

# Role of Vocational and Technical Education and Skill Development in the Empowerment of the Muslim Women in West Bengal

RANJITA BISWAS

Assistant Teacher, Majdia Railbazar High School, Majdia, Nadia, West Bengal, India.

ranjita.das1978@gmail.com

**Abstract** - Women empowerment is an active multidimensional process for enabling women to realise their potential and powers in all spheres of life and play a positive and active role in the development of society. Indian tradition always placed women in the secondary position in every stages of life as compare to their male counterparts. In case of Muslim women the society becomes more male dominating and conservative so that the women scarcely have the taste of independence. Embedded poverty, high illiteracy, constantly increasing everyday insecurity are some of the main reasons for Muslim women's disempowerment. At the elementary stages though the enrolment ratio of Muslim girls is quiet satisfactory but the ratio of discontinuation and drop outs is high in the secondary stages. In West Bengal the Muslim girls from urban educated family though have the opportunity for continuing their higher studies but the rural Muslim women still have to struggle against the social evils and deprivation. Women education in India has been given a lot of importance in all five years plan with special emphasis on vocational and technical education in order to enable the women to be economically independent and lead a quality life. Keeping this in view West Bengal government has framed a new curriculum which introduces vocational and technical education at the secondary and higher secondary level offering many courses especially for girls. This paper purports to identify the basic problems in the way of empowering the Muslim women. The paper also discusses about how far vocational and technical education will help in the empowerment of Muslim women in the rural areas of West Bengal through skill development.

**Keywords:** Education, Employment, Muslim women empowerment, Technical Education, Training, Skill development, Vocational Education.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment, one of the burning most issues all over the world, refers to the creation of an environment for women by increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women to ensure equal right to women and to make them confident enough to claim their rights, such as

- Freely live their life with a sense of self worth, respect and dignity.
- Have complete control of their life, both within and outside of their home and workplace.
- Make their own choices and decisions.
- Have equal status in the society.
- Have equal rights for social and economic justice.
- Determine financial and economic choices.
- Get equal opportunities for education.
- Get equal employment opportunities without any gender bias.
- Get safe and comfortable working environment for their personal as well as social welfare.

Women are undoubtedly, the backbone of any society as they play multiple roles every single day. Still they have always been neglected in almost everywhere of the world which, in turn, has caused them to bear the burnt of inequality, oppression, financial dependability and other social evils. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century the position and status of women in India and elsewhere was very low. They were treated like objects that can be bought and sold. For a long time women in India remained within the four walls of their household. But with the advent of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the position and status of women all over the world has risen incredibly. The rapid pace of economic development increased the demand for educated female labour force in all fields. In India, now the women are earning as much as their male counterparts, providing economic advantage to their family.

But what is discouraging, is the fact that the Muslim women are lagging behind in field of education and employment as compared to other women from other communities in India. Traditional outlook of the Muslims is no doubt, one of the major reasons for their educational backwardness. The orthodox section of the community creates hindrance in women's entry into educational institutions. The Purdah system, practice of early marriage,

low level of aspiration and above all poverty hinder the growth of female education.

Education is, indeed, one of the most significant tool for women empowerment not only because education is an entry point to other opportunities but also because the educational achievements of women can have ripple effects within the family and across generations. But the education should not just focus on the formal knowledge and training. Rather women should be given vocational knowledge and training for skill development through which they not only learn to equip to technical skills but also inculcate a more holistic approach that places a strong emphasis on enabling girls to develop a wider awareness of themselves and the world around them.

## II. OBJECTIVES

The objective of this study is

- To analyze the meaning of vocational and technical education and training and skill development
- To analyze the importance of vocational and technical education and training in women empowerment.
- To identify the educational and socio-economic status of the Muslim women in West Bengal.
- To identify the problems in the way of empowering the Muslim women.
- To highlight the state government initiatives for vocational and technical education and training in West Bengal.
- To provide some suitable suggestions on the basis of the findings to overcome the barriers in the empowerment of Muslim women.

## III. METHODOLOGY

Here, in this study descriptive methods are followed and secondary data has been collected. For this study data and information has been collected from various books, Research Articles, Magazines, Research journal, E-journal, Report of the Vocational and Technical Education and Training Department of West Bengal.

## IV. MEANING OF VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING:

Vocational and Technical Education and Training is a system of education which develops craftsmanship, practical experience and practical problem solving. Venn (1964) explains the etymology of the term 'vocational' as a sort of 'calling'. According to him vocational education and training aims at a stable job and a stable career in a recognized profession. Moodie (2002) stated that "one may consider vocational education and training to be the development and application of knowledge and skills for middle level occupations needed by society from time to time."

"Technical and vocational education is used as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life." (UNESCO, 2001, p.2) Vocational training is defined as 'supplementary to initial training which is part of an ongoing process, designed to ensure that a person's knowledge and skills are related to the requirements of his or her job and are continuously updated'(FAS, 2006).

Vocational and Technical education plays a vital role in human resource development of the country through skill development. The objective of skill development is to create a workforce empowered with the necessary and continuously upgraded skills, knowledge and internationally recognized qualifications to gain access to decent employment and ensure India's competitiveness in the dynamic global market. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) "Skill development is of key importance in stimulating a sustainable development process and can make a contribution in facilitating the transition from an informal to formal economy. It is also essential to address the opportunities and challenges to meet new demands of changing economies and new technologies in the context of globalization".

## V. NEED FOR VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Vocational and technical education and training are one of the most powerful tools for women's empowerment especially in the countries like India because investing in the education and training of females has the highest rate of return of any possible investment in developing countries (FAQ, 1997): educated mothers, having fewer children, invest more in the health and education of each child, thereby raising the productivity of future generations, increasing their income, and generating sustainable growth.

Women's access to education and training can have a major impact on their potential to access and benefit from income generating opportunities and improve their overall well-being. To overcome the challenges that the women have to face various approaches such as non formal education, technical and vocational training, training in new technologies, numeracy training etc. are needed. Moreover information and communication technologies (including mobile and electronic communication etc.) supported by the right policies and institutional framework can provide them with alternative avenues to access information related to their rights services and resources and social protection (e.g identification card registration, laws on land, inheritance, domestic or gender violence, agriculture, market, health, nutrition information and so on.).

## VI. PRESENT STATUS OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN WEST BENGAL

Muslims of West Bengal constitute second largest religious and principal minority group among all other socio religious communities in the state. Muslims constitute 26.65 % (2011) of the state population in West Bengal. In

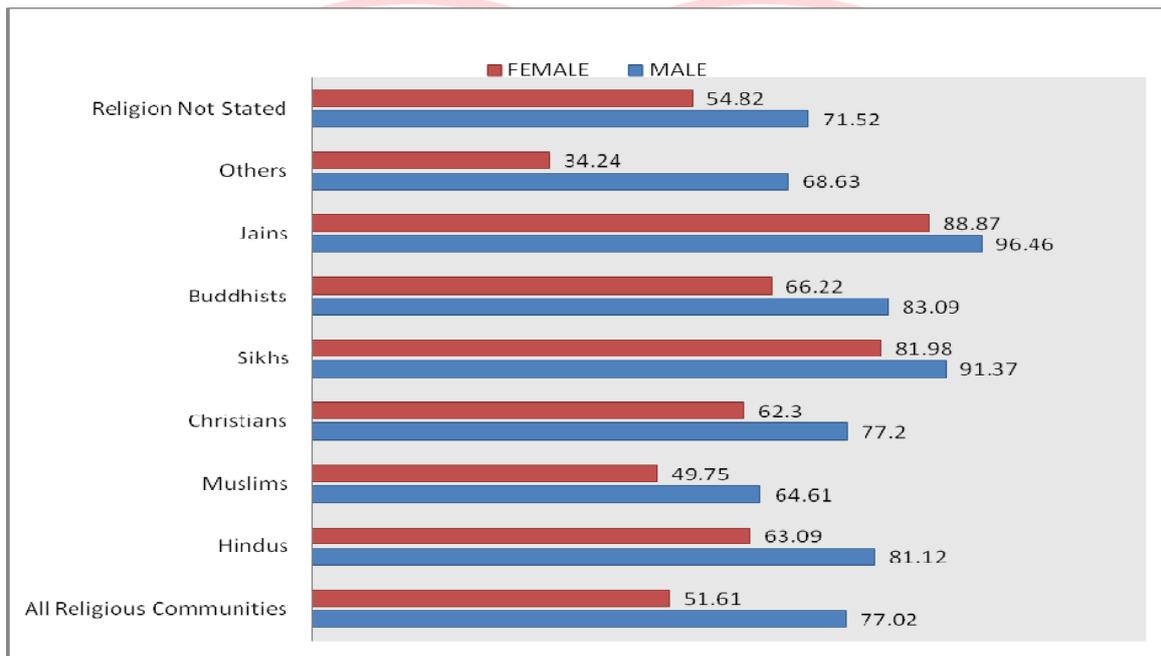
West Bengal the Muslim women are lagged behind the mainstream on all human development indicators since independence due to various external and internal factors. They are still remained socially, economically and educationally towards the back when change is the assortment of today. Empowerment of women implies their better position in socio-political and economic spheres. Muslim women's empowerment is crucial as they continue to be victimized by traditional social structure, social systems and social institutions of the community when modernization of women in India is a potential medium. Lack of education and employment opportunities, economic dependency, poverty and ignorance of their rights have made them further vulnerable to exploitation. Muslim women play a crucial role in well-being and very survival of the Muslim families but unfortunately for various reasons the gender disparity is very much conspicuous in Muslim society and as a result they remain more undernourished, more undercompensated for their labour and more underrepresented in formal decision making bodies than men as a class.

The education commission, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 1966, stated that it is the

responsibility of the educational system to bring different social classes and groups together to promote the emergence of an egalitarian and integrated society. But unfortunately the educational development is very poor in India. Various efforts have been taken in the post independent period to spread education among the masses. But result is not very satisfactory, especially in the context of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, minorities and other backward communities or weaker sections (Mondal, 1997: 19). It is evident that the condition of Muslims in West Bengal in the field of education is very poor, even poorer than SCs and STs and women's education among Muslims in the state is lower than men.

According to 2001 census Muslims constitute 16,075,836 individuals or 25.20 percent of the total population of West Bengal, 84.26% Muslims live in rural and 15.74% in urban areas. The incidence of illiteracy among Muslim women in the state is 61.07% compared to 47.04% among Hindu women. The percentage of Muslim women in the post high school education was stated to be 0.5 while that of non Muslim women is 4.6. The ratios of Muslim and non Muslim in the categories are 1:7 and 1:9.

Figure: Rate of Literacy on the basis of Gender among various Religious communities of West Bengal (In Percent)



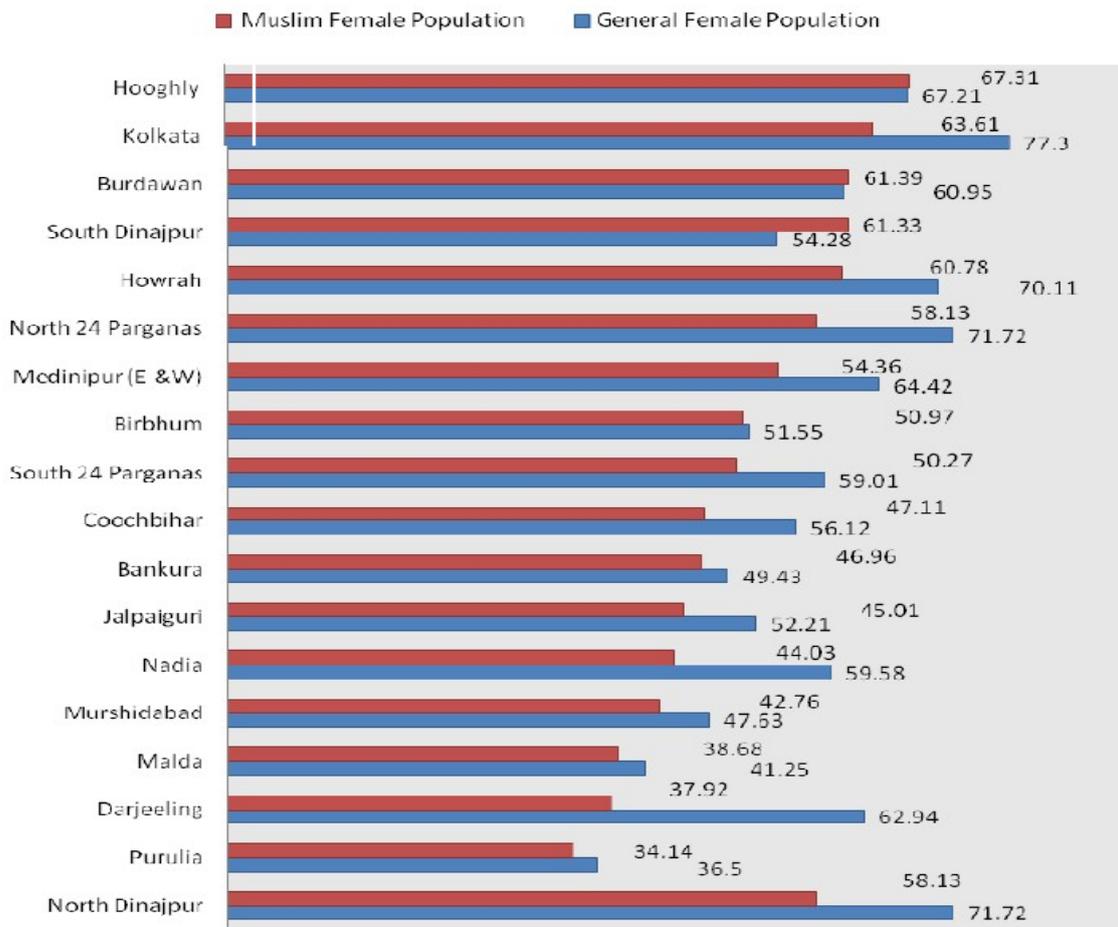
Source: Based on Census Report, 2001, Govt. of India.

Table: Rate of Literacy and Illiteracy among the Muslims including Male and Female of West Bengal on the basis of their Place of Residence (In per cent)

Place of Residence	Literacy Rate		Illiteracy Rate	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Whole State	64.61%	49.75%	35.39%	50.25%
Urban	72.04%	59.23%	27.97%	40.77%
Rural	62.92%	47.87%	37.08%	52.13%

Source: Govt. of India, Census Report, 2001.

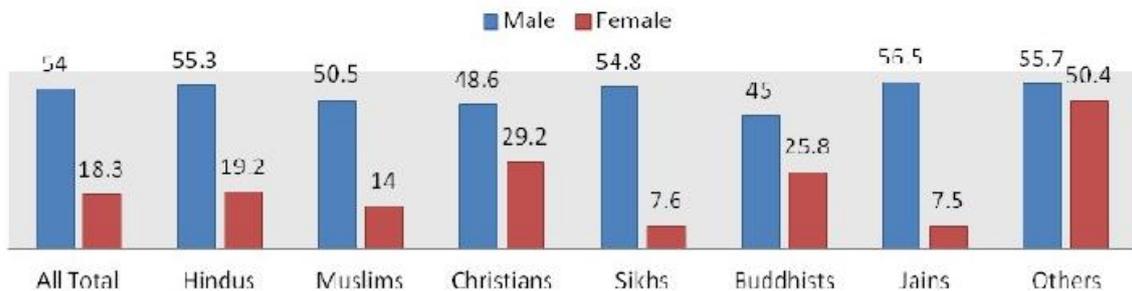
Figure: District wise Rate of Literacy on the basis of Sex between General and Muslim Religious Communities of West Bengal (In per cent) :



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

Muslim women have the lowest work participation rate. Sixty percent of Muslim women are self-employed. Figures for Muslim women's employment as regular workers in urban areas (15.7 percent as compared to 27.7 percent for Hindu women and 51.5 percent for Christian women) highlight their marginal presence in salaried jobs. Figures for rural areas, however, dismal as they are, also indicate a more or less similar employment status for Hindu (3.6 percent) and Muslim (3.0 percent) women. "The high self employment rates and the corresponding low participation of Muslim women as salaried workers indicate their marginal presence as workers; rather it indicates their 'invisibility' as informal workers." (Kazi; S (1991), "Muslim Women in India," A Report (London, UK: Minority Rights Group International, p.31)

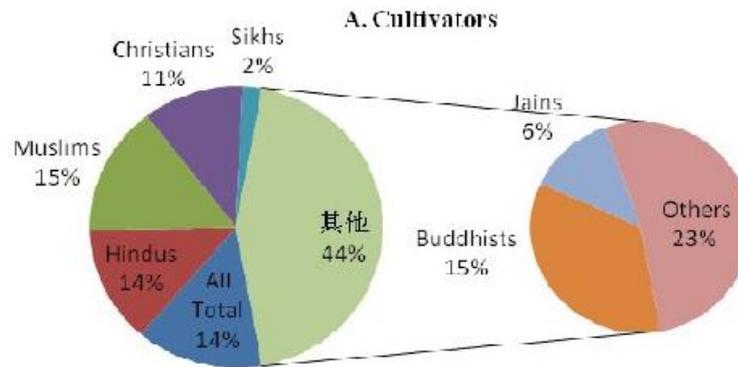
Figure: Work Participant Rate based on sex among various Religious Communities of West Bengal (In per cent)



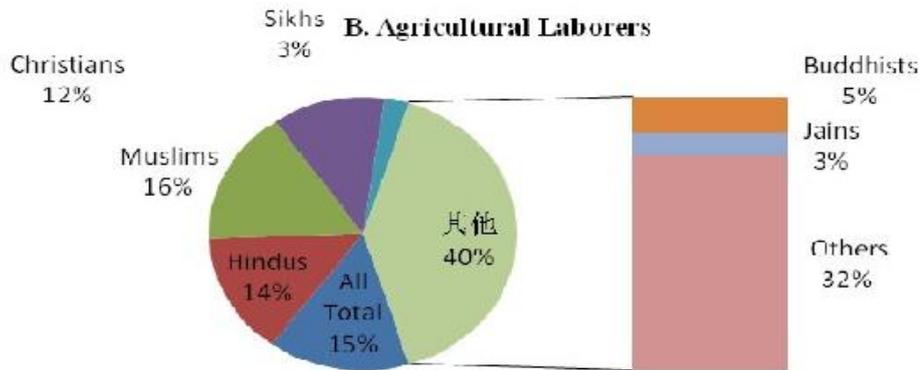
Source: Based on Census Report, 2001, Govt. of India.

Muslim population in the state are concentrated mostly in the rural areas and are engaged in agricultural pursuits. A large number of this population work as agricultural labour and many others suffer from unemployment. Impelled to resort to self-employment for their survival a substantial number of Muslim women involves themselves in a few crafts like needle and zari works, tailoring, embroidery, paper crafts, carpentry etc.

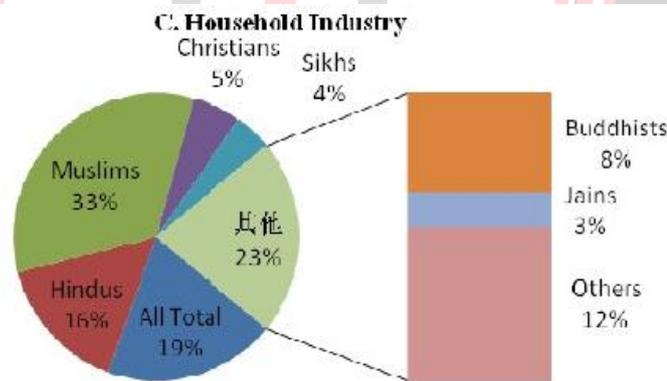
Figure : Various Occupational Pursuits among various Religious Communities of West Bengal (In per cent)



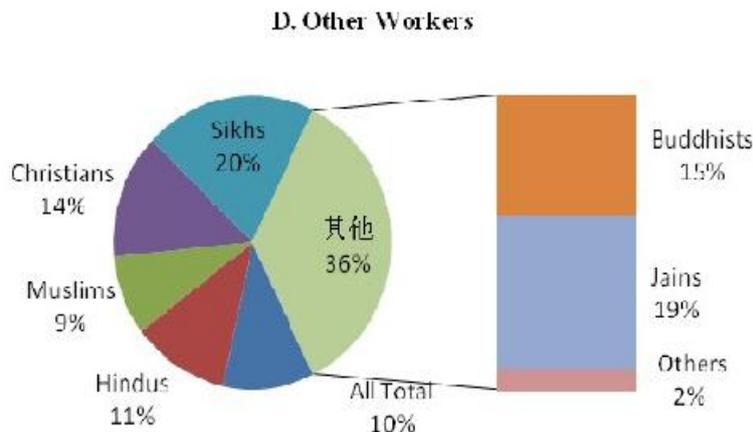
Source: Based on Census Report, 2001, Govt. of India.



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



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



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

**Table : District Wise Female Work Participant Rate in Various Occupations among the Muslims of West Bengal (In per cent)**

Sl. No	Districts	Cultivators	Agricultural Laborers	Household Industry	Other Workers
1.	Kolkata	1.76	0.67	13.04	84.53
2.	Burdawan	11.39	16.83	27.53	44.25
3.	Nadia	18.91	7.95	24.57	48.57
4.	North 24 Parganas	7.50	15.30	23.28	53.92
5.	Howrah	2.50	5.24	52.01	40.25
6.	Hooghly	12.83	14.48	29.30	43.39
7.	South 24 Parganas	10.27	29.51	21.22	39.00
8.	Birbhum	9.76	12.90	46.25	31.10
9.	South Dinajpur	23.05	31.41	6.66	38.89
10.	Darjeeling	7.25	28.49	2.75	61.51
11.	Medinipur (East & West)	12.65	27.19	31.12	29.04
12.	Murshidabad	3.61	4.14	74.13	18.11
13.	Coochbihar	30.77	53.32	3.29	12.61
14.	Jalpaiguri	20.34	47.55	1.99	30.12
15.	North Dinajpur	25.47	45.33	11.81	17.40
16.	Bankura	17.58	19.52	39.40	23.50
17.	Purulia	20.07	55.50	12.46	11.97
18.	Malda	4.88	14.16	74.13	18.11
All Over West Bengal		11.01	19.21	38.95	30.84

Source: Govt. of India, Census Report, 2001

### VII. PROBLEMS FACED BY MUSLIM WOMEN IN ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Muslim women are the worst victims of the patriarchal Islamic society and are not given enough freedom and hardly have access to higher education. Even they cannot access the primary education easily. Madrassas teach mostly Islamic faith and do not provide secular education. They emphasize more on Quranic education given at home to the girls and not to allow them to go outside the home in the name of education and employment.

The system of match fixation within kinship is also responsible for distracting the young girls and to loose interest in achieving something through education.

The parents are not interested in having their girls highly educated and employed as it is very difficult to find educated grooms for them in their community.

The orthodox attitude of the Muslim community creates some misconceptions regarding the purity of girls if they have studied in universities or get employed.

Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMLB) in India pointed out the most tragic thing is that Muslim women have accepted this happily, internalizing the kind of roles their men want them to live with. They are told this is what they are created for and that for this they should be happy.

Moreover, lack of infrastructural facilities, transportation problem, distance from home and non-availability of

hostels, lack of proper training and guidance and above all poverty hinder the growth in participation of Muslim women in education and employment.

Need of the hour is to provide job oriented education and also to set up sufficient number of technical schools for male and female separately in the Muslim concentrated areas.

### VIII. WEST BENGAL GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES FOR PROVIDING VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Government of West Bengal successfully introduced and integrated vocational and technical courses at IXth - XIIth standards in the schools in West Bengal with the object:

- to improve employability of the students passing out from the courses because of industry driven inputs and exposure. This will be measured by enhanced employment (70% placement in workplace as employees or interns for six months) of the students achieving level 4 certificate.
- to reduce school dropout rates and achieve better attendance levels due to better job prospects through such programs.

The State government is conducting the entire training delivery by NSDC Training Partners from March 2016 in 289 schools where following sectors are introduced:

Sector	No. of Schools
Automotive	64
Retail	161
ITCs	174
Security	39
Healthcare	140
Total	578

During 2016 -17 the state has proposed for implementation of vocational education in 1016 schools with 18 trades including automobile.

Minority Affairs and Madrasa Education (MAME), Department of the Government of West Bengal offers Placement Linked Skill Development Training Programme for candidates belonging to minority communities under various interventions being made by the Government of West Bengal as well as under Multisectoral Development Programme (MSDP), Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India.

Besides Government ITI and Polytechnic colleges, a number of vocational and technical education and training colleges are being established under PPP model.

A number of NGOs in collaboration with the state government are engaged in providing vocational education especially in the rural areas of West Bengal.

### IX. FINDINGS

The literacy rate among Muslims in 2001 was far below than all other categories and Muslim women are far behind their men.

In almost every district of the state except Hooghly, Burdwan and South Dinajpur rate of literacy among Muslim female population is much lower than that of general female population.

Though enrollment rates at the primary level have risen considerably, but many of the students who enrolled, drop out and only a very small number manage to get beyond the primary stage.

Muslim women are mostly self-employed or unemployed. Number of Muslim salaried female workers is nominal.

Vocational and Technical Education at IXth-XIIth standards is introduced in the schools but the Madrasas are still not included in this scheme. Therefore a large number of students in Madrasas are still deprived of the opportunities of accessing vocational and technical education at secondary and higher secondary levels.

Vocational and Technical Education and Training colleges in the state do not have the provision for providing education to the women separately.

## X. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident from the above discussion that vocational and technical education can play an important role in the empowerment of Muslim women in West Bengal not only by providing education but also enabling them to get employed through skill development and training. Though State government has taken a number of initiatives for providing vocational and technical education from school level, there is a lot to be done:

Besides the secondary and higher secondary schools in West Bengal, all Madrasas in the state should be approved for providing vocational and technical education at secondary and higher secondary levels as maximum number of Muslim students are enrolled in Madrasas.

More female teachers and trainers are to be appointed.

Arrangement of scholarships for talented and rank holder girls should be made to motivate them to complete their course of education.

Various courses relating to women such as fashion designing, costume designing, textile designing etc should be introduced.

Teachers should create interest in science subjects at the school levels so that the girls get interested in Technical education and training.

Vocational and Technical Education and Training colleges have to provide hostel and infrastructural facilities for girls wherever necessary.

In school, parent teacher meeting should be conducted to make the parents aware of the importance of vocational education and training and of the opportunities it can provide to their children.

## XI. CONCLUSION

After going through the discussions and findings it may be concluded that vocational and technical education and training can equip women with technical skills for better employment and enable them to develop a wider awareness of themselves and the world around them. It may also be

concluded from the findings that the educational and socio economic status of the Muslim women are still behind than other women from other communities in West Bengal especially in the rural areas. It is also found that the madrasas in West Bengal where the maximum number of Muslim women are enrolled, are not still granted by the government for providing vocational and technical education at secondary and higher secondary level. Therefore, to equip the Muslim women with vocational and technical training government should make necessary arrangements thereby empowering the women for their better future. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Educate a man you educate one person; educate a woman you educate a whole nation" which means empowering a woman is empowering a whole nation. So it is not only the duty of the government and the NGOS to play active role in imparting education to the Muslim women but the whole community should cooperate in this matter. Moreover, the female themselves should have the urge of improving their situation through participation in education and employment.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Ali M. (2009, June 25) Two Circles.net/ Muslim Women in India are in Miserable Condition: Uzma Naheed.
- [2] Higher Education in India: Issues Related to Expansion, Inclusiveness, Quality and Finance, 2008.
- [3] Hussain,S. (2010), "Educational Attainment of Muslim Women in India: Obstacles and Interventions", in *Minority Education in India: Issues of Access, Equity and Inclusion*, ed. A. Waheed, New Delhi: Serials Publications.
- [4] Kazi,S (1991), "Muslim Women in India," A Report (London, UK: Minority Rights Group International, p.31)
- [5] Mondal, 1997:19, *Educational Status of Muslims: Problems, Prospects and Priorities* (New Delhi; Inter-India Publications, 1997.
- [6] Siddiqui, M.K.A (2011) "Muslims in India: Issues and Challenges" (A Collection of Articles), Kolkata: Abadi Publication.
- [7] Rahaman , M.T. and A. Bhuimali: (2011)*Indian Muslims and Their Economy.*" Delhi; Abhijit Publications pp. 84 and 91.
- [8] Request For Qualification For Selection of Private Training Provider for Implementing Vocational Education in 289 Government Schools in State of West Bengal; Directorate of Vocational Education and Training; Department of Technical Education and Training, Govt. of West Bengal/www.nsdindia.org.

**Notes:** In spite of the fact that the provisional data of Census report of 2011 conducted by the Government of India, New Delhi, has been accredited on 31st March 2011, however, to avail the religion wise data, it will take about some years to be made such data in public. Therefore, the discussion is based on the Census data of 2001, Government of India.