



Partition of Bengal and socio-economic and political livelihood of Muslims of West Bengal: A Sociological Study

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ABSTRACT

The partition of India was an unexpected result of communal politics beneath the nationalism movement and the result of the disastrous milieu of national politics after the Second World War, which created West Bengal and East Pakistan. After partition, numerous Hindu refugees entered from East Pakistan to the newly created West Bengal in different phases. In comparison to that, less numbers of Muslims go from West Bengal to East Pakistan. The majority of them remained in West Bengal. The present study focuses on the socio-economic, political, and cultural consequences of the partition of Bengal in 1947 on the Muslims of West Bengal and their influences on their status in the present. The study employs a socio-historical and qualitative approach with an extensive review of secondary sources like books, journals, articles, news reports, historical records, govt. Gazetteer, etc. However, the social, economic, and political situation was devastating after the partition. The socio-economic livelihood of both communities was heavily affected by riots, poverty, inflation, displacement, etc. Due to partition, Muslims were generally in a minority position in West Bengal and Hindus in East Bengal. The research highlights how communal violence and systemic biases restructured the livelihoods of Bengali Muslims. In contrast to the relatively smoother integration experienced by Hindu refugees, Muslims in West Bengal were left marginalized in education, employment, and political representation. The findings underscore the need for targeted policy interventions to address these enduring inequities.

Keywords: Bengali Muslims, Partition of Bengal, Socio-economic Impact, Political Marginalization

Introduction

The Partition of Bengal occurred in 1905 and 1947. But the partition in 1947 had heavily affected the socio-economic structure of Bengal, which reshaped the socio-political landscape in South Asian History. The partition led to the creation of two nations, India and Pakistan. The division of Bengal into West Bengal (India) and East Bengal (East Pakistan, which later became Bangladesh in 1971) had far-reaching manifestations for the region. Socio-economic and political disruption, large-scale communal violence, mass migration, and assault of women were the most significant outcomes of this partition (Chatterji, J: 1995). While the partition was primarily driven by religious and political motivations, its consequences were deeply felt across social, economic, and cultural spheres. As per historical discourses, the impact of partition on Punjab and its turmoil remains equal and significant to the consequences of partition on Bengal and its Muslim population (Chatterji, J: 2007). This study aims to study the multi-dimensional impact of the partition on Bengali society in general and to analyze socio-economic, political and cultural impact on Muslims of West Bengal in Particular. The study also aims to examine the influences of the partition of Bengal in the present status of Muslims of West Bengal. Bengali Muslims, who were a majority in East Bengal but a minority in West Bengal, experienced varying degrees of political disenfranchisement, economic instability, and cultural transformations. While much attention has been given to the Hindu-Muslim divide and the broader impacts of partition, the specific socioeconomic challenges faced by Bengali Muslims in both India and Bangladesh remain underexplored. The Muslim community in West Bengal was significantly affected, facing challenges such as forced migration, economic deprivation, and social reconfiguration.

Women, in particular, experienced gendered violence, displacement, and shifts in societal roles. These socio-economic challenges and hardship may be attributed to their socio-economic, educational backwardness, political powerlessness, and lack of health consciousness.

Review of Literature

W Van (2009) examined the economic and political turmoil in the chapter on East Pakistani livelihoods, which altered the fate of the region the eventual independence of East Pakistan as Bangladesh. The economic policies of Pakistan heavily favored its western wing, leading to significant disparities in wealth and development. East Pakistan made a major contribution to earning foreign money, particularly through jute exports. But the government allocated only a fraction of its budget for the East Bengal, imposing extra economic grievances. The rural economy remained dominant as the majority of people were involved in agricultural activities. But it suffered from low state investment, largely controlled by West Pakistani entrepreneurs, focused on resource extraction rather than sustainable exchanges. As a result, the economic disruption resulted in further destabilized livelihoods. By 1971, thus, the effect of economic neglect, political disenfranchisement, and social unrest culminated in the struggle for independence, which made the Pakistan experiment a disappointment for many East Pakistanis.

Moore (2012) explores, in the literature on the partition: *Everyday Lives and Loyalties in West Bengal*, two contrasting narratives, namely the official state discourse and the personal experiences of refugees. Traditional historiography has largely focused on high politics with an emphasis on state policies and government actions. However, in recent times, the voice of marginalized communities has been continuously tried to be uncovered, including women, peasants, and the lower classes, which were historically veiled from official accounts. The partition led to profound changes in social identities, disrupting kinship relations and traditional occupational structure in the society of Bengal. The government's response to the refugee crisis was largely inadequate, with policies that were reactionary rather than preemptive, often failing to address the long-term rehabilitation needs of migrant people in West Bengal. Scholars such as Urvashi Butalia and Joya Chatterji significantly shifted the historiographical perspective by focusing on oral histories and grassroots experiences. While official documents provide an overarching view of political decisions, the emotional and psychological trauma endured by individuals remains unaccounted for by them, highlighting the necessity of incorporating personal testimonies into partition studies.

Banerjee, M (2015) revealed in the study that the establishment of separate nations based on religion was the main aim behind the partition so that people of each religious group could live peacefully. But a different reality was experienced. Massive violence, deaths of hundreds of thousands, and the displacement of millions were the ultimate result of this partition. Religious oppression of the Hindus led them to leave East Bengal and go to West Bengal. On the other hand, communal tensions and violence faced by the Muslims in West Bengal and in other parts of India led to their displacement. It was like a reverse process. The partition affected society by splitting several families, enhancing and widening communal division, and shattering livelihoods, which are still visible to this day. The division was initially intended as a solution to religious conflict, but instead deepened sectarian division, leading to decades of political instability and social unrest in both India and Pakistan.

Basu (2023) in an article "Female migration and partition of Bengal: Revisiting the memories," studied the gendered dimensions of the partition of Bengal in 1947. Basu revealed various socio-economic hardships experienced by women during partition, like sexual violence, harassment, abduction, forced conversion, and displacement. Basu applied historical analysis, personal narratives, and socio-cultural studies as a multidisciplinary approach in this study. Despite these adversities, many women displayed resilience, playing pivotal roles in rebuilding their families and communities. The study also explores the long-term impact of migration on women's voices in the historical discourse; the research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the Partition's profound consequences.

Mandal (2023) conducted a study on the analysis of the socio-economic status of migrated '*Pata*' and '*Nakshi Kantha*' artists of the Birbhum district of West Bengal, in which he mentioned that they were mainly the inhabitants of Bangladesh. After partition, they migrated to West Bengal. In the present day, they are suffering socio-economic hardships for their livelihoods. Many of them abandoned their ancestral crafts, but some artists tried to preserve their traditional artistic profession. The pressures of modernization and economic hardship are pushing many of them to switch professions for survival. Mandal aims to find out the historical significance of Pata paintings and Nakshi Kantha embroidery by emphasizing their cultural and artistic value. However, due to migration, lack of institutional support, and economic instability, these art forms are declining. The study underscores the need for initiatives to sustain these traditional crafts and improve the livelihoods of the artisans. The findings contribute to discussions on cultural preservation, migration impacts, and economic sustainability for folk artists in India.

Anuttama Banerji (2022) conducted a study on "Bengal's Multiple Partitions," in which she explores the historical and geographical impacts on regional identity and India-Bangladesh relations due to Bengal's partitions in 1905, 1947, and 1971. This study tried to highlight that religious and ethnic divisions have been reinforced. And a sense of "Otherness" has been nurtured among Bengali Hindus and Muslims despite being followers of homogenous Bengali cultural and linguistic traditions and values. This research paper

underscores that the India-Bangladesh relationship has been marred due to the persistent communal tensions, migration crises, and political discourses. This relation is also exacerbated by policies like the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC). The author advocates for increased people-to-people interactions, cross-border cooperation, and policy reforms to mitigate historical animosities and promote stability in South Asia.

Research Gap

Most of the research studies highlight the partition of Bengal and its subsequent impacts on the social, political, and economic life of Bengalis. After partition, Hindus, who did not migrate, became a Minority in East Bengal (East Pakistan) and Muslims in West Bengal. However, there is a paucity of research on the Bengalis who did not migrate but remained where they were, with a special focus on the Muslims of West Bengal.

Objective

The present study aims to analyze socio-economic consequences, changes in demographic composition, and settlement patterns after partitions, which have led to challenges for Muslims. It also aims to make an enquiry into the influences of Bengal's partition on their present socio-economic status in West Bengal.

Methodology

The present study employs a qualitative approach rooted in an extensive review of secondary sources to investigate the socio-economic, political, and cultural impacts of the partition of Bengal. Data and information were gathered from scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, historical records, government gazetteers, and reputable news reports, which provided a comprehensive backdrop for analysis. While contextualizing the issues such as forced migration, displacement, communal violence, lack of security and safety of property, transformation of social livelihood, economic disruption, and political disenfranchisement within the broader socio-historical paradigm of the partition, the study attempts to focus on the identification of these recurring issues. By gathering information from diverse sources, the present study attempts to validate its findings and patterns of marginalization and elasticity among the affected communities, despite limitations in the availability and scope of certain data. This methodological framework facilitated a sturdy exploration of consequences of the partition, socio-economic marginalization, identity crisis and communal politics, from subaltern and marginalization narratives, of Muslims of West Bengal.

Consequences of Partition

The partition of Bengal profoundly affected the lives of millions, disrupting livelihoods and displacing communities. It has far-reaching consequences for minorities on both sides of the border, who were poor, faced violence, discrimination. While the broader consequences of Bengal's partition have been documented, there is a significant paucity of research on its effects on the Muslims of West Bengal after 1947. The paucity of reliable research information, like government reports and scholarly studies, makes it difficult to analyze the social and economic conditions of Muslims following the partition. The West Bengal government surveyed on displaced populations after partition, but it offers only brief references to the Muslim population and Hindu refugees without substantial insights into their experiences.

Before partition, Muslims of West Bengal were more heterogeneous in terms of ethnic origin, occupation, sects, and status than the Muslims in the agrarian tracts of East Bengal. Muslim inhabitants were ethnically, occupationally, and socially more diverse and scattered in the urban setting of southern and in rural track of North West Bengal than their coreligionists in the East Bengal. In urban areas, particularly around Calcutta, 24 Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly, Muslims were engaged in different artisan, crafts, business activities as well as many skilled and unskilled professions such as weavers (Jola), tailors (darjis), barbers (Napitas), or bow-makers (Tirakars), bookbinder, carpenters, cigarette-makers, leather-workers, etc. They were more in number than the very growing English Educated Class of Muslim professionals. On the other hand, Muslims, in the rural track concentrated mostly in Murshidabad, Malda in a larger chunk than Hindus, along with West Dinajpur, Coochbehar, and in part of Birbhum, and smaller number in Bankura, Midnapur, and West Burdwan. They were mostly involved in agricultural activities and scattered in small communities, and more visible with the Hindus of Western Bengal. (Chatterji, J: 2007). Consequently, understanding the impact of Bengal's partition on Muslims and their responses require relying on fragmented and anecdotal evidence, often obscured by complexities (ibid: 2007).

➤ *Demographic change, Migrations and Refugees*

In the immediate aftermath of partition, Hindus migrated to West Bengal, and Muslims relocated to East Bengal. Just after partition, a large number of Muslims migrated to East Bengal due to the communal massacre of thirty thousand Muslims in Bihar in 1946, leading to a decline of the Muslim population from

23% (1946-47) to 12% (1951) in Kolkata. Pakistan Census of 1951 and 1961 shows the Muslims' migration from West Bengal to East Bengal as refugees, around more than a million, which is thought second phase of migration after partition. As per a government report in 1951, around seven lakhs Muslims had left West Bengal, but later, five lakhs returned. In the third phase of migration, it is believed that Muslims migrated in the same magnitudes (around eight lakhs) at the first wave from West Bengal and North India in 1964. It has been roughly measured that around 1.5 million Muslims migrated to East Pakistan in two decades just after partition (Chatterji, J: 2007). Most of them migrated due to communal violence, lack of safety, in the hope of new opportunities, etc. Government servants, most top Muslim officers, orderlies, peons, clerks, tellers, watchmen, police constables, educated people, all moved to East Bengal in sufficient numbers. But the rural poor left West Bengal in a very rough, tough, and extreme situation of communal violence and intimidation. Elite and other resourceful persons shift with the exchange of plots and holdings between Muslims Estate holders of West Bengal and Hindus of East Bengal in legal or informal ways conducted for emigration. Muslims migrated in large numbers from the districts; Nadia, Calcutta, West Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Malda, and the 24 Parganas (Ibid: 2007). Muslims shifted themselves due to communal tension from Hindu majority areas to Muslim majority areas within West Bengal. Many of them migrated from the city to Muslims majority wards or remote areas in the city, and rural areas also led to congestion and ghettoization in Muslim areas. After partition, communal fear pushed many Muslims to leave their house and land and migrate for a short period of time to the border area of Eastern Bengal and remote areas in West Bengal. When they (as refugees) returned to their village and ward of the city found that land and house had been robbed by the local and refugee Hindus in the absence of Muslims. In some cases, Muslims had been forced to leave their homes and land, which led to emigration to Muslim majority areas or districts. The Government and Police failed to protect Muslims in this case, as refugee Hindus have established a political link. "In April 1950, a meeting was held at Hanskhali under the 'presidentship of Bikash Roy (Congress) [at which] he urged the refugees not to vacate Muslim houses occupied by them, nor to allow any Muslim to enter there" (Ibid: 2007). As a result Density of Muslim population increased due to in-migration and reverse migration from East Bengal and other districts of West Bengal to Murshidabad, Malda, Dinajpur, and Birbhum (Ibid: 2007).

➤ **Socio-political Impact**

The partition has very profoundly affected the Muslims of West Bengal in socio-political parameters of their livelihood. Before the partition of 1947, Muslims had been the political master of United Bengal. Their showing off in the socio-cultural life of their neighbourhoods and even in the locality where Hindus outnumbered them was more visible. Partition suddenly curtailed the Muslim majority exposed and vulnerable minority in West Bengal (Ibid: 2007). West Bengal experienced a shift in its demographic composition due to the influx of Hindu refugees from East Bengal. This migration influenced electoral politics, as the refugee population became a considerable constituency. The political discourse in West Bengal began to focus on refugee rehabilitation and integration, leading to the rise of political parties and leaders advocating for their rights and welfare. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI (M)] gained prominence in the state, partly due to its support among the refugee communities, and eventually established a long-standing government from 1977 to 2011. In contrast, Bengali Muslims in West Bengal faced challenges of Identity, citizenship, and communal tensions in post-Partition India (Bagchi, J & Dasgupta, S: 2017). Muslims remaining in West Bengal were the weak and poor, having few or no assets, no connections, and hardly any skills to begin a new life across the border. They lack security and safety; as a result, they assimilated themselves with the existing secular political milieu. But their welcome to the political career was more or less contradictory to the dominant party. Muslims feel deprived of the right to vote intentionally and in an organised manner. In this political scenario, few Muslims can find security and a way back to mainstream politics of the new order. On the other hand, ordinary majority Muslims faced intimidation, harassment, and communal tension in their day-to-day life. Thus, a new line of stratification has emerged among Muslims of West Bengal (Chatterji, J: 2007). Many Bengali Muslims struggled for political representation and faced discrimination in state policies that favoured Hindu populations (Chakrabarty, D: 1990). Despite that, Muslims tried to express their political representatives, but they were never able to show off their political mastery as an independent party; rather, they were the victims of the vote bank policy of the secular dominant political parties in West Bengal. Politically, Bengali Muslims in India have often faced marginalization (Chaterji, J: 2007).

➤ **Socio-economic impact**

The division of Bengal led to significant disruptions in the economic structure of both West Bengal and East Bengal (later Bangladesh), particularly in terms of trade, agriculture, industrial development, and economic linkage that had existed for centuries. It affected both Hindus and Muslims simultaneously. Historically, Bengal functioned as a unified economic zone where the fertile East supplied raw materials and food, while the industrialized West processed these materials and produced goods. West Bengal faced significant challenges, including a substantial food shortage due to the loss of fertile rice-producing districts to East Bengal. By 1959, the state grappled with an annual food deficit of approximately 950,000 tonnes, leading to widespread hunger marches in Kolkata (Chatterji, J: 2007).

Kolkata, which had been the economic hub of undivided Bengal, suffered from the loss of hinterland resources and industrial bases. The disruption of economic activities caused widespread unemployment and increased poverty levels (Islam, S: 1996). In West Bengal, Bengali Muslims found themselves economically disadvantaged, often marginalized from land ownership and employment opportunities due to systematic biases and communal discrimination (Bandyopadhyay, R: 2009). They were often excluded from mainstream economic opportunities and faced discrimination in employment and education (Bagchi, J & Dasgupta, S: 2003). Economic policies favouring the majority Hindu population often resulted in systematic discrimination in employment opportunities (Hasan, M: 2018). Muslims in West Bengal disproportionately found themselves in lower-income occupations, with limited access to government employment and educational opportunities (Engineer, A.A: 2005). Land reform policies in West Bengal did not always benefit Muslim peasants, further entrenching their economic struggles (Jalal, A: 1995 & Roy, T: 2010). Thus, the economic gap between Hindus and Muslims widened, contributing to social tensions and reinforcing systemic inequalities, and social and economic marginalization in post-partition West Bengal (Menon, R & Bhasin, K: 1998).

Before Partition, the Muslim population in West Bengal was engaged in diverse economic activities. In urban centers like Calcutta, Howrah, Hooghly, and 24 Parganas, many Muslims worked in tanneries, leatherwork, tailoring, carpentry, and jute mills. A significant number were artisans and skilled laborers, often involved in hereditary crafts. Some English-educated Muslims held government jobs and lived in urban areas, while rural Muslims were primarily involved in agriculture, particularly in regions such as Murshidabad, Malda, West Dinajpur, and parts of Birbhum and Cooch Behar. Muslims also participated actively in trade and commerce, including money lending and other profitable ventures.

The Partition of 1947 brought severe disruption. Communal violence and socio-political upheaval led to the migration of many urban Muslim artisans to rural Muslim-majority areas, especially near the India-East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) border. The post-Partition period was marked by economic decline among Muslims, as reflected in the 1961 and 1971 census reports, which documented high levels of poverty and underdevelopment, particularly in border areas.

Displaced urban artisans lost their traditional client base and means of livelihood. Many took up marginal jobs such as bidi-making, rickshaw-pulling, or fish hawking. Former skilled workers, like the Ansaris and Raiens, often abandoned their ancestral crafts. A few who were literate transitioned into lower-tier professions, but the majority faced chronic poverty and unemployment. In the borderlands, smuggling became a widespread survival strategy, involving both Hindus and Muslims. Scholars like Willem van Schendel and M. Bau noted the dominant role of Muslims in this informal economy, reflecting the drastic economic reorientation forced by Partition (Chatterji, J: 2007).

➤ *Socio-cultural and religious impact*

Bengali identity, which had historically transcended religious boundaries, was deeply affected by the partition. The linguistic and cultural unity of Bengal was challenged as political and religious differences became more pronounced (Mukherjee, S: 2001). In West Bengal, the influx of Hindu refugees from East Bengal introduced new cultural elements, enriching the existing cultural tapestry but also leading to challenges in assimilation and integration. However, the partition also led to the marginalization of Bengali Muslims who chose to stay in West Bengal, affecting their cultural and social integration. Muslims faced challenges in preserving their cultural and religious identity in a Hindu-majority state while also confronting social prejudices (Chatterji, J: 2007). Moreover, periodic communal riots, such as the 1964 riots in Kolkata, further exacerbated tensions and insecurity among Muslims (Brass, P. R: 2003). The lack of strong institutional support for Muslim educational and cultural institutions led to further marginalization and a struggle to preserve their distinct identity within a predominantly Hindu society (Engineer, A. A: 2005). Social stigmatization and the fear of being labeled as the "other" often pushed Muslims into socio-cultural seclusion, altering their public visibility and cultural expressions. Moreover, many Muslim institutions and cultural spaces in West Bengal saw gradual erosion or transformation in the post-partition decades due to demographic changes and altered state policies (Chatterji, J: 2007).

After partition, the customary right to offer religious ritual in public was prevalent for both the communities and supported by the Government of West Bengal then. Though the West Bengal Animal Slaughter Control Act 1950 allowed Muslims to slaughter cow, Muslim minority was afraid of attack by Hindus on the occasion of Bakri-Id for cow slaughtering. Hindus' mode of aggressive assertiveness is expressed in the other festivals of Muslims like Tazia, graveyard ritual, Holi procession crossing before the Masjid during prayer time. And Muslims assimilated themselves with this cultural milieu of fear and surrendered themselves to it (Chatterji, J: 2007). Despite these challenges, the Muslim community has continuously adapted, striving to preserve its cultural heritage while negotiating its place in a pluralistic society.

➤ *Challenges for Women*

Women bore a disproportionate burden of the Partition's consequences. They faced physical violence, sexual assault, and abduction during communal riots (Menon, R & Bhasin, K: 1998). Many women were forcibly relocated, and governmental efforts to repatriate abducted women often led to additional social stigma,

making reintegration into society difficult. Women were primary targets of communal violence, with widespread abductions, rape, and forced conversions (Butalia, U: 1998). Many were abandoned due to stigma, while others became sole breadwinners after male family members were killed or migrated (Bagchi, J & Dasgupta, S: 2003). Refugee women, mostly Hindus from East Pakistan, endured overcrowded camps and economic exploitation, while Muslim women in West Bengal faced discrimination as a religious minority, restricting their mobility and education (Sarkar, T: 2009). Muslim women in post-Partition West Bengal experienced compounded hardships due to economic deprivation and conservative social norms. Many were pushed into informal labor like beedi-rolling or domestic work, with limited access to education (Sachar, J. R: 2006). Restrictions on mobility, reinforced by communal tensions, further isolated them, while personal laws governing marriage and inheritance often left them legally vulnerable (Hasan, Z & Menon, R: 2004). The lingering effects of Partition contributed to long-term educational and economic gaps, with Muslim women remaining underrepresented in formal employment and politics (Datta, P.K: 2012). Thus, the trauma of Partition left enduring scars with Muslim women facing ongoing challenges related to security, identity, and socio-economic equity in West Bengal. Periodic communal riots and political marginalization have perpetuated their vulnerability, reinforcing the need for inclusive policies to address historical injustices (Chatterji, J: 2007).

Growth of population and socio-economic and political status

| Table No: 01 Decadal Growth of Hindu and Muslim Population | | |
|---|-------------------------|---------------|
| Year | Decadal Growth % | |
| | Hindu | Muslim |
| 1951-61 | 32.63 | 36.48 |
| 1961-71 | 25.75 | 29.76 |
| 1971-81 | 21.37 | 29.55 |
| 1981-91 | 21.09 | 36.89 |
| 1991-01 | 14.23 | 25.91 |
| 2001-11 | 10.81 | 21.81 |

(Source: www.cpsindia.org)

| Table No: 02 Muslim Population in west Bengal in percent | |
|---|----------------------------|
| Year | Muslim Population % |
| 1941 | 29.48 |
| 1951 | 19.85 |
| 1961 | 20.00 |
| 1971 | 20.46 |
| 1981 | 21.52 |
| 1991 | 23.61 |
| 2001 | 25.25 |
| 2011 | 26.86 |
| 2021 | 27.89 (Prospected) |
| 2031 | 28.70 (Prospected) |
| 2041 | 29.36 (Prospected) |

(Source: Hussain. N, Abbas.M.Z & Owais. S. 2012)

After partition of Bengal in 1947, the share of Muslim population has slowly and gradually increased from 19.85 percent in 1951 to 26.86 percent in 2011 census and projected population in 2021 is about 27.89 percent in West Bengal.

The economic condition of Muslims was significantly unwell since the British period in Bengal. Muslims have hardly placed in government jobs then. They were working in various skilled and unskilled works in cities and in villages. After partition, wealth and educated Muslims migrated to East Pakistan by leaving behind poor peasant Muslim Community in West Bengal. City dweller adopted new professions after displaced by settling down either in urban ghettos or in rural areas (Hunter, W. 1871 & Chatterji, J: 2007). Economic condition of Muslims of West Bengal has rarely been changed. Sachar Committee Report (2006) revealed that the representation of Muslims in Government Jobs was a mere 4.2% and they occupied only 5% of the 'Key position' in the Judiciary. However, the economic status of them has historically remained weak since their loss of political power in Bengal and in present, they are living in the abject poverty. NCRB reports of Government and other research study reported that Muslims are found more in jail than Government jobs. Once Muslims were rulers but slowly and gradually in course of time they are in position of political

powerless. Rather they have been used as tool of vote bank politics of secular political parties in present time in West Bengal.

The literacy rate of Muslims has reached at 69.5 % that is 7% lower than the average literacy rate of West Bengal as per 2011 census. But in reality, they prefer Madrasa education more than Modern Education, absence of tradition and culture of education among them, lack of proportional number of educational institutions in their locality, stereotypes attitudes towards girls' education and uninfluenceability due to growing unemployment in West Bengal have emerged as challenges for their educational progress and development.

However, they are in disadvantageous position on all indicators of socio-economic development like education, work participation, political representation, safety and security, health and hygiene, and social amenities (Biswas, Z.H.: 2015).

Discussion and Conclusion

The partition of Bengal had far-reaching socio-economic, political, and cultural impacts on Bengalis that altered their economic, social, and cultural livelihood and gender dynamics. However, it is difficult to measure the level of destruction that is more effective for a particular community. Muslims, who migrated to Muslim majority locality (Urban and Rural) for security being of the same faith, faced so many economic hardships, communal violence, sexual assaults, social hatreds, etc. Similarly, Hindus migrated to West Bengal for jobs and work and faced many difficulties in their socio-political livelihood. But in comparison to Hindus, Muslims in West Bengal faced discrimination, prejudices, and various hardships in social, economic, political, and educational livelihood. After a long time since the partition of Bengal in 1947, their socio-economic condition remained on the margin of mainstream society which has been evident in various academic research and government and non-government reports. Muslims are economically poor, educationally backward, politically powerless, socially marginal, and health-wise & hygienically malnourished. The Left Front government, which ruled West Bengal for several decades, attempted to provide some political and economic stability, but these measures often failed to address deep-rooted discrimination.

The socio-economic condition of Muslims in Bengal before the partition of India in 1947 was complex and varied in terms of profession and social groups. They were socially stratified into different social groups in a vertical line: Ashraf, Ajlaf, and Arzal. They were involved in various skilled and unskilled works, like artisans, crafts, business, and government jobs. In Urban areas, many of them were working in factory as daily labourers, cigarette makers, working in leather factory, tailoring, etc. But in Rural areas, Muslims were exclusively engaged with agricultural activities. In spite of that, their social mobility was limited, and in education, they were lagging behind other communities. However, in the present situation, their socio-economic and educational status in West Bengal in particular has less improved. The Sachhar Committee Report (2006) is a milestone document regarding the status of Muslims in India in general and in West Bengal in particular. The Kundu Committee report (2014), Pratichi Trust and SNAP Report (2016), and several scholarly research studies have revealed that either less significant changes have been observed or have remained marginal in all parameters of socio-economic developments. The Government has taken various positive actions for their welfare but still there are lacuna in its proper implementation and community engagement. The reservation policy for Muslims Other Backward Classes (OBCs) by the then Government of West Bengal was one positive initiative that paved the path to change their community fate (Biswas, M. Z. H.: 2017). But recently, in 2024 Calcutta High Court cancelled OBC certificates for 77 communities due to legal issues, and out of them, 41 communities were from Muslims religion. As a result Government of West Bengal has changed the previous list of OBCs and placed a new list of OBCs where Muslim OBCs are 80 groups out of 140 OBCs (Muslim OBC-A-36 groups and OBC-B-44 OBCs) (Khanna & Konar, 2025: TOI). Earlier Majority of Muslims OBCs were in OBC category-A, where they enjoyed 10% reservation including some non-Muslims OBCs allotted by then CPIM Government and in OBC category-B, where 7% reservation was exclusively enjoyed by the Non-Muslims OBCs, with few Muslim OBCs. Later on, new OBC list has been published by the present government (Trinomool Govt.) in July 2025, where the earlier format of exclusive existence of Muslims in category-A has been technically changed, and a number of Muslim OBCs have been shifted from category-A to category-B based on an oral survey conducted by the West Bengal Backward Classes welfare Department. As a result, this update of the OBC list created a disaster and anxiety among the Muslims of West Bengal (Dasgupta, Sravasti, 2024: WIRE). However, the lack of proportional representation in legislative bodies further hindered the community's ability to advocate for its needs effectively. The policies address economic disparities, ensure political representation, and foster inter-communal harmony essential for the continued progress of Muslims in West Bengal. Major findings indicate that Bengali Muslims continue to face significant marginalization in terms of political representation, economic opportunities, health and hygienic consciousness, and cultural integration. Systemic discrimination compounded the hardships of forced migration and communal violence, leading to persistent inequities that remain largely unaddressed by short-term governmental measures. These results call for comprehensive policy reforms aimed at promoting inclusive development and inter-communal harmony, thereby rectifying the historical disadvantages imposed by the partition.

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