

# Chapter 12

## Reassessing the Socio-economic Condition Among Muslim and Hindus: Comparative Accounts

Santanu Panda

### 12.1 Background

An attempt has been made in this article to measure the degree of marginalisation of Muslims in terms of social and economic parameters. Additionally, a comparison has also been made regarding the demographic and socio-economic aspects among the Muslim and Hindu lower castes. In this empirical and field-based study, we have first made an attempt to collect quantitative and qualitative data on the demographic, economic and educational aspects of a group of Muslims in a village in Paschim Medinipur district.

At the second level, along with the data on Muslims, we have also collected similar kinds of data from a group of Hindus belonging to scheduled caste category living in the same village. At the third level, we have attempted a comparative study of the Muslims and Hindus to see the degree of marginalisation of the Muslims compared to the Hindu caste groups.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The data had been collected in connection with an ICSSR project.

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## 12.2 Methodology/Methods

The data for this article have been collected by the author as a research investigator in an ICSSR project sponsored by the Department of Sociology, Delhi University. The project is entitled 'The Muslim outcasts of West Bengal' for which the author conducted intensive anthropological fieldwork during June 2013 to September 2013 and January to March 2014 in the selected village. Data were collected after obtaining the necessary approval from the panchayat member and community leader as well as informed them about the objectives of the study before the commencement of survey.

The fieldwork for this research was carried out from a micro-level perspective by using traditional anthropological methods such as census, participant observation, collection case studies and focus group discussion that have been collected. Data on the demographic, economic, age-at-marriage, house type, family type and political and sociocultural dimensions of the selected settlement were collected. The quantitative data, collected for this research, have been analysed by using simple descriptive methods (e.g. frequency distribution tables, bar graphs and histograms) with the help of Microsoft Excel programme. The qualitative data have been analysed through descriptions supported by some representative case studies.

The primary data for the research have been collected from one hundred and eighty nine (189) Muslim's and one hundred and twenty two (122) Hindu's households, and the total population are 1007 and 673, respectively. For the data collection in each household, separate census, interview and case study were conducted in suitable places which were convenient for the respondents. Near about half an hour was taken for the completion of the schedules for one family. Before introducing questionnaires, the families were informed about the purpose of the study, and after this introduction, the actual data collection procedure began and the required information was collected.

According to Sachar Committee Report (2006), Muslims were socially and economically marginalised in India. From this report, we have also found that Muslims were deprived from government jobs and various educational facilities in the country. Under this background, we have made an attempt to empirically test the major conclusion of the Sachar Committee Report in regard to the marginalisation of the Muslims in a village in West Bengal by comparing them with the Hindus living under similar set of socio-economic and geographical conditions.

## 12.3 Settlement Pattern

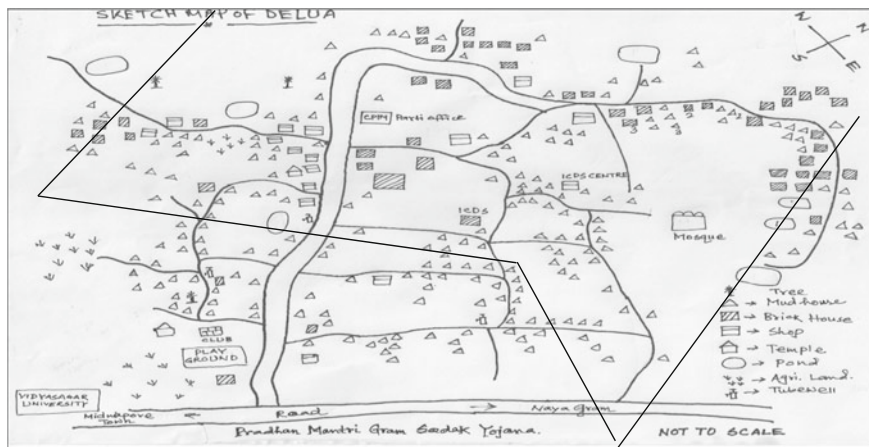
The name of the village is Delua (J.L. No. 156) which is located on the northern side of Vidyasagar University campus under the jurisdiction of Kankabati Gram Panchayat in the Midnapore Sadar Subdivision of Paschim Medinipur district.



**Map 12.1** Satellite image map of the area showing the Delua village downloaded from Google Earth. *Source* Downloaded by author from Google maps

Delua is a real village (see Map 12.1), and our study is not a typical anthropological village study. It is a policy-focused micro-level socio-economic survey having wider implications.

The village is spread over a wide area, and the houses are built on elevated land (*dangajami*). The village map shows a cluster type of settlement pattern, and the Muslim and the Hindu households are distributed in two distinct areas of the village. The black zigzag line on the map is drawn to show the Muslim and the Hindu settlements in the village. The upper portion of the line contains the Muslim houses, while in the lower portion live the Hindus (see Map 12.2), although in reality there is no natural or man-made demarcation between Hindu and Muslim inhabited areas. 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 recognised the distinct clusters of houses as Hindu and Muslim *paras* (neighbourhood). Most of the agricultural land is, 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 *dangajami* 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 is unmetalled (*moramrasta* by 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



**Map 12.2** Village sketch map of Delua. *Source* The author's sketch this map himself during fieldwork, 2013 and map

(*pucca* house). On 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.

## 12.4 Comparison Between the Muslims and Hindus of Delua

Micro-level comparative studies of demographic and socio-economic conditions of the Muslim and Hindu populations in India are not found in the sociological and social anthropological literature. There are some comparative studies of these two religious communities based on macro-level data, like National Sample Surveys. 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 the country (Shariff 1995: 2947–2953). Another published study, which dealt with the demographic and socio-economic conditions of Muslims in the state of West Bengal and compared it with the Hindus and other communities, also worked out with census figures not below the district level (Hossain 2012: 2222–2863; Dasgupta 2009: 91–96). On the other hand, the 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, where religion-wise gender differentials in literacy rate at the state level is computed from the 2001 Census (Siddiqui et al. 2011: 305–325). There are again studies on the problems of classification of Muslim OBCs in West Bengal, which made no attempt to compare the problems with the Hindu OBCs, let alone presentation of empirical data from the field (Moinuddin 2003: 4905–4907).

Comparative micro-level empirical studies based on fieldwork on the socio-economic and demographic aspects of the Muslim and Hindu communities in India have not been found in the literature. This 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 are 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 marginalisation 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.

## 12.4.1 Demographic Contour

### 12.4.1.1 The 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%) and the number of Muslim households is also more than 60% of the total village population (Table 12.1). A comparison of the household size of the two religious communities reveals a relative predominance of small households ranging between 1 and 4 persons among the Hindus, although the mean household size of both the communities does not show any marked difference. However, in the larger household size categories (5–6, 7–8, 8 and above), we have found a predominance of the Muslims (Table 12.2).

The age–sex composition tables (Tables 12.3, 12.4 and 12.5; Figs. 12.1 and 12.2) and the population pyramids of the two communities show broad base

**Table 12.1** Community-wise population and households of the village

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

Figures in parentheses represent percentages

Source Author's field data from Jan, 2013

**Table 12.2** Household size of the Muslims and Hindus of Delua

Size category	No. of Muslim households	Mean household size = 5.4	No. of Hindu households	Mean household size = 5.5
1–2	07 (3.70)		05 (4.09)	
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	

Figures in parentheses represent percentages

Source Author's field data from Jan, 2013

**Table 12.3** Age–sex composition of the Muslims of Delua

Age group	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)

[ ] Represents the percentage of total population of each community

() Represents the percentage of total population. Sex ratio Female/male  $\times$  1000,  $322/351 \times 1000 = 917.37$

Source Author's field data from Jan, 2013

indicating growing populations, although 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 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 0–14 and 60 and above. On the other hand,

**Table 12.4** Age–sex composition of the Hindus of Delua

Age group	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)	00	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)

[] Represents the percentage of total population of each community

() Represents the percentage of total population. *Sex ratio* Female/male  $\times$  1000  
 $502/505 \times 1000 = 994.06$

*Source* Author's field data from Jan, 2013

**Table 12.5** Comparative sex ratios of the Muslims and Hindus of Delua

Age group	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

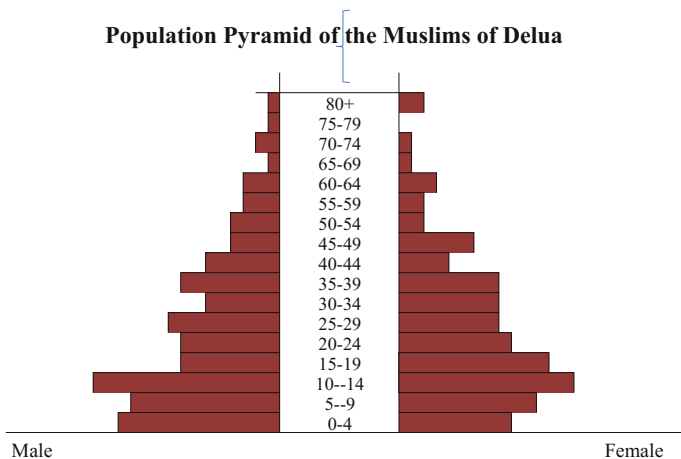
Sex ratio formula used:  $F/M \times 1000$

*Source* Author's field data from Jan, 2013

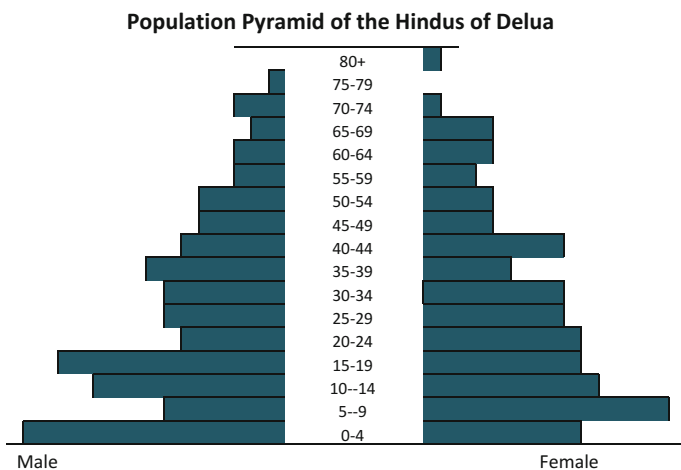
Child–woman ratio of Muslims: 45.93, child–woman ratio of Hindus: 53.94

Formula used: Children between 0 and 4/women between 15 and 44  $\times$  1000

the age groups in which the Hindus show more women than men. The overall sex ratio of the Muslims is more in favour towards the weaker sex than the Hindu segment of the village population.



**Fig. 12.1** Population pyramid of the Muslims of Delua. *Source* Author’ field data from Jan, 2013



**Fig. 12.2** Population pyramid of the Hindus of Delua. *Source* Author’s field data from Jan, 2013

The family composition of the village shows the overall predominance of nuclear families (61.41%), although there are a sizeable number of joint families (33%) 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 that more Hindu women were married at the youngest age group than their Muslim counterparts. In general, the percentage figures reveal that in the higher age-at-marriage groups there are more Muslim women than their Hindu sisters. And this also happened in case of men (Tables 12.6 and 12.7).



**Table 12.6** Family type

Family type	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 (9.65)
Nuclear family with accretion	[6.89] 13 (4.18)	[3.27] 04 (1.28)	17 (5.47)
Total	189 (60.77)	122 (39.23)	311 (100.00)

[ ] Represents the column percentage

() Represents the total household percentage

Source Author's field data from Jan, 2013

**Table 12.7** Age-at-marriage of Muslims and Hindus in Delua village

Age-at-marriage	No. of individuals			
	Muslim		Hindu	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
10-14		16 (7.17)		26 (18.06)
15-19	10 (4.35)	78 (34.98)	32 (20.38)	45 (31.25)
20-24	86 (37.39)	73 (32.74)	54 (34.39)	38 (26.39)
25-29	80 (34.78)	30 (13.45)	36 (22.93)	22 (15.28)
30-34	34 (14.78)	26 (11.66)	26 (16.56)	11 (7.64)
35+	20 (8.70)	00	09 (5.73)	02 (1.38)
Total	230 (100.00)	223 (100.00)	157 (99.99)	144 (100.00)

Figures in parentheses represent percentages

Source Author's field data from Jan, 2013

## 12.4.2 Economic Condition

### 12.4.2.1 Subsistence Pattern of Both Communities

The subsistence pattern of the two communities shows 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 unorganised 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. The comparative scenario of house type of the two communities 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 great. Overall, the Muslims of Delua have been able to live in better houses than their Hindu counterpart (Tables 12.8, 12.9 and 12.10).

From Tables 12.11 and 12.12, 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

**Table 12.8** Subsistence pattern of Muslim

Owner cultivator	Non-agricultural day labourer	Rickshaw puller	Minor forest produce collector	Mason	Total
36 (9.81)	146 (39.78)	29 (7.90)	81 (22.07)	75 (20.43)	367

Figures in parentheses represent percentages

Source Author's field data from Jan, 2013

**Table 12.9** Subsistence pattern of Hindus

Owner cultivator	Non-agricultural day labourer	Rickshaw puller	Minor forest produce collector	Mason	Total
31 (11.36)	146 (53.48)	2 (0.73)	78 (28.57)	16 (5.86)	273

Figures in parentheses represent percentages

Source Author's field data from Jan, 2013

**Table 12.10** House type of the two communities

	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 including roof	[12.17] 23 (7.39)	[9.01] 11 (3.54)	34 (10.93)
Pucca with asbestos/tin roof	[25.39] 48 (15.43)	[18.85] 23 (7.39)	71 (22.83)
	189 (60.77)	122 (39.23)	311 (44.69)

Figures in parentheses represent percentages

Source Author's field data from Jan, 2013

**Table 12.11** Community-wise landholding in Delua

Size category (in acres)	No. of families		Total
	Hindu	Muslim	
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 (1.29)	00	04 (1.29)
1.5–2.00	[2.46] 03 (0.96)	00	03 (0.96)
2.00+	[1.64] 02 (0.64)	[1.59] 03 (0.96)	05 (1.61)
Total	[100.00] 122 (39.23)	189 (60.77)	311 (100.00)

[] Represents the percentage of total household of each community

() Represents the percentage of total households

Source Author's field data from Jan, 2013

**Table 12.12** Landholding Pattern

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)

[] Represents the percentage of total household of each community

() Represents the percentage of total households

Source Author's field data from Jan, 2013

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.

### 12.4.3 Educational Scenario

From the Tables 12.13 and 12.14, we have found 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 Muslim women show a considerably higher percentage of literates than their Hindu sisters. Among the all 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%) (Table 12.15).

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, whereas 70.43% Hindus are educated and 29.57% are uneducated.

From the above tables, it can be observed that the overall education level is better among the Muslims and the Hindus, but we have also found that six persons

**Table 12.13** Literacy condition 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)

Figures in parentheses represent percentages

Source Author's field data from Jan, 2013

**Table 12.14** Female literacy status of both communities

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)

Figures in parentheses represent percentages

Source Author's field data from Jan, 2013

**Table 12.15** Educational level of two communities in Delua village

Level of education	Muslim		Hindu	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Illiterate	80 (7.94)	125 (12.41)	92 (13.67)	107 (15.90)
Can sign	40 (3.97)	49 (4.87)	27 (4.01)	40 (5.95)
I–IV	161 (15.99)	149 (14.80)	90 (13.37)	92 (13.67)
V–VIII	140 (13.90)	145 (14.40)	106 (15.75)	57 (8.47)
IX–XII	52 (5.16)	50 (4.97)	34 (5.05)	22 (3.27)
XII+	03 (0.30)	03 (0.30)	04 (0.59)	02 (0.29)
	230 (100.00)	223 (100.00)	157 (99.99)	144 (100.00)

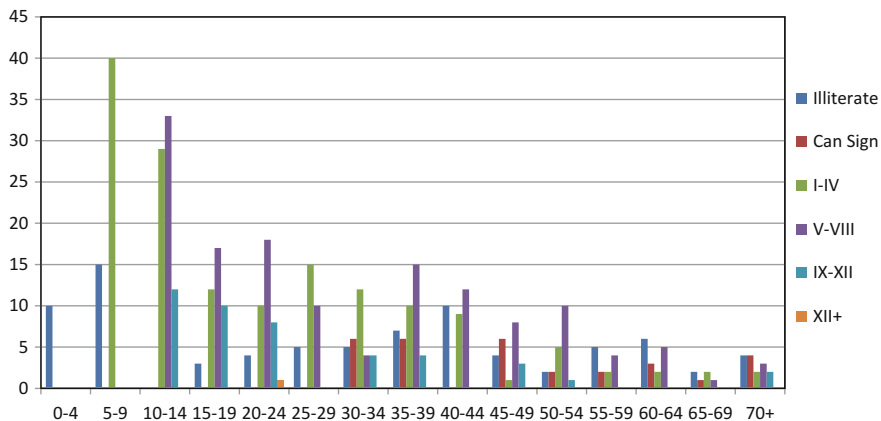
Madrasa [male]: 10 (0.99)

Figures in parentheses represent percentages

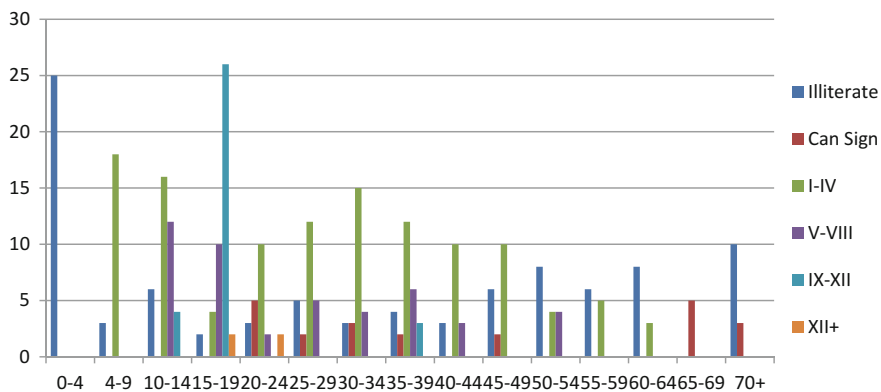
Source Author's field data from Jan, 2013

have graduation degree in the Hindu community while in Muslims are only two. It is observed that primary and upper primary level education is completed most of the studied population. But we have also found maximum number of boys and girls have completed their higher secondary education in the Muslim community (Table 12.15).

From Figs. 12.3 and 12.4, we have found that each age group has more illiterate persons among the Hindu males than the Muslims. The educational level gradually falls down from lower age group to higher age group among the Muslim males, but in Hindus the age group-wise trend of educational level shows ups and downs. The secondary and higher secondary level education is much higher in age group 15–19 among Hindu males than the Muslim. But primary and upper primary level education is better condition in age groups 5–9 and 10–14 among Muslim male than the Hindu males (Figs. 12.5 and 12.6).

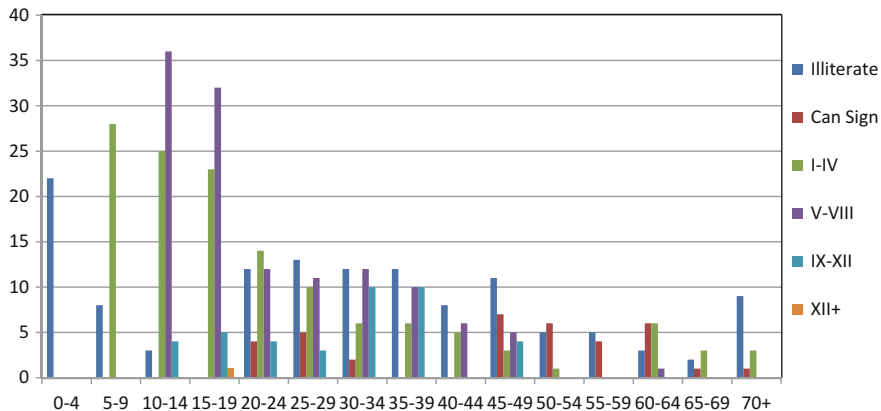


**Fig. 12.3** Age group-wise educational level of Muslim males. *Source* Author’s field data from Jan, 2013

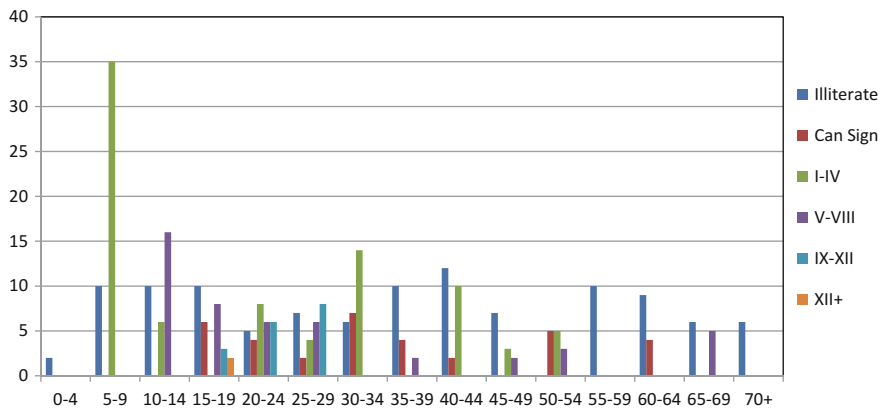


**Fig. 12.4** Age group-wise educational level of Hindu males. *Source* Author’s field data from Jan, 2013

The literacy condition of the Muslim females was much better than their Hindu counterpart. We find primary level of education among the Muslim women in all the age groups, whereas among the Hindu women we do not find any primary level educated individual in the age groups 55–59, 60–64, 65–69 and 70+, which clearly indicates the higher level of consciousness among the Muslim women in having school level education at least in the primary level. The secondary and higher secondary levels of education among the women also show a better picture for the Muslims than the Hindus.



**Fig. 12.5** Age group-wise educational level of Muslim females. *Source* Author’s field data from Jan, 2013



**Fig. 12.6** Age group-wise educational level of Hindu females. *Source* Author’s field data from Jan, 2013

### 12.5 Observation from the Field

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 responsive about the political scenario of the area than their Hindu counterpart; they were very much outspoken and fluently spoke to me and answered my queries during the fieldwork. The reason behind the higher level of consciousness among the Muslims was political. This village is still CPI (M) dominated, and during my fieldwork, I have found that the panchayat member is also a CPI (M) man under the Trinamul-ruled state of West Bengal. During the rule of the left-front

government, the left parties formed a number of women organisations (Mahila Samitis), Self-Help Groups (SHG) and Muslim woman development groups. The left parties were more attentive to the Muslim women owing to their greater participation in the meetings, and the activities of the Muslim women development organisation might have helped to raise the level of consciousness of the Muslim women. The Hindu women on the other hand were found to be less interested to participate in political activities. I did not find any Muslim women under *pardah*. They were, however, found to use a black veil (*burkha*) when they moved out of the village in 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 (Panda and Guha 2015)

Another interesting fact which I observed during my field survey was the nature of communication among the Muslim villagers. When I moved from one Muslim household to another, I found that the news of my entry had already been spread to the new household. In some cases, the family members called up neighbours to their houses to answer my survey queries. This kind of intra-household neighbourhood-level communication was not found among the Hindu families. The Hindus often expressed a kind of aloofness 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.

## 12.6 In Lieu of a Conclusion

The survey and field observations revealed that the study of a single village we should not reach general conclusions the Muslim are not marginalised. This micro-level study revealed that there are concrete empirical situations in which the Muslims may show better conditions of living particularly when compared with a marginalised 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. The Muslims of Delua village do not seem to be marginalised than their scheduled caste neighbours of the same village. The typical image of economically, educationally and socially marginalised Muslim does not emerge from our micro-level field study.

My fieldwork further revealed that the Muslims were more open to disclose their socio-economic conditions than the Hindus. Furthermore, the Muslim women were found to be more aware and cooperative than their Hindu counterparts; they were very much outspoken and fluently spoke to the author and promptly answered his queries. Most interestingly, the Muslims 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.

The typical image of Muslim women giving birth to more children and living under *purdah* and *burkah* obeying the commands of men also does not emerge from our field study. On the contrary, the Muslims of Delua live in better houses; they are better educated than the Hindu neighbours and politically more conscious and advance. The Muslim women were also found to be smarter, open and vocal than their Hindu sisters.

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