

In Search of Marginalization: Muslims in a Paschim Medinipur Village of West Bengal

SANTANU PANDA[†] & ABHIJIT GUHA[‡]

²*Department of Anthropology, Vidyasagar University,
Medinipur 721102, West Bengal
E-mail: abhijitguhavuanthro@rediffmail.com*

KEYWORDS: Muslims. Socio-economic condition. Paschim Medinipur. West Bengal. Marginalization. Sachar Committee Report.

ABSTRACT: According to Sachar Committee Report (2006) Muslims are marginalized in India. From this report we have also found that the Muslims are deprived from Government jobs and education facility. In 2013 the first author worked as a research investigator in an ICSSR project on “The Muslim outcaste of West Bengal” and conducted intensive fieldwork in a village inhabited by Muslim and Hindu lower castes in Paschim Medinipur district of West Bengal. The study revealed that the Muslims were more open to disclose their socio-economic conditions than the Hindus, and the Muslim women were found to be more cooperative than their Hindu counterparts as they shared information unhesitatingly to the first author and promptly answered his queries. Most of the Muslim families of this village were found to be in a better position in terms of their house type, economic and occupational conditions, educational level and landholding pattern than the Hindus who belonged to the scheduled caste category.

INTRODUCTION

According to Sachar Committee Report (2006) Muslims are socially and economically marginalized in India. This report also observed that Muslims were deprived from government jobs and various educational facilities in this country. Our experience and observation in the field suggest contradictory views. With this in mind we conducted a field based study, and made an attempt to collect quantitative and qualitative data on the demographic, economic and educational aspects of a group of Muslims families in a village in Paschim Medinipur district of West Bengal. Along with the data on Muslims, we also collected similar type of data from a group of Hindus belonging to scheduled caste category living in the same village along with the Muslims. At the third

level, we have attempted a comparative study of the Muslim and Hindu sample groups to understand the degree of marginalization of the Muslims compared to the Hindu scheduled caste groups of the village.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The data for this research has been collected by the first author (SP) who worked as a research investigator in an ICSSR project sponsored to the Department of Sociology, Delhi University. The project was titled as “The Muslim outcastes of West Bengal” for which the first author conducted intensive anthropological fieldwork during June 2013 to September 2013 and March 2104 in the village identified for study. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected through village census schedule, structured and unstructured questionnaire, and further data were collected with the help of genealogy, case studies, participatory observations, and focus-group

[†] ICSSR Post Doctoral Fellow

[‡] Associate Professor, corresponding author

discussions. The study is a policy focused micro-level socio-economic survey.

THE VILLAGE

The village Delua (J.L. No. 156) is located on the northern side of Vidyasagar University campus under the jurisdiction of Kankabati Gram Panchayat in the Midnapore Sadar Subdivision of Paschim Medinipur district. The village is spread over a wide area and the houses are built on elevated land (*danga jami*). The village map (Fig. 1) shows a cluster type of settlement pattern and the Muslim and the Hindu households are distributed in two areas of the village. There is some distinction in the settlement pattern in the village. The clustering of Muslim houses are largely in the eastern and northern sides; while in the lower portion in south-western part of the village the Hindus live. However, in reality there is no natural or man-made demarcation between Hindu and Muslim inhabited areas, only tradition follows. The Hindu houses are clustered on the south-western side of the

village while the Muslim houses are distributed over the north-eastern side. Both the Muslim and the Hindu inhabitants of the village recognized the distinct clusters of houses as Hindu and Muslim *paras* (neighbourhood). Most of the agricultural land are however located on the eastern side of the village and interestingly, these lands are located at higher elevation than the lands where the houses of Delua are constructed. These high lands are also known as *danga jami* and require heavy rainfall for cultivation. Both Muslim and Hindu families of Delua have lands in the south-eastern part of the village. It was observed that the houses in the Muslim *para* are more compactly located than the houses of the Hindu *para*. The main road as well as the lanes and bye-lanes within the village are unmetalled (*moram rasta*, local parlance). The majority of the houses have mud walls with roofs thatched with straw. There are some houses with brick walls with asbestos roofs. Interestingly, a good number of Muslim houses in the village have cemented brick walls and roofs (*pucca* house). On

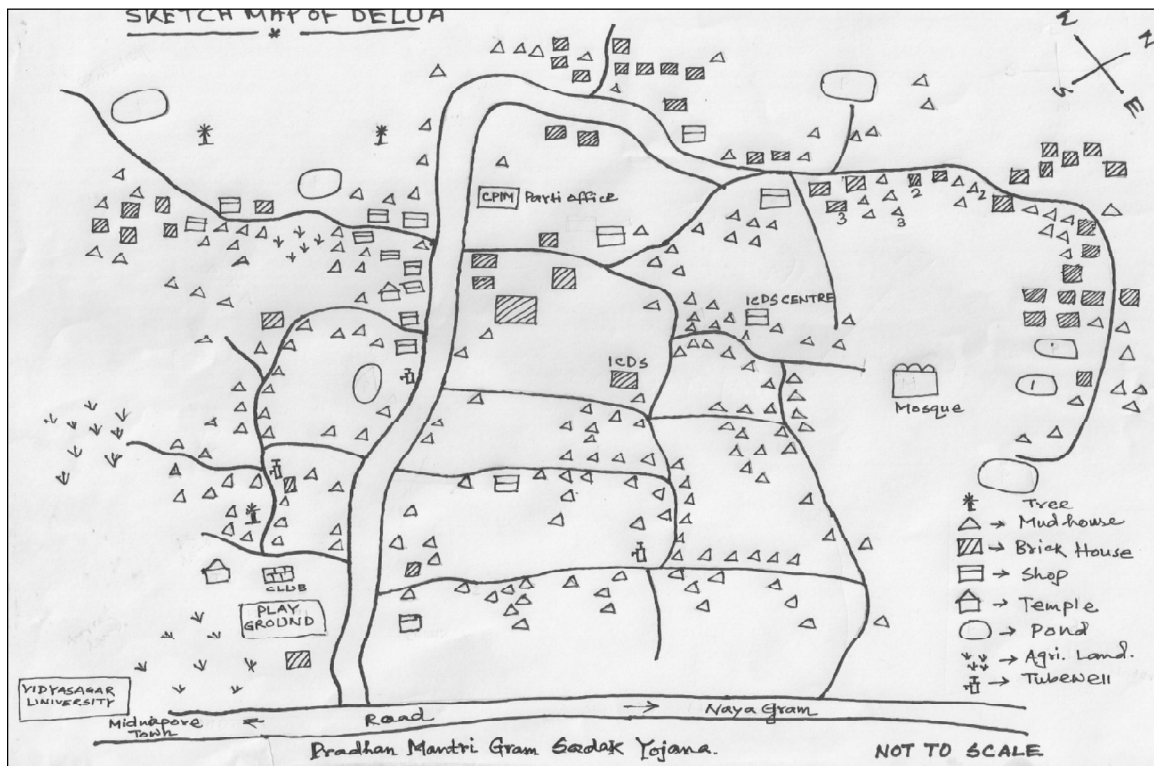


Fig. 1: Generalized sketch map of village Delua

enquiry, it was found that many of the Muslims of the village are skilled masons and they have built their own houses at a lower cost by using their own labour and skill.

MUSLIMS AND HINDUS OF DELUA

Micro-level comparative studies of demographic and socio-economic conditions of the Muslim and Hindu populations at the village level are scarcely found in the sociological and social anthropological literature. However, there are some comparative studies of these two religious communities based on macro-level data, as are available in National Sample Surveys reports. For example, an article published in *Economic and Political Weekly* compared the demographic and socio-economic differentials among the Hindus and Muslims of India based on NSS data across different states of India (Shariff, '95). Another published study deals with the demographic and socio-economic conditions of Muslims in the state of West Bengal and the authors compared it with the Hindus and other communities based on Census figures at the district level (Dasgupta, 2009; Hossain, 2012). On the other hand, studies which were conducted exclusively on the demographic and socio-economic condition of the Muslims made comparative statements like, "After six decades of independence, Muslims in West Bengal are lagging behind other community in terms of socio-economic condition and political representation' without making any quantitative study on the 'other community'" (Mainuddin, 2011:132). In one recent study done on literacy and work participation rate among the Muslim women in Uttar Pradesh religion-wise gender differentials in literacy rate at the state level is computed from the 2001 Census (Siddiqui, Hussain and Hannan, 2011). There are again studies on the problems of classification of Muslim OBC's in West Bengal, which made no attempt to compare the problems with the Hindu OBC's, let alone presentation of empirical data from the field (Moinuddin, 2003). Comparative micro-level empirical studies based on fieldwork in a single village on the socio-economic and demographic aspects of the Muslim and Hindu communities in India are rarely been found in anthropological literature. The present study is a modest attempt to make a comparative

assessment of the Muslims and Hindus living in a village of Paschim (West) Medinipur district through anthropological fieldwork. In this micro-level empirical study a comparison between these two communities have been made to look into the similarities and differences in the demographic, economic and social conditions of the Muslims and Hindus of a village under the wider context of the overall marginalization of the Muslims in India as depicted in the Sachar Committee Report. The empirical findings of this field based study are arranged in three sections, viz. (i) demography, (ii) economic condition and (iii) education. Comparative accounts of the two communities are narrated in these sections by using quantitative and qualitative data collected from the field.

DEMOGRAPHY

Demographic Profile of the Muslims and Hindus of Delua

The population composition of the village shows that the Muslims constitute the larger segment of the village (60.77%), and the number of Muslim households is also more than 60% of the total village population (Table 1). A comparison of the household size of the two religious communities reveal a relative predominance of small households ranging between 1-4 persons among the Hindus, although the mean household size of both the communities do not show any marked difference. However, in the larger household size categories (5-6, 7-8, and above 8) we have again found a predominance of the Hindus (Table 2).

TABLE 1

Community-wise population and households of the village

Community	No. of household	Total population
Hindu	122 (39.23)*	673 (40.06)
Muslim	189 (60.77)	1007 (59.94)
Total	311 (100.00)	1680 (100.00)

*Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

The age and sex composition of the two communities are shown in Table 3, 4 and 5. In the old age-groups the Muslim women are greater in number than their Hindu counterpart. Contrary to popular belief, the comparative child-woman ratio of the two

TABLE 2
Household size of the Muslims and Hindus of Delua

Household size category	Muslim Households	Hindu Households
1-2	07 (3.70)*	05 (04.09)
3-4	70 (37.03)	50 (40.98)
5-6	72 (38.09)	45 (36.88)
7-8	26 (13.75)	16 (13.11)
8+	14 (7.40)	06 (4.92)
Total	189	122
Mean household	5.4	5.5

*Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

communities reveals a higher fertility rate of the Hindu women. The comparative sex-ratios of the two communities also show that in all the age-groups, there are more Muslim women than men compared to the Hindus, except for the age-groups of 0-14 years and 60 year and above. On the other hand, the age-groups in which the Hindus show more women than men, the difference with the Muslims is not very high. The overall sex-ratio of the Muslims is more in favour towards the weaker sex than the Hindu segment of the village population.

TABLE 3
Age and sex composition of total population in Delua village

Age-groups (in years)	Male	Female	Total
0-4	*[14.04] 120 (7.20)**	*[9.10] 75 (4.46)**	196 (11.66)
5-9	[9.81] 84 (5.00)	[12.14] 100 (5.95)	184 (10.95)
10-14	[13.08] 112 (6.66)	[12.14] 100 (5.95)	212 (12.62)
15-19	[10.05] 86 (5.12)	[10.92] 90 (5.36)	176 (9.94)
20-24	[7.36] 63 (3.75)	[9.10] 75 (4.46)	138 (8.21)
25-29	[6.31] 54 (3.21)	[8.13] 67 (3.99)	121 (7.20)
30-34	[6.54] 56 (3.33)	[8.37] 69 (4.11)	125 (7.44)
35-39	[8.06] 69 (4.11)	[6.55] 54 (3.21)	123 (7.32)
40-44	[5.84] 50 (2.98)	[5.21] 43 (2.56)	93 (5.53)
45-49	[4.44] 38 (2.26)	[5.09] 42 (2.50)	80 (4.76)
50-54	[4.20] 36 (2.14)	[3.03] 25 (1.49)	61 (3.63)
55-59	[2.69] 23 (1.37)	[2.30] 19 (1.13)	42 (2.50)
60-64	[3.15] 27 (1.61)	[3.51] 29 (1.73)	56 (3.33)
65-69	[1.28] 11 (0.65)	[2.06] 17 (1.01)	28 (1.66)
70-74	[1.98] 17 (1.01)	[1.09] 09 (0.54)	26 (1.54)
75-79	[0.58] 05 (0.30)	[0.12] 01 (0.06)	06 (0.35)
80+	[0.47] 04 (0.25)	[1.09] 09 (0.54)	13 (0.77)
Total	[100] 856 (49.75)	[100] 824 (49.25)	1680

*[] Indicate percentage out of column total, male; female

** () Indicate percentage of male (or female) to total population

Sex-ratio: $824/856 \times 1000=962.94$

TABLE 4
Age and sex composition of the Muslims of Delua

Age-groups (in years)	Male	Female	Total
0-4	*[13.26] 66 (6.65)**	*[9.36] 47 (4.67)**	113 (11.22)
5-9	[11.48] 58 (5.75)	[10.95] 55 (5.46)	113 (11.22)
10-14	[14.65] 74 (7.35)	[13.54] 68 (6.75)	142 (14.10)
15-19	[8.32] 42 (4.17)	[12.15] 61 (6.05)	103 (10.23)
20-24	[8.11] 41 (4.07)	[9.16] 46 (4.56)	87 (8.64)
25-29	[8.95] 30 (2.98)	[7.96] 40 (3.97)	70 (6.95)
30-34	[6.13] 31 (3.07)	[8.36] 42 (4.17)	73 (7.25)
35-39	[8.32] 42 (4.17)	[7.57] 38 (3.77)	80 (7.94)
40-44	[6.13] 31 (3.07)	[3.78] 19 (1.88)	50 (4.96)
45-49	[4.36] 22 (2.18)	[5.97] 30 (2.98)	52 (5.16)
50-54	[3.96] 20 (1.98)	[2.29] 12 (1.19)	32 (3.18)
55-59	[2.57] 13 (1.29)	[1.79] 09 (0.89)	22 (2.18)
60-64	[3.16] 16 (1.58)	[3.18] 16 (1.58)	32 (3.18)
65-69	[1.18] 06 (0.59)	[1.19] 06 (0.59)	12 (1.19)
70-74	[1.58] 08 (0.79)	[1.19] 06 (0.59)	14 (1.39)
75-79	[0.39] 02 (0.19)	—	02 (0.20)
80+	[0.59] 03 (0.29)	[1.39] 07 (0.69)	10 (0.99)
Total	[100] 505 (50.15)	[100] 502 (49.85)	1007 (59.94)

*[] Indicate percentage out of column total, male; female

** () Indicate percentage of male (or female) to total population

Sex-ratio: $502/505 \times 1000=994.06$

TABLE 5
Age and sex composition of the Hindus of Delua

Age-groups (in years)	Male	Female	Total
0-4	*[15.38] 54 (8.02)**	*[8.69] 28 (4.16)**	82 (12.18)
5-9	[7.40] 26 (3.86)	[13.97] 45 (6.68)	71 (10.55)
10-14	[10.83] 38 (5.65)	[9.94] 32 (4.75)	70 (10.40)
15-19	[12.54] 44 (6.54)	[9.00] 29 (4.30)	73 (10.85)
20-24	[6.27] 22 (3.26)	[9.00] 29 (4.30)	51 (7.58)
25-29	[6.84] 24 (3.56)	[8.38] 27 (4.01)	51 (7.58)
30-34	[7.12] 25 (3.71)	[8.38] 27 (4.01)	52 (7.73)
35-39	[7.69] 27 (4.01)	[4.96] 16 (2.37)	43 (6.39)
40-44	[5.41] 19 (2.82)	[7.45] 24 (3.56)	43 (6.39)
45-49	[4.56] 16 (2.37)	[3.72] 12 (1.78)	28 (4.16)
50-54	[4.56] 16 (2.37)	[4.03] 13 (1.93)	29 (4.31)
55-59	[3.13] 11 (1.63)	[3.10] 10 (1.48)	21 (3.12)
60-64	[3.13] 11 (1.63)	[4.03] 13 (1.93)	24 (3.57)
65-69	[1.42] 05 (0.74)	[3.41] 11 (1.63)	16 (2.38)
70-74	[2.56] 09 (1.33)	[0.93] 03 (0.44)	12 (1.78)
75-79	[0.85] 03 (0.44)	[0.31] 01 (0.14)	04 (0.59)
80+	[0.28] 01 (0.14)	[0.62] 02 (0.29)	03 (0.45)
Total	[100] 351 (52.15)	[100] 322 (47.85)	673 (40.06)

*[] Indicate percentage out of column total, male; female

** () Indicate percentage of male (or female) to total population

Sex-ratio: $322/351 \times 1000=917.37$

TABLE 6
Comparative sex-ratios of the Muslims and Hindus of Delua in different age-groups

Age-groups (in years)	Hindu	Muslim
0-14	889.83	858.58
15-29	944.44	1300.88
30-44	943.66	951.92
45-59	813.95	1472.73
60+	1034.48	1000
Total	917.37	994.06
Child-Woman ratio of Muslims: 45.93		
Child-Woman ratio of Hindus: 53.94;		
Formula used: Children between 0-4/Women between 15-44 × 100		

The family composition (Table 7) of the village shows the overall predominance of nuclear families (61.41%), although there are a sizeable number of joint families (33.00%) among both communities. Comparatively, the percentages of joint and nuclear family among the Muslims are higher than the Hindus. Nuclear family with accretion is also higher among the Muslims.

The comparative percentage figures for age at marriage show (Table 8) that more Hindu women were married at the younger age-groups than their Muslim counterparts. In general, the percentage figures reveal that in the higher age-group marriage there are more Muslim women than the Hindus. And this situation is also observed in case of men.

TABLE 7
Family types in households of Muslims and Hindus in Delua village

Family types	Muslim	Hindu	Total
Nuclear	*[56.08] 106 (34.08)**	*[69.67] 85 (27.33)**	191 (61.41)
Vertically extended joint family	[28.87] 47 (15.11)	[21.31] 26 (8.36)	73 (23.47)
Horizontally extended joint family	[12.17] 23 (7.39)	[5.73] 07 (2.25)	30 (9.64)
Nuclear family with accretion	[6.89] 13 (4.18)	[3.27] 04 (1.28)	17 (5.46)
Total	189 (60.77)	122 (39.23)	311 (99.98)

*[] Indicate percentage out of column total
 ** () Indicate percentage to total households

TABLE 8
Age at marriage of Muslims and Hindus in Delua village

Age at marriage (in years)	Muslim		Hindu	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
10-14	—	16 (7.17)*	—	26 (18.05)
15-19	10 (4.35)	78 (34.97)	32 (19.63)	45 (31.25)
20-24	86 (37.39)	73 (32.73)	54 (33.13)	38 (26.39)
25-29	80 (34.78)	30 (13.45)	36 (22.08)	22 (15.28)
30-34	34 (14.78)	26 (11.66)	26 (15.95)	11 (7.64)
35+	20 (8.70)	-	09 (5.52)	02 (1.38)
Total	230 (100)	223 (99.98)	163 (98.31)	144 (99.99)

* Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

*Economic Condition
Subsistence Pattern of the Communities*

TABLE 9
Subsistence pattern of Muslims in Delua

Owner cultivator	Non-agricultural day labourer	Rickshaw-puller	Minor forest produce collector	Mason	Total
36 (9.80)*	146 (39.78)	29 (7.90)	81 (22.07)	75 (20.43)	367 (100.00)

* Figures in parentheses indicate percentage

TABLE 10
Subsistence pattern of Hindus in Delua

Owner Cultivator	Non-agricultural day labourer	Rickshaw-puller	Minor forest produce collector	Mason	Total
31 (11.35)*	146 (53.47)	2 (0.73)	78 (28.57)	16 (5.86)	273 (100.00)

*Figures in parentheses indicate percentage

The subsistence pattern of the two communities (Table 9 and 10) show considerable variation; there are more owner cultivators among the Hindus, while the Muslims were found to be engaged more in non-agricultural skilled jobs (masons) in the unorganized sector. These persons are economically in better position than other persons of the village. More Hindus were found to be engaged as non-agricultural

day labourer than their Muslim counterpart. We have observed that the majority of the individuals (45.62%) are engaged in non-agricultural labour. A substantial number of individuals were found to be engaged in forest produce collection to earn their livelihood among both communities. More Muslim was found to be engaged as a rickshaw puller.

TABLE 11
House types of Muslim and Hindu communities in Delua

	Muslim	Hindu	Total
Kaccha with roof thatched with straw	*[38.62] 73 (23.47)**	*[50.09] 66 (21.22)**	139 (44.69)
Kaccha with asbestos/tin roof	[23.81] 45 (14.67)	[18.03] 22 (7.07)	67 (21.54)
Pucca roof	[12.17] 23 (7.39)	[9.01] 11 (3.54)	34 (10.39)
Pucca with asbestos/tin roof	[25.39] 48 (15.43)	[18.85] 23 (7.39)	71 (22.83)
Total	189 (60.77)	122 (39.23)	311 (100.00)

* [] Indicate percentage out of column total

** () Indicate percentage to total house types

The comparative house types structure of the Muslim and the Hindu communities (Table 11) reveals the following facts. The Muslims have been able to build more pucca houses than the Hindus. More Muslim houses (both kaccha and pucca) have asbestos and tin roofs than the Hindu houses. Only in cases of kaccha houses thatched with straw the percentage of Hindu households is slightly lower than the Muslims, although the difference is not very marked. In general, the Muslims of Delua have been able to live in better houses than their Hindu counterpart.

From Tables 12 and 13, we have found that out of the total households only 98 (31.51%) households have own agricultural land and rest 213 (68.49%)

households have no agricultural land. Out of 189 Muslim households, 136 (71.96 % out of 189) households have no agricultural land and 53 (28.04%) households have some amount of own agricultural land. Only 16% have 0.5-1.00 acres land and 0.96% has more than 2 acres of land. Out of 122 Hindu households 77(63.11% out of 122) are landless while 45 (36.89%) have some amount of own agricultural land. Only 12% households have 0.5-1.00 acres of own agricultural land and 0.64% households have more than 2 acres of agricultural land. In summary, in terms of own agricultural landholding the condition of the Muslims is slightly better than the Hindus, although there is more landlessness among the Muslims.

TABLE 12
Community-wise landholding in Delua

Community	Owner of agricultural land	Landless	Total
Hindu	*[36.89] 45 (14.46)**	* [63.11] 77 (24.76)**	122 (39.23)
Muslim	[28.04] 53 (17.04)	[71.96] 136 (43.73)	189 (60.77)
Total	98 (31.51)	213 (68.49)	311 (100.00)

* [] Indicate percentage out of column total

** () Indicate percentage to total landholding

TABLE 13

Landholding size in Hindus and Nuslims of Deluaa village

Size category (in acres)	Hindu	Muslim	Total
Landless	*[63.11] 77 (24.76)**	*[71.96] 136 (43.73)**	213 (68.49)
0.5-1.00	[29.51] 36 (11.57)	[26.45] 50 (16.07)	86 (27.65)
1.00-1.50	[3.28] 04 (1.28)	—	04 (1.28)
1.5-2.00	[2.45] 03 (0.96)	—	03 (0.96)
2.00+	[1.64] 02 (0.64)	[1.59] 03 (0.96)	05 (0.64)
Total	[99.99] 122 (39.23)	189 (60.77)	311(100.00)

*[] Indicate percentage out of column total

**() Indicate percentage to total landholding size

Education

TABLE 14

Literacy percentage among Hindus and Muslims of Delua village

Community	Illiterate	Literate	Total
Hindu	*[29.57] 199 (11.85)**	*[70.43] 474 (28.21)**	673 (40.06)
Muslim	[20.36] 205 (12.20)	[79.64] 802 (47.74)	1007 (59.94)
Total	404 (24.05)	1276 (75.95)	1680 (100.00)

*[] Indicate percentage out of column total

**() Indicate percentage to total literacy

TABLE 15

Female literacy status of Hindu and Muslim communities of Delua

Community	Literate	Illiterate
Hindu	*[36.18] 212 (12.62)**	*[46.12] 107 (6.37)**
Muslim	[63.82] 374 (20.65)	[53.88] 125 (7.44)
Total	586 (34.88)	232 (13.80)

*[] Indicate percentage out of column total

**() Indicate percentage to total literacy

From Table 14 and 15 we find the overall literacy of the village is about 76%. The Muslims of the village show higher percentage of literates than the Hindus.

The Muslims also show higher literacy percentage within their own religious group than the Hindus. The Muslims women show a considerably higher percentage of literates than their Hindu counterpart. Among all the 586 literate women of the village the Muslim women are 374, which is about 64% while the corresponding figure of the Hindu women is much lower, i.e. 212 (36%). In this village 75.95% are literate and 24.05% are illiterate. Among the Muslims 802 (79.64%) persons are literate and 20.36% are illiterate where as 70.43% Hindus are educated and 29.57% are uneducated.

TABLE 16

Educational level of the Muslims in Delua

Illiterate		Literate		I-IV class		V-VIII class		IX-XII class		XII+ class		Total
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
80	125	30	36	151	133	140	125	44	40	01	01	906
(8.83)*	(13.79)	(3.31)	(3.97)	(16.67)	(14.67)	(15.45)	(13.79)	(4.45)	(4.41)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(100.00)

Madrassa: 10 (0.99); *Figures in parentheses indicate percentage

TABLE 17

Educational level of the Hindus in Delua

Illiterate		Literate		I-IV class		V-VIII class		IX-XII class		XII+ class		Total
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
92	107	22	34	82	85	94	48	29	17	4	2	617
(13.67)*	(15.89)	(3.27)	(5.05)	(12.18)	(12.63)	(14.12)	(7.13)	(4.31)	(2.53)	(0.59)	(0.29)	(100.00)

*Figures in parentheses indicate percentage

From the above tables (Table 16 and 17) it can be observed that the overall education level is better among the Muslims than the Hindus, however, we have also found that six persons have degree of XII+ in the Hindu community while in Muslim community there are only two. It is observed that in primary, upper primary, and in higher secondary there are more number of Muslim boys and girls who have completed their education. It has been found that the educational level percentage gradually falls down from lower age-group to higher age-group among the Muslim males, but among the Hindus the age-group-wise trend of educational level shows upward trends in general. The literacy condition of the Muslim females is found to be better than their Hindu counterpart.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

The Muslim women were found to be more aware and conscious about the health and education of their children and pregnant women. They were also found to be more aware about the political situation of the area than their Hindu counterpart; they were very much outspoken and they unhesitatingly spoke to the author (SP) while answering queries during the fieldwork. The author (SP) did not find any Muslim women behind *purdah*. They were however, found to use a black veil (*burkah*) when they moved out of the village for the town. The Hindu women on the other hand were found to be very shy and unaware of many basic facts about their own house and village. Another interesting fact which the author observed during the field survey was the nature of communication among the Muslim villagers. When the author moved from one Muslim household to another, for conducting interview, he found that the news of his entry had already been spread to the neighbouring household. In some cases, the family members called up neighbours to their houses to answer the survey queries. This kind of intra-household neighbourhood level communication was not found among the Hindu families. The members of the Hindu community in the village often gave the impression of a kind of aloofness, unconcerned regarding the whereabouts of their neighbouring families. On the whole, the sense of in-group feeling and solidarity was found to be much stronger among the Muslims than their Hindu neighbours.

CONCLUSIONS

Though from the study of a single village we should not reach to a generalized conclusion to contradict the Sachar Committee report, but our micro-level study in Delua village reveals that there are clear empirical situations in which the Muslims are showing better living conditions, particularly when compared with a marginalized scheduled caste Hindu community. Our search in the literature on the socio-demographic, economic and literacy condition of the Muslims revealed that there is a virtual absence of micro-level comparative study of the Muslim and Hindu communities in India. Whenever comparative studies were done they were based on macro-level census and large-scale survey data. It is important here to point out that the empirical database of the Sachar Committee report is also on large scale surveys, primarily on all-India and state-level census data. The Muslims of Delua village does not seem to be marginalized community as compared to their scheduled caste neighbours of the same village. The typical image of economically, educationally and socially marginalized Muslim does not emerge from our micro-level field study. The typical image of Muslim women giving birth to more children and living under *purdah* and *burkah* obeying the commands of men also do not emerge from our field study. On the contrary, the Muslims of Delua village live in better houses, they are better educated than the Hindu neighbours and politically more conscious, and the Muslim women were found to be smarter, open and vocal than their Hindu counterparts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The first author (SP) deeply acknowledges the hearty co-operation of the Muslim and Hindu villagers of Delua without whom the fieldwork could not have been done. We are also indebted to Professor Abhijit Dasgupta of the Department of Sociology, Delhi University for granting an ICSSR research fund to the first author and also for supervising the work. The first author is also grateful to the organizers of a national seminar of the Sociology Department of Vidyasagar University for inviting him to present a shorter version of this paper.

REFERENCES CITED

- Dasgupta, A. 2009. On the Margins: Muslims in West Bengal. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44(16): 91-96.
- Hossain, I. 2012. Muslims of West Bengal: Some demographic, socio-economic and educational situation. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(10): 44-56.

- Mainuddin, M. 2011. Socio-economic conditions and political representation of Indian Muslims: A study of West Bengal. *Journal of Arts, Science & Commerce*, 2(4): 123-134. (http://www.minorityaffairs.gov.in/sites/upload_files/moma/files/pdf/sachar_comm.pdf Accessed on 15.02.2015).
- Moinuddin, S. A. H. 2003. Problems of identification of Muslim OBCs in West Bengal. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(46): 4905-4907.
- Sachar Committee Report 2006. *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India: A Report*. (November 2006). Prime Minister's High Level Committee, Cabinet Secretariat. Government of India, Sardar Patel Bhawan: New Delhi. *Internet: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sachar_Committee*. Accessed on 12.08.2013.
- Shariff, A. 1995. Socio-economic and demographic differentials between Hindus and Muslims in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30(46): 2947-2953.
- Siddiqui, Hussain and Hannan 2011. Literacy and work participation among Muslims in UttarPradesh. *Journal of Geography and Regional Planning*. 4(6): 305-325. *Internet: ncm.nic.in/pdf/compilation.pdf* Accessed on 12.08.2013.