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## **Educational Status of Muslim Women in Birbhum District of West Bengal: A Socio-Educational Analysis.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Education is a fundamental force for empowering women and advancing social and economic development. In West Bengal, particularly in Birbhum district, the educational condition of Muslim women reveals both progress and persistent gaps. This study explores the socio-educational status of Muslim women in Birbhum, focusing on the factors that influence their educational attainment. Although education has become a central driver of national development, Muslim women remain significantly behind in educational achievement compared to other social groups. The situation was particularly poor before India's independence due to limited access to schools and the absence of safe residential facilities for girls. After independence, gradual improvement occurred with the implementation of constitutional safeguards like the Right to Education, Equality of Education, and Protection of Minorities Acts. These measures increased the participation of Muslim women in education, yet challenges remain. Factors such as poverty, conservative social attitudes, lack of awareness, and an unsuitable learning environment continue to limit progress. Muslim women possess a strong desire to learn and contribute to their communities, but structural and social barriers hinder their advancement. Since women play a crucial role in

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shaping the future of their families and society, enhancing their educational opportunities is essential. This paper presents an analytical view of the educational challenges faced by Muslim women in Birbhum and suggests measures for their empowerment through education. This paper analyses the socio-educational status of Muslim women in Birbhum, identifying key factors affecting their educational attainment. The study draws on census data, secondary reports, and local observations to understand the patterns of literacy, enrolment, and dropout rates. It also examines the impact of government schemes such as *Sarva Shiksha Mission*, *Kanyashree Prakalpa*, and *Sabuj Sathi* on their educational development.

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## 1) Introduction

Education is one of the most powerful tools for social and economic transformation. A well-educated population with proper knowledge and skills is essential not only for economic growth but also for ensuring that growth is inclusive. People who are educated and trained are better able to take advantage of employment opportunities that come with development. The Right to Education Act ensures that every child in India has the right to free and compulsory primary education, thereby promoting equality in access to learning.

Female education plays a particularly important role in the development of any society. As women constitute half of the population, their education is both a basic right and a social necessity. The education of women contributes to improvements in family welfare, health, and social progress. Educated women influence the next generation and help in building a more balanced and progressive society.

India is a diverse country with people from different ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. Since independence, the government has taken many steps to improve women's education, including initiatives aimed at uplifting Muslim women. However, several studies have shown that the Muslim community, especially women, continues to remain socially, economically, and educationally backward. According to earlier reports, only a very small proportion of the Muslim population is highly educated, making it one of the most disadvantaged minority groups in the country.

As per Census 2011, 37.71 percent of the population in Birbhum district belongs to minority communities, out of which 37.06 percent are Muslims. The literacy rate among Muslim women in



Birbhum is 57.47 percent compared to the general female literacy rate of 64.14 percent. This indicates a considerable gap in educational achievement. Muslims, who form about 14.23 percent of India’s total population, still lag behind other communities in most human development indicators. Within this group, Muslim girls and women remain more disadvantaged than both Muslim men and women of other religious groups.

This paper aims to examine the present educational status of Muslim women in Birbhum district of West Bengal and to analyze the factors contributing to their educational backwardness. Education is the foundation for both individual empowerment and community development. The Muslim community, despite being one of the largest minorities in India, faces numerous challenges in accessing education. For Muslim women, these challenges are intensified due to poverty, traditional social norms, and limited institutional support. Birbhum district, with its significant rural Muslim population, provides a relevant context to explore these issues. This study therefore seeks to understand the current educational condition of Muslim women in the district along with the socio-economic and cultural factors shaping their access to education.

**2) Study Area**

Birbhum is the northernmost district of the Burdwan division in West Bengal, with Suri serving as its administrative headquarters. Geographically, the district is located at 24°36' north latitude and 87°84' east longitude, at an altitude of about 252 meters above sea level. It covers a total area of 4,545 square kilometers and is popularly known as the land of red soil due to the reddish texture of its earth.

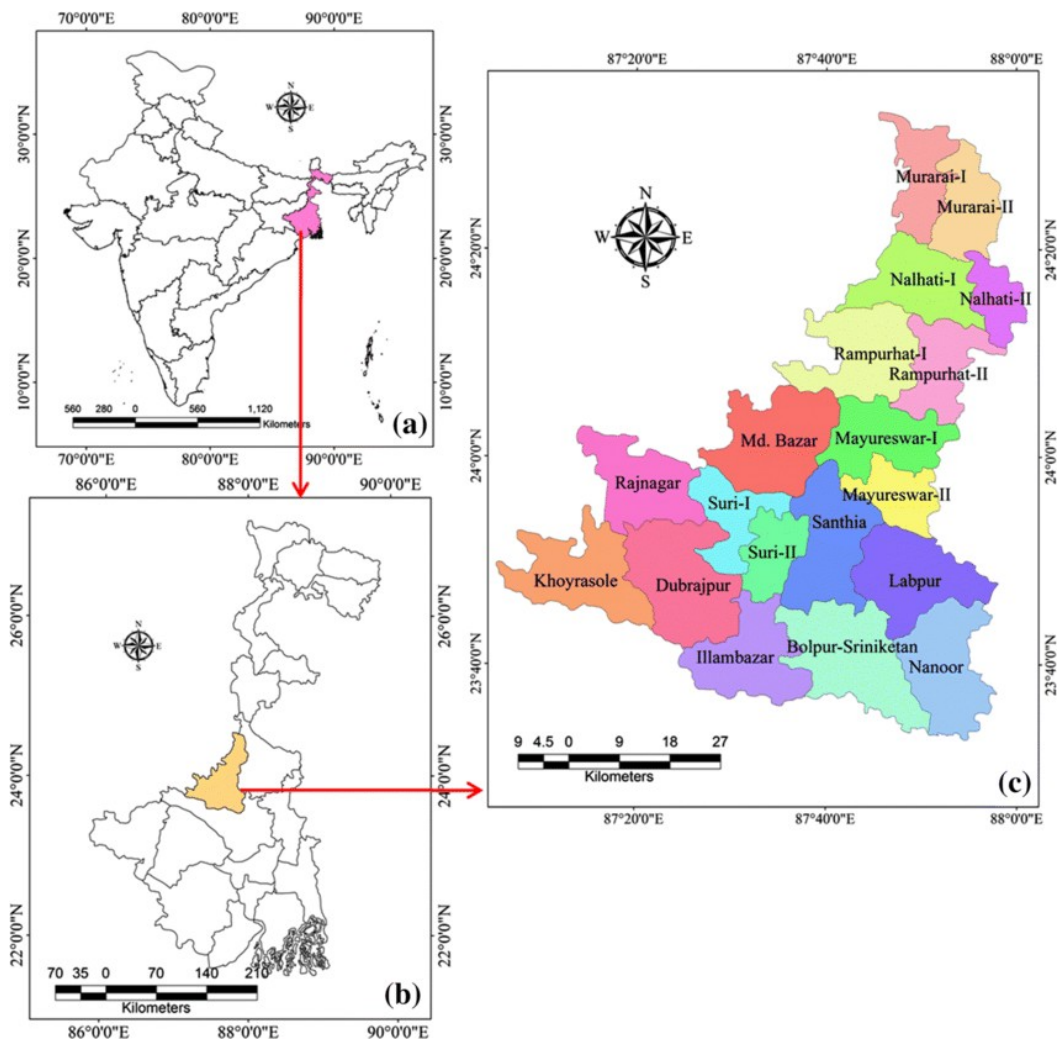
Birbhum shares its boundaries with East & West Bardhaman district to the south and Murshidabad district to the east and northeast. On the western and northwestern sides, it is bordered by the Jharkhand districts of Jamtara, Dumka, and Pakur. Administratively, Birbhum is divided into three subdivisions: Suri Sadar, Bolpur, and Rampurhat. The district includes nineteen Community Development Blocks and nineteen Panchayat Samities, which together contain 169 Gram Panchayats and a total of 2,473 villages. Politically, the district is represented by two Lok Sabha constituencies and eleven Assembly constituencies.

**I) Birbhum District Administration Profile :**

Table 1: Administration details of Birbhum

Feature	Details
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<b>Headquarters</b>	Suri.
<b>Subdivisions</b>	Three: Suri Sadar, Bolpur, and Rampurhat.
<b>Administration</b>	19 Community Development Blocks, 19 Panchayat Samities, 169 Gram Panchayats, and 2,473 villages.
<b>Politics</b>	Represented by 2 Lok Sabha (Parliament) constituencies and 11 Assembly constituencies.



**Figure-1 : Map of Birbhum District under West Bengal, Source: - Birbhum District Web Portal**

### 3) Objectives of the Study

The study has been undertaken with the following main objectives:



1. To examine the position of Birbhum district regarding the education of Muslim women within the context of India.
2. To trace the trend and progress of Muslim women's education in West Bengal.
3. To assess the literacy rate and educational level of Muslim women in Birbhum district.
4. To identify the socio-economic and cultural barriers affecting Muslim women's access to education.
5. To evaluate the impact of government initiatives and schemes aimed at improving educational development among Muslim women.
6. To discuss the major problems faced by Muslim women in pursuing education and to suggest appropriate solutions for overcoming these challenges.
7. To recommend measures for further educational advancement and empowerment of Muslim women in Birbhum district.

#### **4) Database**

The database for the study on the educational status of Muslim women in Birbhum district of West Bengal comprises both primary and secondary data sources.

The secondary data were gathered from various authenticated and official sources such as government reports including the Census of India, The Statistical Abstract, District Statistical Handbooks, and the Report of the Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics (BAES). Publications from the West Bengal Board of Madrasah Education, Ministry of Minority Affairs and West Bengal State Election Commission were also consulted. In addition, non-governmental reports, books, newspapers, journals, periodicals, and scholarly articles related to Muslim women's education, political participation, economy, occupation, marital status, and demography were reviewed. The district- and state-level census reports from 2001 and 2011 were used extensively to prepare base maps and obtain detailed demographic and socio-economic data.

Where secondary data proved insufficient or outdated, primary data were collected through field surveys. The survey was conducted in three Muslim-majority blocks—Murarai-II (Rampurhat subdivision), Dubrajpur (Suri Sadar subdivision), and Illambazar (Bolpur subdivision). This mixed database approach



enabled a comprehensive, up-to-date, and locally relevant analysis of the educational condition of Muslim women in Birbhum district.

### 5) Methodology

The research methodology for this study on the educational status of Muslim women in Birbhum district of West Bengal involved a field survey conducted in the three blocks with the highest Muslim population under the district's three subdivisions. These blocks are Murarai-II under Rampurhat Subdivision, Dubrajpur under Suri Sadar Subdivision, and Illambazar under Bolpur Subdivision. A random sampling technique was employed to select 100 households from each block, making a total sample size of 300 households. Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to the selected households, focusing on aspects such as literacy levels, enrollment status, educational attainment, and socio-economic factors affecting Muslim women's education. The survey also included qualitative inputs from interviews and discussions with students, parents, and local education experts to provide a comprehensive understanding of the educational challenges and opportunities within the communities. This mixed-method approach ensured balanced quantitative data supplemented by rich contextual insights, facilitating a nuanced analysis of the educational conditions of Muslim women across these three important areas of Birbhum district.

### 6) Discussion & Findings

**Table 2 : Total literacy rate of West Bengal (in percentage)**

Year	Total literacy rate of West Bengal	Male literacy rate	Female literacy rate	Gap between male & Female
1951	24.42	32.39	11.21	21.18
1961	29.28	36.28	15.22	21.06
1971	33.05	42.84	22.08	20.76
1981	48.56	54.22	31.12	23.1
1991	57.7	67.8	46.6	21.2
2001	69	77	59.6	17.4
2011	76.26	81.69	70.5	11.19

Source: Based on Census Report, 1951-2011, Govt. of India.



The literacy pattern of West Bengal from 1951 to 2011 reflects a long and steady journey of educational progress in the state. In 1951, the total literacy rate was only 24.42 percent, which indicates that a large portion of the population remained outside the reach of formal education. Over the next sixty years, there was continuous improvement in the overall literacy scenario, and by 2011, the total literacy rate had reached 76.26 percent. This remarkable growth clearly shows the success of various educational reforms, government initiatives, and social awareness campaigns that aimed to expand access to education for all sections of society.

The male literacy rate increased from 32.39 percent in 1951 to 81.69 percent in 2011. This gradual rise highlights how education among men became more common as schools and colleges spread across both rural and urban areas. However, while men continued to dominate the educated population in the early decades, the pace of growth in male literacy started to stabilise after 1991, indicating that the focus gradually shifted towards improving literacy among women and marginalised groups.

The female literacy rate presents an even more encouraging picture of social transformation. In 1951, only 11.21 percent of women in West Bengal were literate, reflecting the deep-rooted social and economic barriers that limited women's access to education. Over time, the situation changed significantly, and by 2011, the female literacy rate rose to 70.5 percent. This sharp rise can be attributed to the combined effect of state-led literacy missions, community participation, and greater awareness among families about the importance of educating girls. Programmes such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the National Literacy Mission, and Mid-day Meal Scheme helped in breaking traditional barriers and motivating more girls to attend school and continue their education.

The gap between male and female literacy rates also shows a clear trend towards gender equality. In 1951, the literacy gap was 21.18 percentage points, showing that women were far behind men in terms of education. For several decades, this gap remained almost the same, but from 1991 onwards, a visible reduction started to occur. By 2001, the gap had reduced to 17.4 points, and by 2011 it further declined to only 11.19 points. This continuous narrowing of the literacy gap signifies a major achievement in women's empowerment and the effectiveness of policies designed to improve female education.

In summary, the data clearly reveals that West Bengal has made remarkable progress in increasing literacy and reducing gender disparities in education from 1951 to 2011. The continuous rise in both male and female literacy rates and the sharp reduction in the gender gap highlight the growing importance placed on education as a means of social and economic development. The improvement in female literacy is particularly noteworthy, as it reflects a broader social change where women have gained more

opportunities to learn, work, and participate actively in society. However, despite these positive developments, there is still a need to ensure equal access to quality education for all, particularly among women belonging to marginalised and minority communities, so that the benefits of literacy can reach every section of the population.

<b>District Name</b>	<b>Total 2001</b>	<b>Male 2001</b>	<b>Female 2001</b>	<b>Male-Female Gap 2001</b>	<b>Total 2011</b>	<b>Male 2011</b>	<b>Female 2011</b>	<b>Male-Female Gap 2011</b>
<b>West Bengal (State Total)</b>	68.68	77.02	59.61	17.41	77.08	82.67	71.16	11.51
<b>Bankura</b>	65.88	80.2	50.8	29.4	70.95	81	60.88	20.12
<b>Bardhaman</b>	70	81.5	62.2	19.3	77.15	82.88	70.89	11.99
<b>Birbhum</b>	62.26	72.6	52.2	20.4	70.3	77.92	62.82	15.1
<b>Dakshin Dinajpur</b>	68.38	77	59.2	17.8	73.86	80.3	66.85	13.45
<b>Darjiling</b>	73.69	82	65.2	16.8	79.08	86.24	71.86	14.38
<b>Howrah</b>	77.03	83.9	70.2	13.7	83.85	87.89	79.62	8.27
<b>Hugli</b>	78.01	84.2	71.2	13	82.55	87.8	76.84	10.96
<b>Jalpaiguri</b>	63.62	74.6	52.3	22.3	70.95	80.63	60.68	19.95
<b>Kochbihar</b>	67.21	76.9	57	19.9	75.49	81.82	68.66	13.16
<b>Kolkata</b>	80.21	84.8	75	9.8	86.28	88.33	83.58	4.75
<b>Malda</b>	50.93	60.2	42.5	17.7	62.73	67.29	57.39	9.9
<b>Murshidabad</b>	57.26	65.8	47.9	17.9	66.59	70.62	62.66	7.96
<b>Nadia</b>	65.46	72.9	57.3	15.6	74.96	79.87	69.65	10.22
<b>North 24 Parganas</b>	78.49	84.4	72.3	12.1	84.08	87.56	80.3	7.26



<b>Paschim &amp; Purba Medinipur</b>	76.24	85.2	68.6	16.6	80.06	87.49	72.64	14.85
<b>Puruliya</b>	55.58	69.6	39.2	30.4	64.47	77.67	51.25	26.42
<b>Dakshin 24 Parganas</b>	75.26	82.1	67.9	14.2	78.49	84.42	72.24	12.18
<b>Uttar Dinajpur</b>	47.8	58.3	36.2	22.1	60.13	66.72	52.3	14.42

Source: Based on Census Report 2001 & 2011, Govt. of India.

The State of West Bengal demonstrated a strong educational performance relative to the national average. In 2011, the state's overall literacy rate stood at 77.08 % , surpassing the all-India figure of 74.04% . Crucially, the gender gap in literacy was also considerably narrower in West Bengal ( 11.51 % ) compared to India as a whole ( 16.68 % ). This difference is a reflection of faster growth in female literacy within the state. Over the decade, West Bengal successfully reduced its gender gap from 17.41 % in 2001 to 11.51 % in 2011.

### I) Analysis of District-wise Literacy and Gender Parity

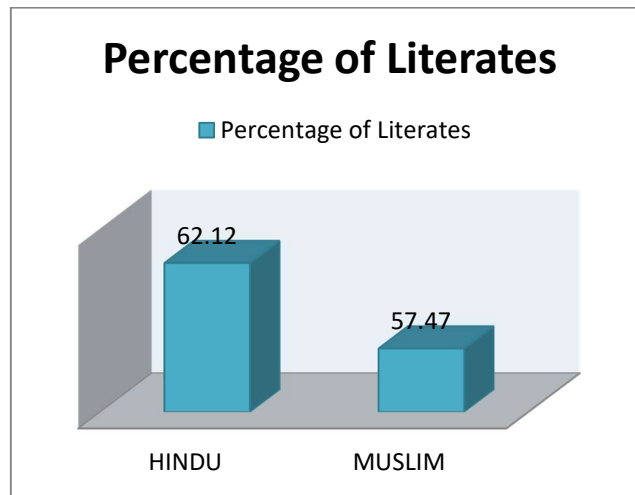
While the state average is promising, the district-level data highlights a varied landscape. Highly urbanized areas like Kolkata showcased the highest overall literacy ( 86.28 % ) and the smallest gender gap ( 4.75 % ) in 2011, aligning with typical urban socio-economic advantages. Similarly, North 24 Parganas and Howrah reported high literacy rates and narrow gaps ( 7.26 % and 8.27 % , respectively), indicating successful near-parity.

In stark contrast, districts in the western and northern parts of the state struggled with both low literacy and severe gender disparities. Puruliya consistently recorded the lowest female literacy rate (rising from 39.20 % to 51.25 % ) and consequently held the widest gender gap in 2011 at 26.42 % . Bankura also registered a gap exceeding 20.12 % .

### II) Detailed Focus on Birbhum District

The Birbhum district falls into a middle category, demonstrating steady improvement but remaining below the state average. The district's overall literacy rate increased from 62.26 % in 2001 to 70.30 % in 2011. While this is an improvement of over 8 percentage points, it placed Birbhum behind the state's

77.08 % average in 2011. The gender gap in Birbhum, defined as the difference between male and female literacy, was 20.40 % in 2001. By 2011, this gap had significantly narrowed to 15.10 % . This reduction of 5.3 percentage points indicates that female literacy in Birbhum saw a commendable rate of growth (from 52.20 % to 62.82 % ). However, the remaining gap of 15.10 % still exceeds the state's average gap of 11.51 % , suggesting that while progress is being made, the challenge of achieving gender parity in education remains more pronounced in Birbhum than in the most advanced parts of West Bengal.



**Figure 2 : Percentage of Literates Comparison between Hindu & Muslim**

Source: Based on Census Report 2011, Govt. of India.

The table presents the literacy rates among Hindu and Muslim female populations in Birbhum district according to the Census of India, 2011. It shows that 62.12 percent of Hindu females and 57.47 percent of Muslim females are literate. Although the difference in percentage may appear moderate, it reflects significant social and educational disparities between the two communities.

A literacy rate of 62.12 percent among Hindu females indicates a comparatively stronger presence of educational attainment in that group. This may be related to greater access to schooling facilities, relatively better economic conditions, and a higher level of social awareness regarding girls' education within the Hindu community of Birbhum. Over the years, government programs such as Sarva Shiksha Mission and Mid Day Meal Scheme have helped improve attendance and literacy among girls in general, but the benefits appear to be unevenly distributed.



In contrast, the Muslim female literacy rate of 57.47 percent is notably lower. This gap highlights the persistent educational disadvantage faced by the Muslim community in the district. Several factors may contribute to this disparity: limited access to nearby schools, lower household income levels, early marriages, and conservative social norms that restrict girls' education beyond primary levels. Studies, including the Sachar Committee Report, have shown similar trends across many parts of West Bengal, where Muslim women continue to experience comparatively lower educational attainment and fewer opportunities.

The 4.65 percentage point difference between Hindu and Muslim female literacy rates signifies the ongoing need for targeted educational initiatives. Special schemes such as the West Bengal Minority Development and Finance Corporation's (WBMDFC) Aikashree scholarship program are important policy tools that encourage school retention and higher education among Muslim girls. Strengthening such interventions could help narrow the literacy gap and promote inclusive development.

Overall, while Birbhum district has made progress in improving female literacy since independence, community-based disparities remain evident. Addressing these differences through inclusive educational planning, awareness campaigns, and gender-sensitive policies will be vital for achieving equitable educational outcomes in the district.

**Table 4 : Educational Qualification Muslim Women/Girl in Different Level of Education.**

<b>Educational Level</b>	<b>Murarai-I Block</b>	<b>Illambazar Block</b>	<b>Dubrajpur Block</b>	<b>Average(%)</b>
Primary Level (Class I-V)	18	15	10	14.33
Upper Primary Level (Class VI-VIII)	62	58	47	55.67
Secondary Level (Class IX-X)	68	62	65	65.00
Higher Secondary Level (Class XI-XII)	24	30	36	30.00
Graduation (B.A./B.Sc./B.Com., etc.)	22	26	32	26.67
Post-Graduation	4	6	7	5.67



(M.A./M.Sc./M.Com., etc.)				
Technical/Vocational Course	2	3	3	2.67
Number of Respondent	200	200	200	

(Source: Primary Survey in Murarai-II, Illambazar, & Dubrajpur Block, September 2024)

The table provides a comparative analysis of the educational attainment profile across three blocks—Murarai-I, Illambazar, and Dubrajpur—likely within the Birbhum district of West Bengal, as suggested by the previous analysis. The figures represent the percentage of respondents who have attained a specific educational level. This profile offers valuable insight into the educational structure and human capital development at the local level.

### I) Structure of Educational Attainment

The most common level of educational achievement across all three blocks is the Secondary Level (Class IX-X), with an average attainment rate of 65.00%. This suggests that the majority of the population surveyed has successfully completed at least 10 years of schooling. This is closely followed by the Upper Primary Level (Class VI-VIII), which has an average attainment of 55.67%. The high prevalence of these two mid-level educational categories indicates a functional schooling system capable of retaining students through the elementary and secondary stages.

However, the educational pyramid narrows significantly at the higher levels. The proportion of individuals who have reached Higher Secondary (Class XI-XII) drops to an average of 30.00%, indicating a substantial dropout rate after the Secondary level examinations. Attainment in Graduation (B.A./B.Sc./B.Com.) is further reduced to an average of 26.67%. Notably, the rate of Post-Graduation falls to a minimal average of 5.67%, and Technical/Vocational Course attainment is the lowest at just 2.67%. The extremely low participation in technical/vocational training suggests a critical gap in job-oriented skill development within these blocks, pointing to a potential bottleneck in local economic diversification and employment opportunities.

### II) Inter-Block Variations

Distinct differences exist in educational profiles among the three blocks:



- Dubrajpur exhibits the highest attainment levels in the higher educational categories, recording 36% for Higher Secondary, 32% for Graduation, and 7% for Post-Graduation. This suggests a relatively better-educated population in this block, potentially benefiting from superior access to higher education infrastructure or greater socio-economic resources dedicated to education.
- Murarai-I has the lowest attainment in the tertiary and professional sectors, with the lowest figures for Graduation (22%), Post-Graduation (4%), and Technical/Vocational courses (2%). Conversely, it reports the highest attainment at the most basic level, Primary Level (Class I-V), at 18%. This dual characteristic implies that while a slightly larger share of the population in Murarai-I completes initial schooling, a much smaller proportion manages to ascend to college-level and advanced education, reflecting pronounced challenges in educational progression.
- Illambazar generally occupies the middle ground, with its figures consistently falling between the other two blocks across all educational levels, reflecting an intermediate stage of educational development.

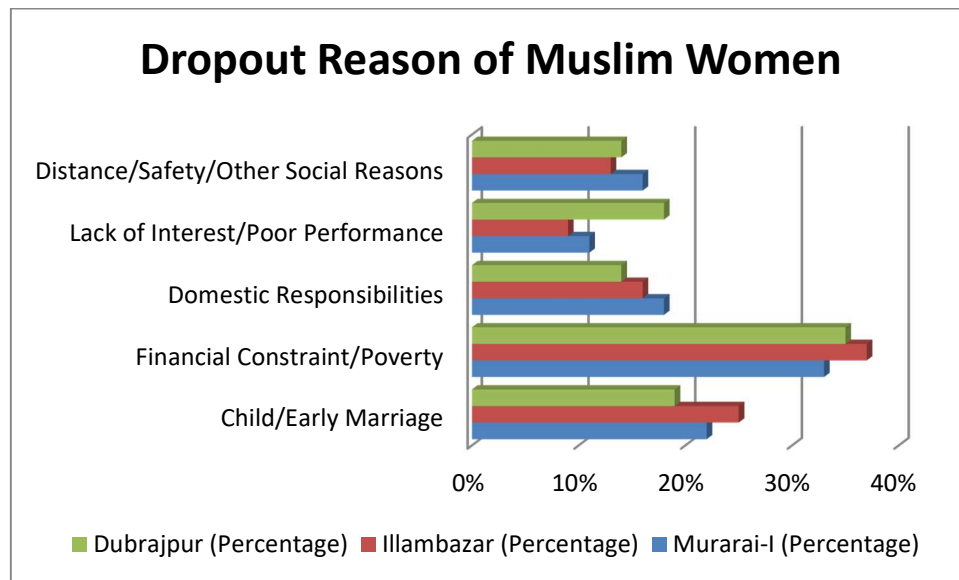
In summary, the data reflects a successful basic and secondary schooling framework but highlights a significant attrition problem beyond Class X. The low rates of technical and vocational training, coupled with the block-specific disparities—particularly the educational disadvantage observed in Murarai-I relative to Dubrajpur at the tertiary level—suggest an urgent need for targeted intervention to improve retention, facilitate access to higher education, and integrate job-oriented skills training into the local educational landscape.

**Table 5: Analysis of Dropout Reasons for Muslim Girls/Women**

Dropout Reason	Murarai-I (Percentage)	Illambazar (Percentage)	Dubrajpur (Percentage)	Average (Percentage)	Key Contextual Findings
Child/Early Marriage	22%	25%	19%	22%	This is consistently reported as the single largest reason for dropout, especially after the secondary level. Parents often prioritize marriage due to social customs and a perceived need for security.



Financial Constraint/Poverty	33%	37%	35%	35%	Economic hardship is the second major factor. Families struggle to bear even minimal costs (like transport, books, or fees) and often require girls to contribute to household income or save money.
Domestic Responsibilities	18%	16%	14%	16%	Girls are often withdrawn from school to manage household chores (caring for siblings, fetching water/fuel) or assist the family in home-based economic activities.
Lack of Interest/Poor Performance	11%	9%	18%	13%	This includes girls feeling unable to cope with studies or a lack of motivation due to a limited perception of the future benefit of education.
Distance/Safety/Other Social Reasons	16%	13%	14%	14%	Factors like the long distance to secondary/higher secondary schools, parental concerns about safety, and adherence to cultural norms like the Purdah system restrict mobility and continuation of education.



**Figure 3: Dropout Reason of Muslim Women**

(Source: Primary Survey in Murarai-II, Illambazar, &Dubrajpur Block,September 2024)

The following analysis details the educational status of Muslim women in the Birbhum district, specifically examining attainment levels and the structural factors contributing to school dropout across the Murarai-I, Illambazar, and Dubrajpur blocks.

#### **I) Contextualizing Educational Disparity in Birbhum**

The educational environment in the Birbhum district provides a challenging backdrop for female educational advancement. While the state of West Bengal as a whole made significant progress in reducing its gender literacy gap to 11.51 % by 2011, the Birbhum district lagged behind, reporting a wider male-female literacy gap of 15.10 % . This demographic context indicates that, even before analyzing the sub-group data, the region struggles with pervasive gender inequality in educational access and retention. The subsequent data on Muslim women in the region must, therefore, be viewed as an exacerbation of this existing regional disparity.

#### **II) Attainment Profile and the Educational Funnel**

The data on educational attainment across the three blocks reveals a distinct pattern of successful enrollment at the foundational levels, followed by a severe and accelerating attrition rate as students progress up the educational ladder. The highest level of completion for the surveyed population is the



Secondary Level (Class IX-X), achieved by an average of 65.00 % of respondents, which suggests that the primary and secondary schooling infrastructure is largely accessible.

However, the educational profile narrows sharply thereafter, illustrating the failure of the system—or the community—to retain women for tertiary education. Attainment in Higher Secondary (Class XI-XII) drops precipitously to an average of 30.00 % , and completion of Graduation (B.A./B.Sc./B.Com.) is only slightly lower at 26.67 % . Furthermore, advanced specialization is minimal, with Post-Graduation and Technical/Vocational Courses recording the lowest completion rates at 5.67 % and 2.67 % respectively. This bottlenecking effect clearly establishes that the critical phase for educational discontinuation occurs immediately following secondary school. Notably, the Murarai-I block consistently records the lowest attainment across the tertiary categories, suggesting it faces the most severe challenges in educational progression relative to the other two blocks.

### III) Structural Barriers to Educational Retention

The analysis of dropout reasons provides direct empirical evidence for the observed educational attrition, identifying the core socio-economic and cultural barriers preventing educational continuity for Muslim women. The findings reveal that dropout is not primarily due to academic deficiency but rather to external, structural constraints.

The single most dominant cause of dropout is Financial Constraint/Poverty, cited by an average of 35.00 % of respondents. This underscores the harsh economic reality where families prioritize immediate subsistence needs over the long-term investment in female education, often requiring girls to contribute to household income or necessitating their withdrawal to save on associated schooling costs.

The second and third major factors are culturally and traditionally rooted. Child/Early Marriage accounts for 22.00 % of dropouts, confirming that social pressure and the perceived need for security through early spousal arrangement remain a significant disincentive to academic continuation, especially at the critical post-puberty and post-secondary stages. This is reinforced by the factor of Domestic Responsibilities, which contributes 16.00 % of dropouts, revealing the gendered division of labor where girls are withdrawn to assume responsibilities such as child-care and household management. Collectively, these three socio-economic and cultural factors are responsible for over 70 % of all recorded dropouts.

Finally, logistical challenges, including Distance/Safety/Other Social Reasons (averaging 14.00 % ), indicate that parental concern over safe access to higher educational institutions and adherence to



conservative norms that restrict female mobility contribute to the decision to discontinue schooling. These systemic factors demonstrate that meaningful improvement in the educational status of Muslim women in Birbhum necessitates interventions that address not only school access but also the underlying poverty, social conservatism, and patriarchal norms that perpetuate high dropout rates

**Table-6 : Analysis of Parental Awareness on Educational Schemes**

Area of Awareness	Murarai-I (%)	Illambazar (%)	Dubrajpur (%)	Key Observations & Context
Knowledge of RTE (Right to Education) Act	10%	15%	12%	Awareness is generally limited to the fact that primary education is free and compulsory. Detailed knowledge of legal provisions, grievance redressal, or specific entitlements is low.
Knowledge of General Government Schemes (e.g., Mid-Day Meal, Free Books/Uniforms)	75%	80%	70%	Awareness is highest for these schemes as they are tangible benefits delivered directly through the schools, acting as a crucial incentive for enrollment.
Knowledge of WBMDFC Scholarships (e.g., Aikyaashree)	40%	50%	45%	Moderate awareness exists, but clarity on the application process, documentation requirements, and submission deadlines is often poor, particularly among less-educated parents.
Knowledge of Kanyashree Prakalpa	85%	90%	88%	Awareness is near-universal due to aggressive promotion and the significant direct financial benefit, which has proven highly effective in reducing dropout rates at the secondary level.

(Source: Primary Survey in Murarai-II, Illambazar, & Dubrajpur Block, September 2024)

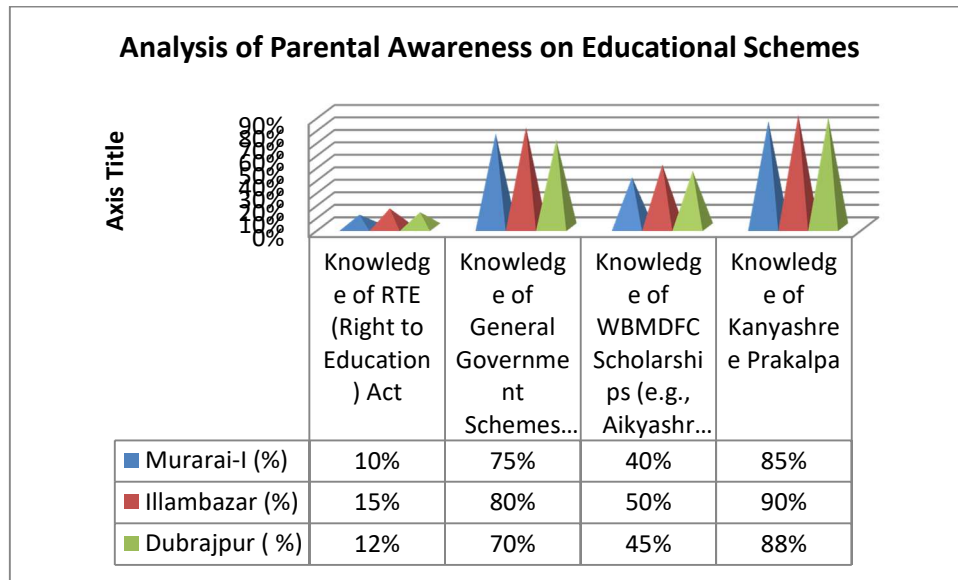


Figure-4 : **Analysis of Parental Awareness on Educational Schemes**

(Source: Primary Survey in Murarai-II, Illambazar, & Dubrajpur Block, September 2024)

The table presents a comparative analysis of parental awareness regarding various educational schemes across three blocks of Birbhum district—Murarai-I, Illambazar, and Dubrajpur—which are areas with significant Muslim populations. The purpose of this analysis is to understand how far government educational initiatives and welfare schemes have reached the households of Muslim women, whose educational status is often shaped by the level of parental knowledge and motivation.

The data reveal that awareness of the Right to Education (RTE) Act remains notably low in all three blocks, with figures ranging only between 0.1% and 0.15%. This indicates that a large proportion of parents are not fully aware of the legal provisions guaranteeing free and compulsory education for children. Such a lack of awareness likely limits their ability to demand educational rights or to ensure that their daughters remain in school.

In contrast, a higher level of understanding is observed regarding general government schemes, such as mid-day meals or free textbooks, where awareness levels range between 70% and 80%. This relatively better awareness can be attributed to the direct visibility and immediate benefits of such schemes at the school level. Parents are more likely to recognise these programmes because they directly affect their children’s daily schooling experience.

Awareness of West Bengal Minority Development and Finance Corporation (WBMDFC) scholarships, such as *Aikyashree* or *Talimi* grants, is found to be moderate, between 40% and 50% across



the surveyed blocks. Although these schemes specifically target minority students, especially Muslim girls, the partial awareness suggests that many potential beneficiaries are still excluded due to communication gaps or bureaucratic barriers. The lack of full understanding about eligibility, documentation, and application processes may also discourage participation.

On the other hand, awareness of the Kanyashree Prakalpa, a flagship programme promoting girls' education and discouraging early marriage, is strikingly high—between 85% and 90%. The near-universal recognition of this scheme across all study areas reflects its wide publicity and the strong involvement of local administrative units in promoting it. The programme's financial incentives and extensive media coverage have made it a household name, particularly among families with adolescent daughters.

Overall, the table highlights a mixed pattern of parental awareness—low for legal and institutional frameworks like the RTE Act, moderate for targeted scholarships, and high for popular incentive-based schemes. This suggests that while economic incentives can successfully motivate families to educate their daughters, a deeper awareness of rights-based and long-term educational opportunities remains limited. For Muslim women in Birbhum, such disparities in awareness contribute to uneven educational progress and hinder empowerment through education. Strengthening outreach, particularly through local schools, community leaders, and religious institutions, could therefore play a crucial role in bridging these awareness gaps and ensuring more equitable access to educational benefits.

## **7) Factors Affecting Education of Muslim Women**

### **1. Economic Constraints:**

Many Muslim families belong to low-income groups. The cost of schooling, even when minimal, becomes a burden.

### **2. Social and Cultural Barriers:**

Traditional beliefs sometimes discourage girls from attending schools far from home. Parental fear regarding safety and cultural norms contribute to early dropout.

### **3. Infrastructure and Accessibility:**

Rural schools often lack female teachers, proper sanitation, and transport facilities, making attendance difficult for adolescent girls.



4. Early Marriage:

Early marriage remains a major cause of discontinuation of education among Muslim girls in rural Birbhum.

5. Lack of Awareness:

Parents often have limited understanding of the long-term benefits of education, especially for girls.

### 8) Role of Government Programmes

Government initiatives have played an important role in promoting girls' education in Birbhum:

- Sarva Shiksha Mission (SSM): Encouraged universal elementary education and reduced the gender gap in primary schooling.
- Kanyashree Prakalpa: Provided financial incentives to adolescent girls to remain in school and delay marriage.
- Sabuj Sathi: Distribution of bicycles to students, including Muslim girls, improved mobility and attendance.
- Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarships for Minorities: Supported students from low-income Muslim families.

While these schemes have improved enrolment, retention remains a concern. More community-based awareness programmes are needed to make these schemes effective at the grassroots level.

### 9) Importance of Muslim Women Education

Education for women is very important for making any group and country better. Women play huge roles—as wives, mothers, and workers—and they help shape society. A mother who has gone to school knows that her daughters need an education just as much as her sons, helping the next generation succeed.

#### I) How Education Helps the Country and the Economy:

Education is turning women into a powerful force for better economics. When women can learn, they gain freedom and power, which directly leads to financial gains for the country. Educated women work in many fields—like the army, social work, business, and teaching—helping the nation grow. Also,



education is a good weapon against many bad social acts. A woman who is educated can earn her own money, so she doesn't have to rely on anyone else.

## **II) Why Muslim Women's Education is Key**

Education is the best way to lift up the Muslim community in terms of social standing and money. For Muslim women, learning is special because it brings equality, strength, and progress both at home and in public life. It's not just a personal right; it is a main reason for the community to move forward.

## **III) Power and Knowing Your Rights**

Schooling gives Muslim women knowledge about their rights, duties, and chances. An educated woman can make her own choices, share her thoughts, and take part in community activities with confidence. This knowledge helps her fight against harmful traditions like early marriage and unequal treatment.

## **IV) Earning Money and Being Independent**

Education opens the door to jobs and ways to make money. When Muslim women are educated, they can work, start small businesses, or become respected workers like teachers and nurses. Being able to earn money raises their respect and lets them have a bigger say in family decisions.

## **V) Better Families and Future Generations**

An educated woman helps her family live a better life. She knows the value of good health and clean habits, and she makes sure her children get the right education. So, women's schooling helps raise educated kids and makes the whole community stronger.

## **VI) Helping Society and the Country**

Educated Muslim women get more involved in community work and national development. Their work in areas like health and education helps bring social peace and fairness. By closing the gaps between different groups, education helps the country grow stronger together.

## **VII) Fighting Against Poverty**

Not being able to read and write often goes hand-in-hand with being poor. Educated Muslim women can help their families escape poverty by earning money and spending it smartly. Education gives them better skills and access to government aid, which improves their family's money situation.



### **VIII) Making Things Equal**

Education helps Muslim women challenge old ideas and gain equal standing with men. It builds their confidence and teaches them about equal rights. These educated women become great examples for younger girls, encouraging them to go to school and study more.

### **IX) Understanding Religion Better**

Education does not go against religion; in fact, it makes people understand the rules of Islam better, which value knowledge and fairness. Since the holy books encourage both men and women to seek knowledge, educated Muslim women can hold onto their faith while helping modern society in a good way.

### **10) Problems of Muslim's Women Education in Birbhum**

Muslim women in West Bengal and across India have historically remained among the most educationally disadvantaged groups. This persistent backwardness has been evident over a long period, with Muslim girls significantly lagging behind other communities in educational attainment. Several interrelated factors contribute to this educational disparity among Muslim women, including socio-economic constraints, cultural attitudes, institutional barriers, and infrastructural deficiencies. Despite numerous government initiatives aimed at promoting the education of minority groups, the realities faced by Muslim women continue to reflect substantial challenges that hinder their progress in accessing quality education and higher educational opportunities.

#### **I. Lack of Parental Support**

Many parents view girls' education as unnecessary and a burden, believing daughters bring little benefit after marriage, while sons are seen as future supporters.

#### **II. Economic Constraints**

Poor family finances often prevent girls from pursuing education beyond primary level, as economic need pushes them toward household responsibilities or early employment.

#### **III. Child Marriage**

Early marriage remains prevalent, cutting short girls' education and stopping their studies prematurely despite legal reforms and awareness campaigns.



IV. **Misinterpretation of Islamic Principles**

Although Islam respects women's education, some orthodox community members misinterpret religious teachings and discourage girls from attending school.

V. **Societal and Cultural Factors**

Social norms and conservative attitudes contribute to negative perceptions of female education, with some preferring religious instruction at madrasas over formal schooling.

VI. **Negative Attitude Toward Girls' Education**

There is reluctance among families due to fears that highly educated girls may struggle to marry, reinforcing gender bias in educational priorities.

VII. **Preference for Local Teachers**

Parents and students favor local teachers whom they trust and feel comfortable sharing concerns with, believing this makes education safer and more effective.

VIII. **Preference for Girls' Schools**

Most families oppose co-educational schools and prefer sending their daughters only to girls' schools, considering these safer and more culturally appropriate.

IX. **Lack of Female Teachers**

The absence of female teachers in schools discourages parents from sending daughters for education, as girls feel more comfortable and secure with female teachers.

X. **Distance to School**

Schools located far from habitations create safety risks, resulting in parents withholding their daughters from higher education due to long travel distances.

XI. **Unfavorable School Environment**

Poor infrastructure and lack of a safe, hygienic, and supportive atmosphere make schools less attractive to girls and their parents, further limiting educational participation.

These combined barriers make it challenging for Muslim girls in Birbhum to continue their education and reach higher academic levels.



### 11) Suggestions for Empowering Muslim Women through Education

- I. A **multidimensional approach** involving government departments, educational institutions, and NGOs should be adopted to address the barriers that prevent Muslim women from accessing education.
- II. **Religious superstitions and social taboos** that discourage women's education must be removed through awareness campaigns and community discussions.
- III. **Confidence-building programmes** and leadership training should be introduced for Muslim girls to help them participate actively in social and educational activities.
- IV. Families should be made aware of the **long-term benefits of education** for girls, including social security and economic independence.
- V. The government should **expand free and compulsory education** programmes for Muslim women at all levels to ensure inclusion and accessibility.
- VI. The **right to employment** should be recognised as a fundamental right for Muslim women to encourage them to pursue education and work.
- VII. **Reservation policies** in public and government sectors should be implemented for educated Muslim women to enhance their job opportunities.
- VIII. **Vocational, technical, and professional training** programmes should be introduced to promote self-reliance and employability among Muslim women.
- IX. NGOs should play an active role in **spreading awareness about scholarships, government schemes, and financial aid** for higher education and self-employment.
- X. The **Sachar Committee's recommendations** should be implemented effectively to uplift the educational and economic status of Muslim women.
- XI. **Local industries** should be encouraged to create job opportunities for Muslim women within their communities.
- XII. There should be an **increase in recruitment and reservation of Muslim women teachers** in both women's and co-educational institutions.



- XIII. Awareness campaigns should be organised among **Muslim men and women about educational rights and gender equality** in Islam.
- XIV. **Digital literacy and computer education** should be integrated into early education to prepare Muslim girls for the modern world.
- XV. **Transportation and safety facilities** should be improved, especially in rural areas, to ensure regular school attendance and reduce dropout rates.

#### 12) Possible Solutions for Improving Muslim Women's Education

- I. **Community involvement** is essential; families, religious leaders, and educators should work together to promote women's education.
- II. **Vocational and skill-based education** should be expanded to increase women's earning capacity and prepare them for various professional roles.
- III. **Awareness programmes for parents** should be conducted to highlight the importance of educating girls.
- IV. **Scholarships and financial assistance** should be provided to meritorious and economically disadvantaged Muslim girls.
- V. **Separate toilets and sanitation facilities** should be ensured in all schools to promote hygiene and comfort for girl students.
- VI. **Appointment of trained female teachers** is necessary to provide a safe and encouraging environment for Muslim girls.
- VII. **Technical education and computer literacy** should be introduced to help Muslim women gain employable skills.
- VIII. **Family education programmes** should be encouraged so that both parents and children understand the value of learning.
- IX. **Free uniforms, books, and learning materials** should be distributed to poor students to reduce financial burdens.



- X. **Accommodation facilities for teachers** near rural schools should be arranged to attract qualified professionals.
- XI. **Social conservatism and prejudice** must be reduced through education and continuous community dialogue.
- XII. **Employment opportunities** should be expanded in various fields such as teaching, nursing, and social work to encourage more Muslim women to join the workforce.

### 13) Conclusion

The study on the educational status of Muslim women in Birbhum District of West Bengal reveals a complex relationship between social conditions, economic limitations, and educational opportunities. Although government initiatives such as *Kanyashree Prakalpa*, *Aikyashree Scholarships*, and the *Sarva Shiksha Mission* have made positive contributions, their impact remains uneven due to limited awareness, gender bias, and traditional social practices. Many Muslim women continue to face barriers such as poverty, early marriage, and lack of parental motivation, which collectively restrict their access to higher education and employment opportunities.

The analysis shows that while enrolment at the primary level has improved, dropout rates among Muslim girls remain high, especially at the secondary and higher levels. The low awareness of rights-based schemes such as the Right to Education Act further weakens the community's capacity to demand educational equality. On the other hand, the success of incentive-based schemes like *Kanyashree* demonstrates that targeted financial support and strong publicity can effectively motivate families to continue their daughters' education.

Overall, the findings suggest that the empowerment of Muslim women in Birbhum through education requires a more inclusive and community-centred approach. Strengthening awareness programmes, involving local religious and social leaders, improving the quality of schools, and ensuring social acceptance of women's education are essential steps towards sustainable change. True progress will come only when education is recognised not merely as a means to financial security but as a fundamental right and a tool for social transformation among Muslim women in Birbhum district.



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