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Status and Trends in the Education of Minority Women: A case of West Bengal

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Abstract:

Gender inequality is a global phenomenon, only the manifestations vary form and degree in different cultures. In majority of the societies girls grow up with a nation of temporary membership in her natal home and considered as a reproductive machine in the family of 'in Law'. This reproductive role becomes limited to household chores. Many years ago, women's contribution to society was limited and controlled by men. The women's role has changed tremendously and is making its greatest impact in our society today. Education is a powerful vehicle for bringing about change, a panacea of all evils and a patient weapon for prevention plays a central role of the society. However, in the present paper we have observed the educational status and trends of minority women as a vulnerable group in our society. So this study is conducted on education and empowerment of minority girls in the selected districts of West Bengal. As a result Education enhances women's economic productivity in the form and non- form sector. The last but not least that theme of women's education was taken up by all communities including minority's girls as education is one of the main factors for empowerment and upliftment of women in the social and economic development which alleviates the gender disparity in the society.

Key words: Women, Minority, Education, Literacy, Empowerment

Introduction:

Women are standing tall and are playing a major role in many important areas. Women's role has changed at an accelerating rate and has part in areas such as politics, professional training jobs, medicine, business and law. Formerly they were not part of any political matter, but they have advanced in many aspects.

Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. It leads to higher productivity, efficiency and better socio-economic level of men. Women education is the best way to improve the health, nutrition, fertility and economic of a household that constitute a micro unit of a country. Women constitute almost half of the population of the world. In this context, it can be argued that lack of woman education can be an impediment to the country's economic growth. Educated women are more likely to engage in civic participation and attend political meetings. For this reason they were able to secure themselves through political movement which is the part of developed country.

Now, Being one of the world's largest democracies, India glorifies the principles of secularism and pluralism and the Indian constitution promotes prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth but this type of cultural, religious, and social diversity leads to varying forms of intersectional discrimination for the minority communities, for example, Dalit, Muslims, and Christians, or religious minorities who are also linguistic minorities or belong to indigenous communities (Adivasis) and such challenges are intensified when it comes to women of the minority community. There are several causes behind the illiteracy among women in India viz. economic causes as well as social causes. First the economic factors are poor economic condition of the Minority parents in rural India, socio-economical poverty among the prevalent in rural sector of the country, engagement of the Minority women in wage earning activities to help their parents. Second, the social factors are teaching and learning procedure in the schools are not attractive and effective, Poor student-teacher ratio in rural schools of our country, Child Marriage specially marriage of the girls at very early age, minority parents are illiterate and ignorant about importance of education of their girl child and lack of awareness among the Minority parent about the importance of women education. Besides, the most vital factor is unsuitable social environment for women education in our country.

However, it is admitted that “Empowerment of women” is the key route for the development of any society. Unfortunately, only a few studies or research have been done on the dismal condition of Minority women in India. In the book “Educating Minority Girls: A Campaign of Five Indian Cities” is an empirical work based on the first hand information of Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon (2005) that critically analyzed the status of education of Minority women in India. In the book “Rural Muslim Women: Role and Status” by Sekh Rahim Mandal (2005) analyses the socio-economic and cultural condition of the Muslim women and their problems in the district of Siliguri sub-division in West Bengal. Suman K. Kundu and Ananya Chakraborty (2012), in their article “An Empirical Analysis of Women Empowerment within Muslim Community in Murshidabad District of West Bengal” have examined the issues related to Women Empowerment within Muslim Community. Md. Intekhab Hossain (2013) in the article “Socio-Economic and Educational Status of Muslim Women: a Comparative Outlook” described the miserable condition of the Muslim women in West Bengal.

Explanation in context of West Bengal:

Coming to the consideration of West Bengal it is observed that, the minority population is 100,896,618 of West Bengal's total population which constitutes of 27.01% as per census of India. Hinduism is majority religion in the state with 70.53%. These two communities (Hindus and Minorities) share more than 97% of the total population. Muslim is second most popular religion in State of West Bengal with 27.01%. In West Bengal state, Christianity is followed by 0.72 %, Jainism by 0.07 %, Sikhism by 0.07 % and Buddhism by 0.07 %. Around 1.03 % stated 'Other Religion'; approximately 0.25 % stated 'No Particular Religion'.

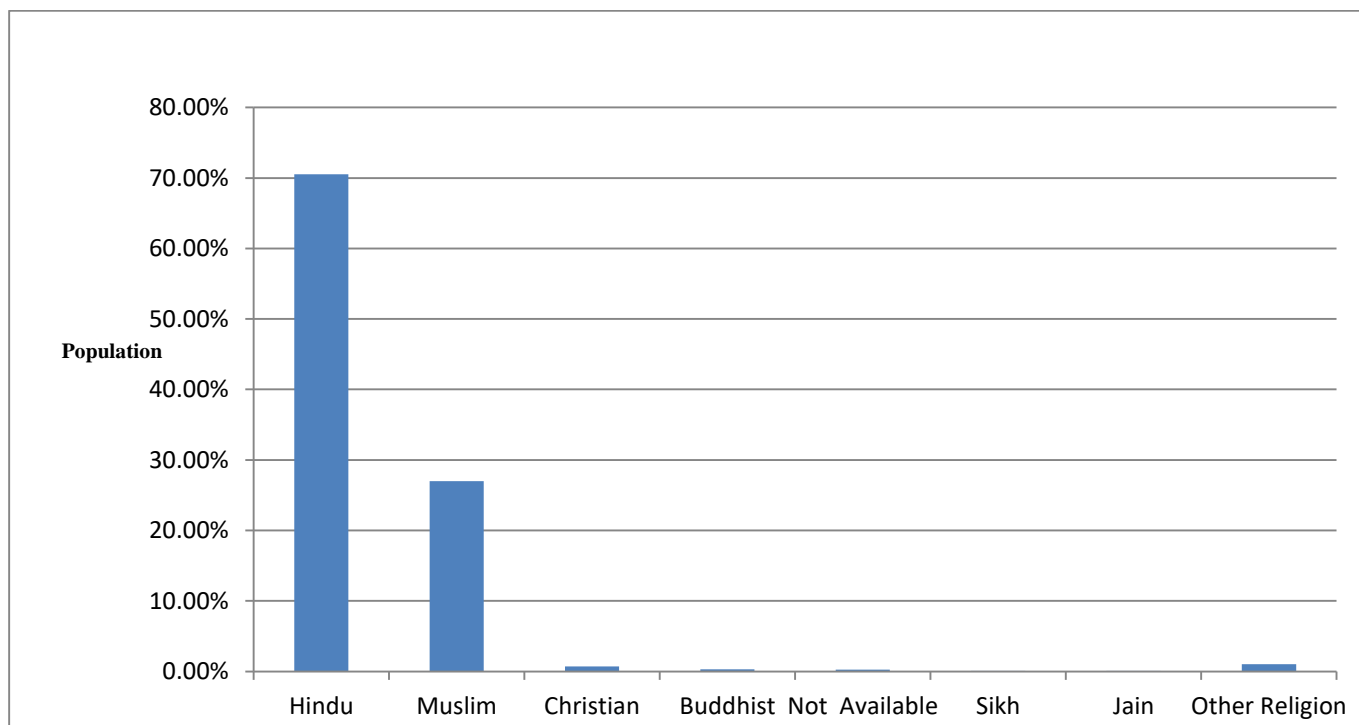
Table 1: Population of West Bengal by Religion - 2021

Description	Population	Percentage
Hindu	71,171,783	70.53%
Muslim	27,253,444	27.01%
Other Religion	1,041,615	1.03%
Christian	728,036	0.72%
Buddhist	312,715	0.31%
Not Available	252,326	0.25%
Sikh	70,218	0.07%
Jain	66,480	0.07%

Source: www.indiacensus.net

Now we try to find out a graph of population of the various religions in the next figure (Fig-1.1). In comparison to the other religions or groups residing in West Bengal, the Minorities have been lagging behind the mainstream communities in terms of socio-economic condition, livelihood pattern, educational status and cultural life.

Fig 1.1: Population of West Bengal by Religion – 2021



Source: www.indiacensus.net

In the table 2: we have informed the whole minority community categorically distribution between male and female on the basis of regionally such as rural and urban areas in West Bengal according to the census of 2011.

Table 2: Minority Population in West Bengal - 2011

Minority Population	Total	Males	Females	Percentage (males)	Percentage (Females)
West Bengal	31144763	12640092	12014733	51.27	48.73
Rural	19146627	9784832	9784832	51.10	48.90
Urban	5508198	2855260	2652938	51.84	48.16

Source: Census of India - 2011

3. Educational situation of minority Women in West Bengal

After six decades of independence, the majority of Minority women belongs to the economically impoverished and politically marginalized sections in Indian society and is in the most disadvantaged condition with the least literacy rate. The Gopal Singh Committee instituted by the Government of India in 1983, declared that Minorities are a 'backward' community in India as well as in West Bengal.

One of the most crucial instruments of empowerment of women is education. The policy calls for special measures to be undertaken to universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender-sensitive education system and develop vocational and technical skills among the women. It would also enable the women particularly the Minority women to take up employment and become financially empowered. (Hussain, N., 2009) In general, Indian women are relatively undereducated. Families are far less likely to educate girls than boys, and far more likely to pull them out of school due to social norms, fear of violence and expect them to help housekeepers at home. India has the largest population of non-school going working girls in the world (UNESCO). Within this picture of overall poor statistics, it is a predictable certainty that the corresponding figures for Minority women are still lower than any other community and the situation of West Bengal is not an exception.

The Sachar Committee Report stated that 4% of all the children of the Minority community are enrolled in recognized schools and a total of 9% attend some sort of school recognized or unrecognized and 91% do not have any school to attend. Those enrolled hardly complete school education and 90% of the enrolled get dropped out.

Educational backwardness is a key factor responsible for the social, cultural, economic, and political backwardness of the Minority community in Bengal. It is well known that the literacy and educational levels of Minorities in West Bengal are far below the National average. (Shazli, T., & Asma, S., 2015)

Literacy rate in West Bengal is 77.08% and significantly higher than the national average of 74%. But among the Minority community literacy rate reached to only 57.18%, which is much lower than the national average figure.

In table 4: we see that there is not a significant change in the literacy rate of the various districts of West Bengal between 2011 and 2021. And Table 5: shows the Minority female literacy rate (49.75%) in West Bengal. Also, Minority female literacy rate is much less than the Minority male literacy rate of 64.61%. As already mentioned, women education among Minorities in the state is much lower than men. The educational status of Minorities in West Bengal, like other parts of the country is also depressing. Figures 5.1 and 5.2 have been depicted from table: 5 to express the district wise literacy rate between male and female respectively.

Table 4: Literacy Rate 2011 and 2021 by District

S.NO	District	Literacy rate in 2011	Literacy rate in 2021	Change
1	Purba Medinipur	87.66	87.02	0.64
2	Kolkata	87.14	86.31	0.83
3	North Twenty Four Parganas	84.95	84.06	0.89
4	Haora	83.85	83.31	0.54
5	Hugli	82.55	81.80	0.75
6	Darjiling	79.92	79.56	0.36
7	Paschim Medinipur	79.04	78.00	1.04
8	South Twenty Four Parganas	78.57	77.51	1.06
9	Barddhaman	77.15	76.21	0.94
10	Nadia	75.58	74.97	0.61
11	Koch Bihar	75.49	74.78	0.71
12	Dakshin Dinajpur	73.86	72.82	1.04
13	Jalpaiguri	73.79	73.25	0.54
14	Bankura	70.95	70.26	0.69
15	Birbhum	70.90	70.68	0.22
16	Murshidabad	67.53	66.59	0.94
17	Puruliya	65.38	64.48	0.9

18	Maldah	62.71	61.73	0.98
19	Uttar Dinajpur	60.13	59.07	1.06
20	West Bengal	77.08	76.26	0.82

Source: www.indiacensus.net

Table 5: District wise Literacy Rate of Minorities in West Bengal 2011

S.NO	District	Total	Male	Female
1	Darjeeling	50.38	60.86	37.92
2	Jalpaiguri	55.34	64.98	45.01
3	Koch Bihar	56.07	64.59	47.11
4	Uttar Dinajpur	36.04	45.98	25.50
5	Dakshin Dinajpur	67.21	72.81	61.33
6	Malda	45.30	51.56	38.68
7	Murshidabad	48.63	54.21	42.76
8	Birbhum	59.86	68.28	50.97
9	Bardhaman	68.79	75.54	61.39
10	Nadia	49.41	54.42	44.03
11	North 24 Parganas	65.05	71.41	58.13
12	Hugli	73.50	79.43	67.31
13	Bankura	59.91	71.81	46.96
14	Puruliya	53.44	71.32	34.14
15	Medinipur	64.97	75.05	54.36
16	Haora	67.80	74.13	60.78
17	Kolkata	68.06	71.25	63.61
18	South 24 Parganas	59.83	68.84	50.27
	West Bengal	57.18	64.61	49.75

Source: www.indiacensus.net

Figure 5.1: District wise Male Literacy rate of Minorities

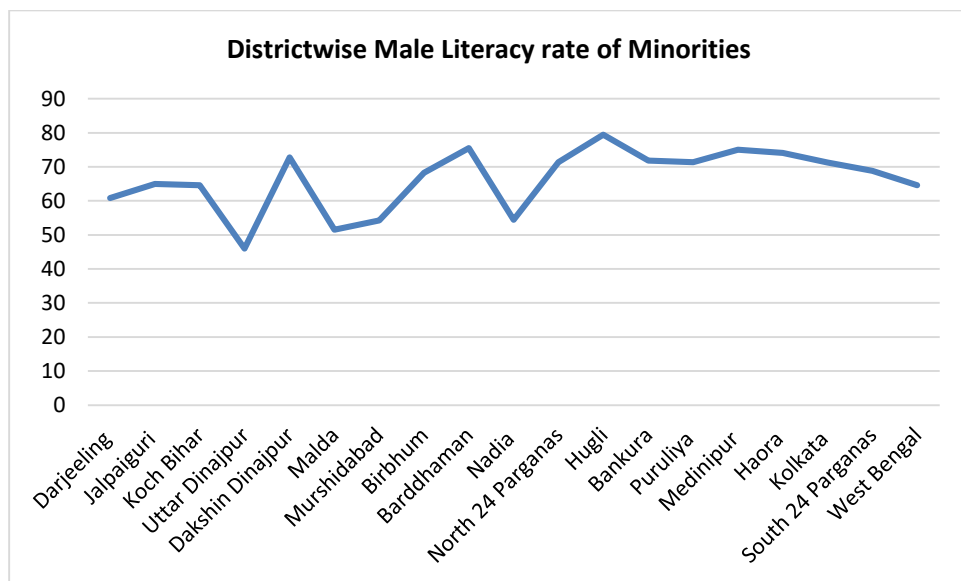
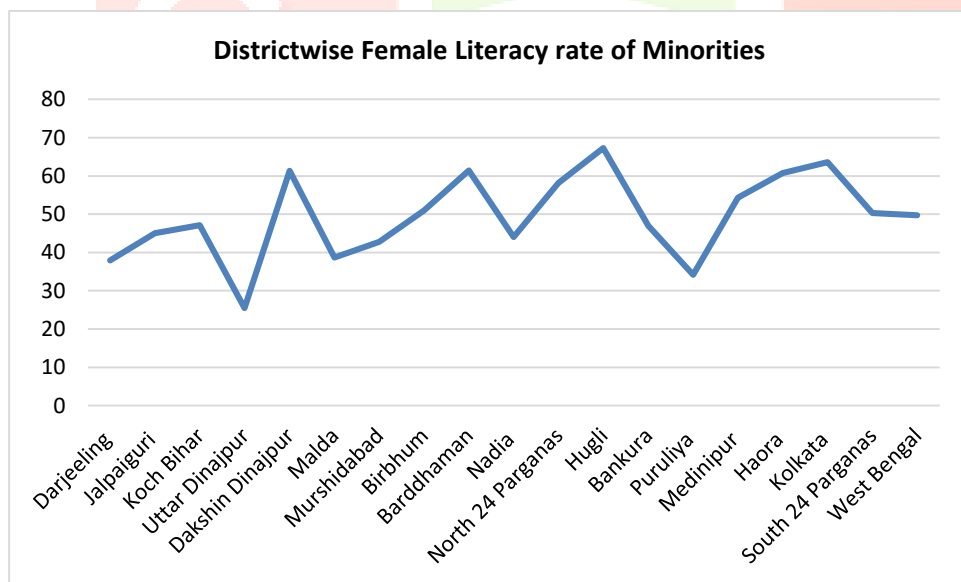


Figure 5.2: District wise Female Literacy rate of Minorities



Descriptive Statistics: Female Minorities	
Mean	50.11611111
Standard Error	2.591843685
Median	50.01
Standard Deviation	10.99626147
Sample Variance	120.9177663
Kurtosis	-0.032261359
Skewness	-0.453767353
Range	41.81
Minimum	25.5
Maximum	67.31

Descriptive Statistics: Male Minorities	
Mean	66.37263158
Standard Error	2.100585806
Median	68.84
Standard Deviation	9.156241249
Sample Variance	83.8367538
Kurtosis	-0.103984339
Skewness	-0.84830627
Range	33.45
Minimum	45.98
Maximum	79.43

From the above result it is established that mean literacy rate of minority male, 66.37 is greater than the female literacy rate 50.12. Standard deviation 11 for female and 9.16 for male represent that the distribution is widely spread. In comparison with the male, the distribution of female is more spread out. The variance of district wise female literacy, 120.92 is higher than the male literacy 83.84, signifies the degree of spread in data set is larger for female. Skewness is a measure of symmetry, or more precisely, the lack of symmetry. Skewness value of both male and female is negative indicates that both the data values is stretched towards the left side more. As we know the limits of the skewness are >3 or < -3 , therefore it has not crossed the negative range of its standard estimates. Kurtosis tells us about the flatness or peakedness of the distribution curve. In this study the negative values of kurtosis, -0.10 for male and -0.03 for female indicate that the distribution is flat and has thin tails. Platykurtic distributions have negative kurtosis values.

From the above statistical analysis it can be inferred that the extent of district wise disparities of female literacy is higher than the male one. The reason can be the individual characteristics of districts which is based on several factors like, political conditions, societal systems, economic environments etc.

Now coming to table 6 it is seen that the average literacy rate of Minority women in the State is 49.75 where as in urban areas it is 59.23% and in the rural areas it is 47.87%. Thus it seems there is significant rural urban gap in the literacy rate.

Table 6: Rate of Literacy among the Minority Males and Females in West Bengal

West Bengal	Literacy Rate	
	Male	Female
State	64.61	49.75
Urban	72.04	59.23
Rural	62.92	47.87

Source: www.indiacensus.net

Rahaman and Bhuimali (2011: 84 and 91) mentioned “among various reasons, the major reasons for educational backwardness among the Minorities are poor economic condition, limited number of government and government aided schools in Minority areas and lack of job opportunities of the educated people in the community. Perhaps Minority women are lagging behind in education because of socio- cultural pattern of the families and the society, the hostile attitude towards girls’ education and lack of infrastructural facilities for education in Minority concentrated areas. Minorities have limited access to the far off schools. Thus the need of the hour is to provide job oriented education and also to set up sufficient number of technical schools for male and female separately in the Minority concentrated areas”

Table 7: reveals the inter-religious disparities in literacy level of West Bengal. Literacy condition of the Minorities is worse than that of all other religious communities of the state; they recorded lowest literacy rate among the religious groups as only 57.47 percent of them are literate. Literacy level of Bengali Minorities are not only less than the state's and national average literacy level but also national Minority average literacy level, where only 64.61 per cent of males and 49.75 per cent of females are literate, or they are the most illiterate religious community in the state of West Bengal. The highest literacy level is found among Jain 92.81 per cent, while Sikh accounted for 87.73 per cent and Buddhist and Christian with 74.73 per cent and 69.72 per cent of literacy level respectively occupy third and fourth position among the six religious group of the state.

Table 7: Minority Literacy Rate in Comparison to Other Religious Communities

People	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikhs	Buddhist	Jains	Total
Male	81.12	64.61	77.20	91.37	89.09	96.46	77.08
Female	63.09	49.75	62.30	81.98	66.22	88.87	59.61
Total	72.44	57.18	69.72	87.19	74.73	92.81	68.64

Source: www.indiacensus.net

Figure 7.1 shows the same expression. It is depicted from table 7.

Table Fig 7.1:

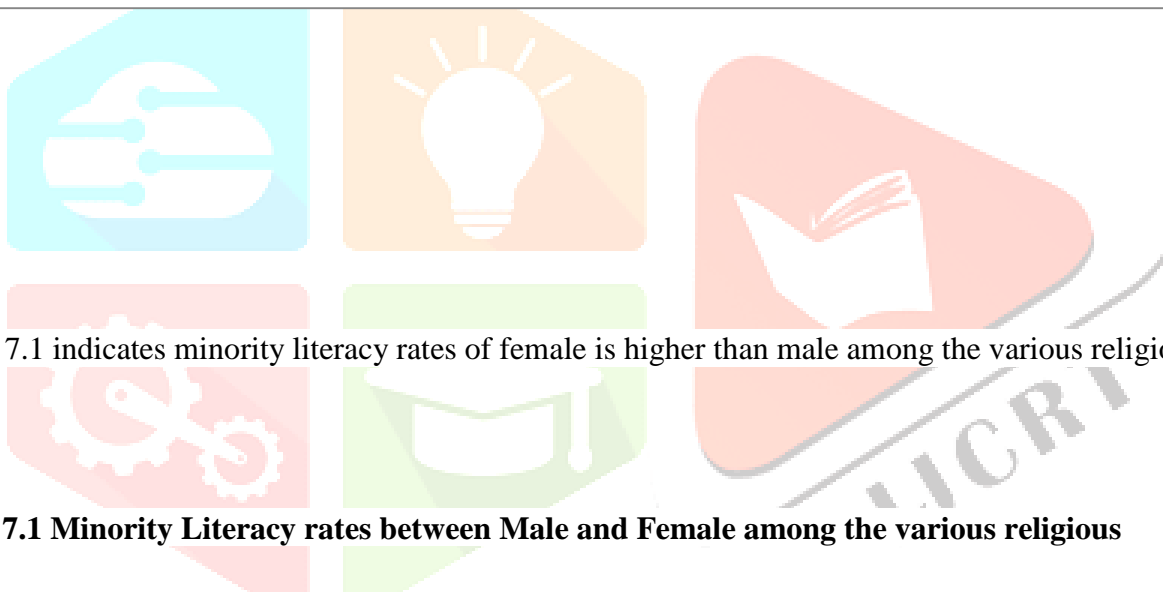
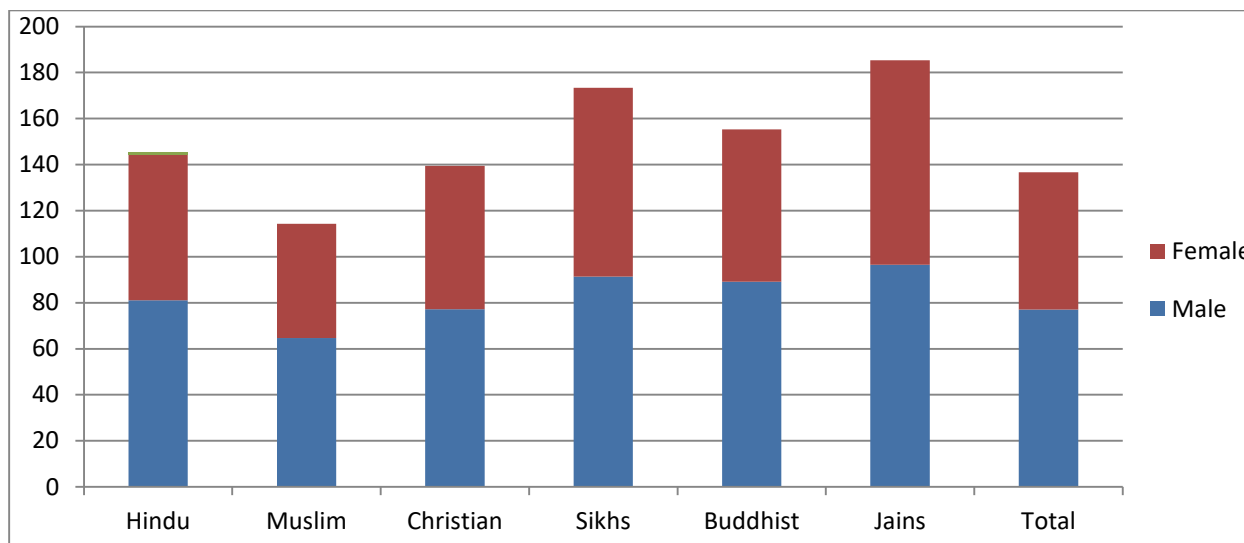


Table 7.1 indicates minority literacy rates of female is higher than male among the various religious.

Table 7.1 Minority Literacy rates between Male and Female among the various religious

People	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikhs	Buddhist	Jains	Mean	Std	CV
Male	81.12	64.61	77.2	91.37	89.09	96.46	83.31	11.52	0.14
Female	63.09	49.75	62.3	81.98	66.22	88.87	68.70	14.29	0.21

In the reports of the ‘National Education Survey’ it is shown that Minority Women are seven times behind Hindu women in high school education and in post-high school they are nine times behind them.

Hasan and Menon (2004: 47) state that “the educational backwardness of Minority women is a matter of particular concern, especially the high drop-out rate, resulting in subsequently fewer proportions of them managing to complete high school”. There is also a common belief that Minority parents feel that education is

not important for girls and that it may instill a wrong set of moral and cultural values. Even if girls are enrolled, they are withdrawn at an early age to marry them off. This leads to a higher drop-out rate among Minority girls in West Bengal.

Conclusion:

Education is one of the main factors for empowerment and upliftment of Minority women in the society. There is a need for adopting an alternative approach to women's education particularly for minority women in the lower socio-economic strata in rural areas. Minority women should be given a required level of skill, education and training not only for their employment, but as necessary requirement for their independence, freedom and to become a fully developed social and cultural being. So, skill education should be given to Minority girls in rural areas of West Bengal. Women should be paid equal wages for equal work. Minority women should be allowed to participate in political, social and economic activities at all level. However, proper education is only possible way out from these problems.

So, the paper reached to be concluded that the education facilities should be given to the Minority community and women in particular on the priority basis and Govt. and other agencies should come forward to provide these opportunities to the Minority women in West Bengal.

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