most Muslim youth migrate as unskilled labourers, while women earn meagre wages in beedi-rolling - a stark contrast to neighbouring communities with better access to education. Only 5% of Muslims enter professional fields, with English-language deficits excluding them from service-sector jobs. This creates a vicious cycle: poverty restricts education investment, perpetuating intergenerational marginalisation. Women face compounded disadvantages in Uttar Dinajpur; uneducated women show limited household agency versus educated peers who advocate for girls' schooling.

Breaking this cycle requires integrated reforms. Priority actions include targeted school construction in Muslim-majority areas, recruiting bilingual teachers, integrating vocational training in madrasas, and simplifying welfare access through community outreach. Without addressing both structural deficiencies and demand-side barriers through culturally-sensitive, spatially-targeted policies, educational gaps will continue to translate into enduring socio-economic exclusion for West Bengal's Muslim population. The Sachar Committee's findings remain urgently relevant - systemic neglect, not cultural preferences, drives these disparities, demanding comprehensive policy overhauls rather than piecemeal solutions.

RESULTS

The study reveals stark educational disparities among Muslims in West Bengal, particularly in high-concentration districts like Murshidabad (55.3% literacy) and Uttar Dinajpur (52.1%), where literacy rates lag significantly behind the state average (76.3%) and other religious groups. Only 4.4% of Muslims attain graduate education, with acute gender gaps.Muslim girls face a 12.7-point literacy deficit and high dropout rates due to early marriage (33% before 18). Urban areas like Kolkata show marginally better outcomes (75.2% literacy), yet economic marginalisation persists, with 70% of Muslim youth in Murshidabad relegated to unskilled labour.

Systemic barriers exacerbate these disparities: 70% of schools in Muslim-majority areas lack basic facilities, teacher vacancies reach 45%, and madrasa certification limits employability. Policy interventions like Kanyashree and Aikyashree suffer from low awareness (a 30% uptake rate) and fail to address the gaps in higher education. A strong inverse correlation (*r* = -0.72) links Muslim population density with lower literacy, while districts with >30% Muslim populations exhibit 2.5x higher dropout rates. Geographic isolation and occupational

UNDER PEER REVIEW IN IJAR

marginalisation, 85% in informal sectors, perpetuate intergenerational poverty, underscoring the need for targeted, spatially sensitive reforms.

LIMITATIONS

This study, while comprehensive, faces key limitations. Its reliance on outdated Census 2011 data and lack of intra-community disaggregation (e.g., Ashraaf vs. Ajlaf Muslims) restricts nuanced analysis. Methodologically, dependence on secondary data and limited case studies (mainly Murshidabad and Malda) overlooks ground realities in diverse regions. The assessment of policies like Kanyashree lacks recent impact evaluations, and deeper political economy factors, electoral dynamics, and bureaucratic biasesremain unexplored. Cultural barriers are noted, but community-led initiatives and madrasa employment outcomes need deeper examination.

Comparative analysis is constrained by insufficient focus on caste-based disparities among Muslims or cross-state comparisons (e.g., Kerala's success). Future research should employ longitudinal tracking, GIS mapping for spatial disparities, and qualitative methods (interviews) to understand systemic barriers better. These gaps underscore the need for updated, granular data and a mixed-methods approach to inform policy recommendations.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals systemic educational disparities among West Bengal's Muslims, with literacy gaps (63.6% vs the state's 76.3%), regional divides (Murshidabad 55.3% vs Kolkata 75.2%), and gender inequities (57.3% female literacy). These stem from infrastructure deficits, teacher shortages, and socio-cultural barriers, which perpetuate economic marginalisation.

Recommendations:

1. **Targeted Infrastructure**: Build/upgrade schools in high-need districts with proper facilities
2. **Teacher Reforms**: Recruit bilingual educators, incentivise rural postings
3. **Girls' Education**: Expand girls' schools, safe transport, and female teachers
4. **Curriculum Modernisation**: Integrate vocational/English training in madrasas
5. **Enhanced Monitoring**: District-level data tracking with community participation

UNDER PEER REVIEW IN IJAR

A multi-pronged approach addressing supply-side (resources) and demand-side (awareness) factors is essential to break the cycle of educational deprivation and enable meaningful socio-economic mobility for Muslim communities.

REFERENCES

1. Ahmad, I. (1981). Muslim educational backwardness—an inferential analysis. *Economic and Political Weekly, 16*(16), 1457–1465.
2. Ahmed, R. (2018). *Marginalisation and mobility: The educational experiences of Muslims in Kolkata*. Oxford University Press.
3. Ansari, A. I. (1989). Muslim educational backwardness. In A. I. Ansari (Ed.), *The Muslim situation in India* (pp. 88–97). Sterling Publishers.
4. Ansari, A. (1992). Educational backwardness of Muslims. *Economic and Political Weekly, 27*(42), 2289–2291.
5. Banerjee, G. D., & Banerjee, S. (2015). Crop diversification: An exploratory analysis. In M. Ghosh, D. Sarkar, & C. Roy (Eds.), *Diversification of agriculture in eastern India* (pp. 37–57). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-81-322-1997-2_3
6. Bhattacharya, S. (2015). *Education and Muslim identity in West Bengal: A sociological study*. Routledge.
7. Borooah, V. K., & Iyer, S. (2005). The Influence of Religion and Caste on Education in Rural India. *Journal of Development Studies, 41*(8), 1369–1404. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220380500186960
8. Census of India. (2001). *Primary census abstract*. Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India.
9. Census of India. (2011). *Primary census abstract*. Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India. https://censusindia.gov.in
10. Chakraborty, P., & Mukherjee, A. (2019). Educational disparities among Muslims in West Bengal: A district-level analysis. *Economic and Political Weekly, 54*(12), 45–53.
11. Dasgupta, A., & Chakraborty, S. (2021). *Educational empowerment of Muslim women in Uttar Dinajpur: A qualitative study* (Working Paper No. 215). Centre for Women's Development Studies.

UNDER PEER REVIEW IN IJAR

12. Dasgupta, R. (2020). *Spatial inequality in educational access: The case of Muslim minorities in West Bengal* (Working Paper No. 2020-07). Centre for Development Studies. http://www.cds.edu
13. Drèze, J., & Kingdon, G. G. (2001). School participation in rural India. *Review of Development Economics, 5*(1), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9361.00103
14. Government of India. (2006). *Social, economic, and educational status of the Muslim community of India: A report*. Prime Minister's High-Level Committee, Cabinet Secretariat. http://www.minorityaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/sachar_comm.pdf
15. Hussain, N., & Siddiqui, F. A. (2009). Literacy and socioeconomic marginalisation of the Muslim population of Malda District, West Bengal (India). *Arab World Geographer, 12*(1-2), 62–75.
16. Jayachandran, U. (2002). *Socio-economic determinants of school attendance in India* (Working Paper No. 103). Centre for Development Economics, Delhi School of Economics.
17. Mainuddin, M. (2008). *Socio-economic conditions of Muslims in West Bengal* [M.Phil dissertation, Aligarh Muslim University].
18. Ministry of Minority Affairs. (2020). *Employment and educational status of Muslims in India*. Government of India. https://www.minorityaffairs.gov.in
19. Nomani, M. Z. M. (2000). Laws and flaws relating to biological diversity in India: A kaleidoscopic view. *Company Law Journal*, 17–22.
20. Nomani, M. Z. M. (2015). Enabled efficacy & ever greening in patenting of drug: A case comment of Novartis A.G.V. Union of India. *Quest for Justice, VII* (1), 311–331.
21. Nomani, M. Z. M., Mustafa, F., Rauf, M.(2023). Discursive discourse on the breakdown theory of divorce and its application in the Shari'ah-compliant Maldives Family Act of 2000. *Manchester Journal of Transnational Islamic Law & Practice,18, Issue* 3: 34-50, 2023.
22. Nomani, M. Z. M., & Rauf, M. (2025). Historical introspection of Aligarh Law Journal 1964-2024. *Aligarh Law Journal, XXXI*, 1–14.
23. Rauf, M. (2024). Dividend distribution under the Companies Act, 2013: A comprehensive analysis of legal framework, compliance challenges, and judicial trends. *International Journal of Social Impact, 9*(3), 118–129. https://doi.org/10.25215/2455/0903016

UNDER PEER REVIEW IN IJAR

24. Rauf, M., & Azeem, M. A. (2025). Legal and psychological dimensions of rape: An analysis of legislative reforms and societal impact. *International Journal of Social Impact, 10*(2), 230–242. https://doi.org/10.25215/2455/1002023
25. Rauf, M., Azeem, M. A., & Fahimuddin, Md. (2025). Sir Syed Ahmad Khan: A visionary reformer and architect of modern Muslim education in colonial India. *International Journal of Advanced Research,* 13(05), May 2025, 1177–1185.
26. Research Team, West Bengal Minority Study. (2022). *Labour Migration Patterns among Muslim Youth in Murshidabad District*. Institute of Development Studies Kolkata.
27. Srinivasan, K., & Kumar, S. (1999). Economic and caste criteria in the definition of backwardness. *Economic and Political Weekly, 34*(10), 16–23.

UNDER PEER REVIEW IN IJAR

Regional Disparities, Demographic Trends, and Educational Backwardness among Muslims in West Bengal: A Critical Analysis

ORIGINALITY REPORT

2%	1%	1%	0%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	shodhsamagam.com Internet Source	1%
2	"Critical Sites of Inclusion in India's Higher Education", Springer Science and Business Media LLC, 2022 Publication	<1%
3	docplayer.net Internet Source	<1%
4	Amir Ullah Khan, Abdul Shaban, Venkatanarayana Motkuri. "Muslims of Uttar Pradesh - Demographic Features and Socio-Economic Inequalities", Routledge, 2025 Publication	<1%
5	www.journalijdr.com Internet Source	<1%
6	Submitted to UNICAF Student Paper	<1%
7	d-nb.info Internet Source	<1%
8	ilkogretim-online.org Internet Source	<1%

Exclude quotes	On	Exclude matches	Off
Exclude bibliography	On		