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Socio-religious Disparity in Educational Achievements: A District Level Study in West Bengal

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Abstract

Education is a powerful catalyst for the change of a society and plays a crucial role in the development of a nation. In recent years, education has been included as a key component of Human Development Index. As a result, social and regional disparities in educational achievement drag back development of the country. The present paper focuses on Educational Achievement in Elementary Education across the districts of West Bengal to explore regional disparities in educational achievements and differences across social groups – Religious Minorities and Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Since data on children with socio-religious classification is not available, we have tried to provide an overview of the situation by analyzing educational achievements separately for Religious Minority dominated districts, SC/ST dominated districts, and Other districts. Based on the data from District Information System for Education, the paper uses educational indicators like Literacy, Enrolment, Drop Out, Repetition Rate, Completion Rate, and Examination Performance of the Students at primary stages and middle stages the paper also tries to construct a composite Educational Development Index, separately for the different types of districts. The paper brings to light regional and social disparities in educational achievement in our state and proposes certain policies for improvement.

I. INTRODUCTION

Access to education is a basic human right and essential to human well-being. Formal education is one of the instruments for accelerating the process of social mobility. School and college education generally give students the confidence that they can improve their lives. It also has the potential to make them aware of the difficulties and obstacles that may hinder their paths. Such awareness induces deprived groups to venture for various alternative avenues for improving their living status and climbing up the social hierarchy. While, India's progress in providing access to education to its children and youth is remarkable, especially for the last decade, after the starting of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in 2001, all socio-religious groups have not benefited equally. During the six decades between 1951 and 2001, India's

Per Capita GDP increased three times, while literacy rate increased 3.5 times and Gross Enrolment Ratio increased 2.5 times. More recently, the number of Out Of School Children (OOSC) in the age group of 6 – 14 years has declined from around 45 million in 2001 to around 8 million by the end of 2009. However, it is argued that this improvement has been unequal for different segments of the society, mostly along social and religious lines. This paper tries to explore differential access and achievement of socio-religious groups to education in the districts of West Bengal. It tries to address the questions like what is the pattern of disparity in educational attainment in West Bengal and to what extent membership of excluded social groups cause deprivation in educational achievement?

The paper consists of **six** sections. The next section provides a brief overview of the current literature and the third section describes the Data Sources and Methodology. The fourth section tries to explore the disparity in educational achievements between socio-religious groups in West Bengal using district level data. Lastly, a case study has been done at a backward and an advanced district. Those two districts are Purulia and Hoogli respectively, chosen on the basis of the ranking in the Human Development Report of West Bengal 2004. The last section sums up the findings and provides some possible suggestions.

II. BRIEF REVIEW OF CURRENT LITERATURE

Education is perceived to be the primary means to overcome social discrimination (Omvedt, 1993). Yet, researchers have found substantial disparities among socio-religious classes in terms of education in India. Some of the recent studies on Education and Social Class in Indian context include those by Chalam (2000), Reddy (2000), Rahul and Subhadra. (2001), Jeffrey et al (2002), Kanbargi (2002), Nambissan and Sedwal (2002), Sujatha (2002), Balagopalan and Subrahmanian (2003), Visaria and Ramachandran (2003), Subrahmanian (2005), Velaskar (2005), Jha and Jhingran (2005), and Lewin (2007). On the other hand, Ansari (1988), Salamatullah (1994), Ruhela (1998), and Desai and Kulkarni (2005) deal with educational status among religious minorities, especially among Muslims in India. Two recent reports of the Government of India, the *Sachar Committee Report* (GOI, 2006) and the *Ranganath Misra Committee Report* (GOI, 2007) also discuss these issues in detail, among many others.

Surprisingly the present author have not come across any studies related to educational disparity among socio-religious groups in West Bengal, though the demographic situation of the state is quite conducive to such studies. The present paper aims to fill this gap in existing literature.

III. DATA SOURCE AND METHODOLOGY

The present study uses data mainly from District Information System of Education of the Government of India (DISE). Some data has also been taken from Planning Department of Government of West Bengal and Data related to population of SC, ST & Minority has been taken from Census of India (2001) and Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. The paper also uses primary data obtained through Field Survey in Purulia and Hoogli districts of West Bengal to explore social exclusion in educational attainment in West Bengal. Though these are case studies, they provide important insights into the situation.

IV. METHODOLOGY

In order to explore the religion wise disparity in educational attainment, the nineteen districts of West Bengal have been divided into different Zones depending on the population composition. We have High Minority districts (Zone-M1), Moderate Minority Districts (Zone-M2) and Low Minority districts (Zone-M3) depending on the share of minority population in the districts. The grouping into three Zones has been done so as to have fairly equal sized groups. The exact method is described in Table-1. Similar grouping were done for SC/ST population. We have also explored the situation after adding the Religious Minorities and SC/STs to get proportion of *Socially Excluded Population*. It may be noted that in our study *Religious Minority* is taken to constitute the Muslim population since other religious minorities are marginal in the context of West Bengal.

The zonal distribution of the districts according to the above three criteria is given in the Appendix.

Now these three Zones for each type of classification can be compared to test the hypothesis that people belonging to Socially Excluded Groups (Religious Minorities or Scheduled Castes and Tribes) are having lower educational attainment compared to the Socially Included communities (Upper Caste Hindus in case of West Bengal) being reflected as lower average educational attainment in the districts dominated by the excluded groups compared to the districts where their presence is relatively lower. In addition to this descriptive exploration, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) has been used to check if the variation between the districts in terms of educational indices can be explained through the membership of the districts in the Zones formed by us with the help of F test. We have also ranked the districts in terms of the educational indices as well as the concentration of Minorities, SC/ST population, and *Socially Excluded Groups*. Thereafter, Rank Correlation has also been used

to examine the association between hierarchy in terms of population groups and that in terms of educational attainment.

Table – 1
Classification Scheme of Districts

<i>Classification of districts according to the dominance of Minority Population</i>	
Zone-M1 <i>High Minority Districts</i>	Districts where Proportion of Religious Minority population <i>is greater than</i> [State average plus half of Standard Deviation in Religious Minority population percentage across districts]
Zone-M2 <i>Moderate Minority Districts</i>	Districts where Proportion of Religious Minority population <i>is lower than</i> [State average plus half of Standard Deviation in Religious Minority population percentage across districts] <i>but is greater than</i> [State average minus half of Standard Deviation in Religious Minority population percentage across districts]
Zone-M3 <i>Low Minority Districts</i>	Districts where Proportion of Religious Minority population <i>is lower than</i> [State average minus half of Standard Deviation in Religious Minority population percentage across districts]
<i>Classification of districts according to the dominance of SC/ST Population</i>	
Zone-S1 <i>High SC/ST Districts</i>	Districts where Proportion of SC/ST population <i>is greater than</i> [State average plus half of Standard Deviation in SC/ST population percentage across districts]
Zone-S2 <i>Moderate SC/ST Districts</i>	Districts where Proportion of SC/ST population <i>is lower than</i> [State average plus half of Standard Deviation in SC/ST population percentage across districts] <i>but is greater than</i> [State average minus half of Standard Deviation in SC/ST population percentage across districts]
Zone-S3 <i>Low SC/ST Districts</i>	Districts where Proportion of SC/ST population <i>is lower than</i> [State average minus half of Standard Deviation in SC/ST population percentage across districts]
<i>Classification of districts according to the dominance of Socially Excluded Groups Population</i>	
Zone-X1 <i>High SEG Districts</i>	Districts where Proportion of SEG population <i>is greater than</i> [State average plus half of Standard Deviation in SEG population percentage across districts]
Zone-X2 <i>Moderate SEG Districts</i>	Districts where Proportion of SEG population <i>is lower than</i> [State average plus half of Standard Deviation in SEG population percentage across districts] <i>but is greater than</i> [State average minus half of Standard Deviation in SEG population percentage across districts]
Zone-X3 <i>Low SEG Districts</i>	Districts where Proportion of SEG population <i>is lower than</i> [State average minus half of Standard Deviation in SEG population percentage across districts]

Note: Socially Excluded Group is sum total of Religious Minority and SC/ST Population. SC and ST refer to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes respectively.

V. EDUCATIONAL SITUATION IN WEST BENGAL: AN OVERVIEW

1. Literacy

As per the Census of India-2001, in West Bengal the literacy rate among Muslim population was 57.5 per cent and the literacy rate among Hindus was 72.4 per cent (Table 2). So there exists a gap of around 15-Percentage points among the religious majority population and the minorities in terms of Literacy. As the district wise literacy figures are not available for minority population of West Bengal, the paper tries to evaluate the performance of the minority population dominated districts vis-à-vis the other districts.

It is observed that Literacy Rate in West Bengal is quite disparate across districts. While the state average is 68 per cent, it varies from the low of 47 per cent in Uttar Dinajpur to the high of 80 per cent in Kolkata. This variation is substantial across different types of districts – differentiated according to proportion of minority, SC/ST, and Social Excluded Groups. The average literacy rate in Zone-M1 districts (i.e. Minority dominated districts) is 58 per cent while that in Zone-M2 and M3 are 73 per cent and 69 per cent respectively. It is thus clear that literacy is lower in minority dominated districts. This is true for both the genders and Male and Female literacy rates are both higher in districts where minority population is low.

Table-2
Literacy Trends Across Zones in West Bengal

<i>Zones</i>	<i>Literacy (Male)</i>	<i>Literacy (Female)</i>	<i>Literacy (Aggregate)</i>
Zone-M1	67.5	49.6	58.8
Zone-M2	80.0	66.3	73.5
Zone-M3	80.4	58.7	69.8
Zone-S1	73.8	49.8	62.2
Zone-S2	78.4	61.4	70.2
Zone-S3	74.7	63.0	69.2
Zone-X1	69.1	50.7	60.2
Zone-X2	78.6	60.6	69.9
Zone-X3	83.6	68.0	76.2
State	76.8	59.3	68.4

Source: DISE, 2007-08

Similar observations are made when we segregate the districts according to proportion of SC/ST population. Literacy Rates are systematically higher in Zone-S2 and S3 compared to Zone-S1 where the share of SC/STs in total population is highest. Significant gender gap in literacy can also be observed across Zones. Gender gap in literacy varies from as high as 24 percentage points in Zone-S1 to a low of 11 percentage points in Zone-S3. So, as proportion of SC/ST population increases, not only the average literacy rate decreases, but the gender gap also increases, indicating high gender inequality in educational achievement in the SC/ST dominated districts.

We have combined SC/ST and Muslims and designated the combined group as *Socially Excluded Group* (SEG). When the zoning is done according to the share of socially excluded group in total population, then also the backwardness of these groups become evident. While literacy in Zone-X1 (SEG dominated district) is 60 per cent, that in Zone-X2 and Zone-X3 are 69 per cent and 76 per cent respectively. In Zone-X1 almost half of the females are illiterate and there is a gender gap in literacy of around 19 percentage points, which is

considerably high. On the other hand, female literacy rate in Zone-X2 and X3 are 60 and 68 per cent respectively. So, it emerges that dominance of *Socially Excluded Group* is inversely proportional to literacy rate in general and female literacy in particular.

While discussing the literacy indicator another important observation can be made. Irrespective of composition of population, there exists an average gender gap in literacy of around 15 percentage points in West Bengal, indicating that negligence of the educational needs of the girl child is quite common among the socially included groups in West Bengal as well, and *Women* can be considered as an *Excluded Group* by themselves, but that is beyond the scope of this paper.

2. Net Enrolment Rate (NER)

To continue with formal educational training, after being literate, children need to be admitted to schools. So, emphasis should be given to on the Net Enrollment Ratio. NER, it may be recalled, measures what proportion of relevant age-group children are enrolled in school stages. A high NER is the objective and indicator of educational achievement. To fulfill this objective, Government of India has started the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2001, and the mission to some extent has been successful. During last ten years significant increase in NER can be noticed, especially in backward areas. According to India's Education For All Mid-Decade Assessment, in just five years between the year 2000 and 2005, primary school enrollment increased by 14 per cent in aggregate and by 20 per cent for girls. Similar trends are true for West Bengal too. However the situation is dissimilar across regions.

Table-3
Net Enrollment Rate Across Zones in West Bengal

<i>Zones</i>	<i>NER Primary</i>	<i>NER Middle</i>
Zone-M1	95.31	50.12
Zone-M2	72.07	49.61
Zone-M3	79.72	48.28
Zone-S1	94.25	56.96
Zone-S2	77.68	47.97
Zone-S3	76.78	45.47
Zone-X1	94.45	52.34
Zone-X2	77.12	51.37
Zone-X3	65.68	42.92
State	81.03	49.37

Source: DISE, 2007-08

The Net Enrollment Rate for Primary Stage in Zone M1 is 95 per cent while that in Zone M2 and M3 is 72 and 79 per cent respectively (Table 3). That is quite unexpected result as per as the hypothesis of backward group dominated districts having lower educational achievements is concerned. In Zone M1 except for Birbhum and South Twenty Four Pargana the other three districts namely, Malda, Murshidabad and Uttar Dinajpur exhibit a NER of 100 per cent. This rise in enrollment may have been because of the SSA drive by the government since 2001. Even so, this is really encouraging trends in so far as bringing children to schools is concerned.

However, when we move to Net Enrollment Rate for Middle Stages, we find a completely opposite picture. The NER for middle stages on an average are almost half of the NER at Primary – indicating high drop outs during movement from primary to middle stages. As we can see that the NER at middle stage for Zone-M1 is 50 per cent and for Zone-M2 and M3 the figures are 49 and 48 per cent respectively.

Low NER of Zone-M2 may have been caused by incompleteness of enrolment data from the advanced district of Kolkata where available DISE data provides enrollment figures mostly for the Government Schools whereas most of the children go to private schools.

Similar is the situation if the districts are classified according to the population of SC/ST community. Here also, both NER at primary stage and middle stage is high for Zone-S1 as compared to Zone-S2 and S3. Again it may be due to the recent efforts of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. Districts like Purulia, Bankura, and Birbhum having around 40 per cent if its population as SC/ST shows about 100 per cent NER at primary level. But again there is a problem in retaining those children in school, is reflected by the lower NER for middle stages.

Lastly, when we divide the districts as per the dominance of *Socially Excluded Group* then it is observed that in Zone-X1, out of every 100 children, 94 gets enrolled in the primary school, 6 remains out of school and 52 out of those 94 enrolled child goes to middle stage while 42 gets dropped out in between the primary and middle stages. So, out of each 100 child of Zone-X1, 48 remain out of school. It appears that Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is successful in bringing the children to school, but is not successful in retaining them in school or reduce dropout. This is the main reason why our hypothesis is refuted for the NER for primary stage but not quite so for the NER for middle stage.

3. Dropout Rates (DOR)

After ensuring all children in the age group of 6 – 14 years are enrolled in school, the next task is to reduce the dropout in order to ensure that the enrolled children completes formal education up to at least the secondary stages. After the completion of mid-decade evaluation of Education For All in 2005, it has been found that one in four children left school before reaching grade V and almost half left before reaching grade VIII. Thus dropout is still a major problem area in our education system. Are the *Socially Excluded Groups* suffering from higher dropout? Let us explore the issue.

When we look at the different Zones classified according to the presence of minority population, it is noticed that as share of minority population increases in the districts, the dropout rate also increases (Table 4).

It is seen that the drop out rate for primary stage in Zone-M1 is 32 per cent while that in middle stage is 44 per cent. And the dropout rate for the Zone-M2 is 18 and 34 per cent for primary and middle stages respectively.

Similar trends in dropout rates are noted when the districts are classified according to SC/ST population and also in case of zoning according to the presence of *Socially Excluded Group*. It appears that our hypothesis is proved if we use the dropout rate as an (inverse) indicator of educational attainment. Though in these days Government of India has started midday meal scheme and various programmes to retain the children in the school, much needs to be done yet.

Table-4
Dropout rate Across Zones in West Bengal

<i>Zones</i>	<i>Dropout Rate Primary</i>	<i>Dropout Rate Middle</i>
Zone-M1	32.7	44.3
Zone-M2	18.4	34.2
Zone-M3	27.2	35.8
Zone-S1	28.5	40.4
Zone-S2	26.9	37.1
Zone-S3	18.0	35.3
Zone-X1	33.0	43.8
Zone-X2	20.8	36.3
Zone-X3	17.5	29.0
State	25.8	37.6

Source: DISE, 2007-08

4. Retention Rate

Retention Rate is actually complementary to the dropout rate. So as dropout rate declines, the retention rate rises. Since the results for dropout rates have already been discussed, there is nothing much to say about the retention rate. But presently retention rate should be the matter of concern for the school authorities. During a field survey on education and human development, results of which we discuss later, an opinion was taken from different persons about the reasons for dropout. Most of them said that high school is far away and they need to provide cycles to their children to send them to school and they are not capable enough to spend so much. For girl children, parents simply don't want their daughters to cover such a long distance to go to school, may be due to security reasons. In fact the poor people take their children out of school because they cannot afford to educate them; even if they could afford to educate their children, the returns on primary school education are meagre; and sometimes they need their children's earning to supplement family income.

Table-5
Completion Rates Across Zones in West Bengal

<i>Zones</i>	<i>Completion Rate Primary</i>	<i>Completion Rate Middle</i>
Zone-M1	64.1	27.9
Zone-M2	58.7	32.6
Zone-M3	58.0	31.0
Zone-S1	67.4	33.9
Zone-S2	56.8	30.2
Zone-S3	62.9	29.4
Zone-X1	63.2	29.4
Zone-X2	61.1	32.7
Zone-X3	54.2	30.5
State	60.1	30.8

Source: *DISE, 2007-08*

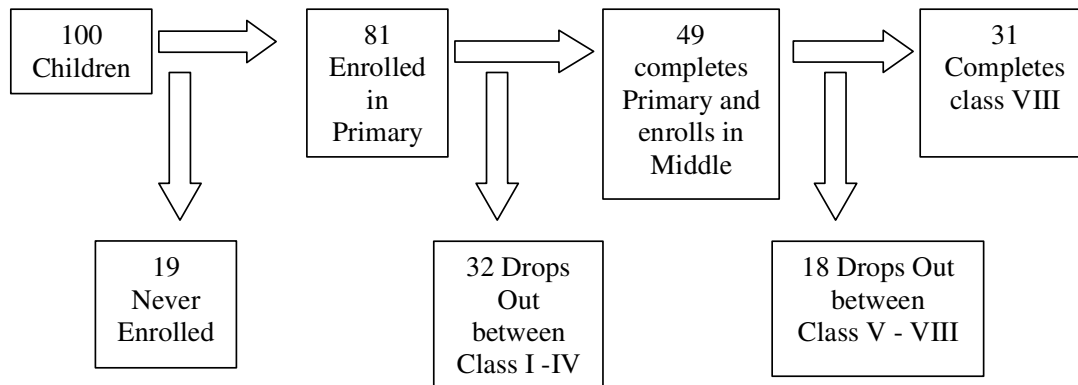
5. Completion Rate

Completion Rates refer to what proportion of relevant age group population completes specific stages of education. It can be calculated or obtained by multiplying Net Enrollment Rate with Retention Rate. In discussing the completion rates for both primary and middle stage after classifying the districts according to the presence of minority community it is noticed that in Zone-M1 the completion rates are 64 per cent and 27 per cent for primary and middle stages respectively (Table 5). This indicates that out of every four children enrolled in Class-I only one is being able to reach Class-VIII, while three are getting dropped out. The

completion rates are expected to be higher in Zone-M2 and Zone-M3 compared to Zone-M1. However we find that our hypothesis is refuted for the primary stages, may be because of the higher enrollment figures. The hypothesis is observed to be satisfied for the completion rates of middle stages.

The complete picture of the educational situation appears more explicit when we consider the Flow Diagram represented by Figure 1. It depicts the children flow across the elementary education system in West Bengal. It is evident that out of 100 children of aged 5 years, only about 49 complete Class-IV and only about 31 completes Class-VIII. The situation is shoddier for the socially excluded groups.

Figure – 1
Children Flow across Elementary Education System in West Bengal



Source: Author's Calculation based on *DISE, 2007-08*

VI. Educational Development Index

In the above discussion, by considering some important educational indicators we have tried to explore the socio-regional disparity in educational achievement. Depending on the values of various educational indicators an Educational Development Index (EDI) has been constructed in this section. This is a composite index constructed from Net Enrollment Index, Literacy Index and Retention Index with equal weightage attached to each of them. All these indices have been calculated as per the UNDP Goalpost method.

The current Educational Development Index for West Bengal is 0.33 while for the national level it is 0.47. It clearly shows that, in terms of educational achievement West Bengal is lagging behind the national average. In Table-6 we have discussed the Zone wise EDI and have tried to explore the disparity in educational achievements across zones. It can be observed that irrespective of the criteria of Zoning of the districts the EDI for 1st Zone is the lowest indicating low educational achievement in SEG (religious minority or SC/ST) dominated districts. Even though enrollment in many districts of these Zones are relatively

higher, but achievement in terms of Literacy and Retention are substantially lower, as a result of which the Educational Development Index is lower in all SEG dominated zones compared to the state and country average scores. EDI score of 2nd and 3rd Zones (according to the classification of all three types of criteria) seems to be moderate and higher than both country and state averages.

Table - 6
Educational Development Index Across Zones in West Bengal – 2007-08

<i>Zones</i>	<i>Literacy Index</i>	<i>Enrollment Index</i>	<i>Retention Index</i>	<i>EDI</i>
Zone-M1	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.33
Zone-M2	1.00	0.72	1.00	0.91
Zone-M3	0.75	0.00	0.85	0.53
Zone-S1	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.33
Zone-S2	1.00	0.22	0.66	0.62
Zone-S3	0.87	0.00	1.00	0.62
Zone-X1	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.33
Zone-X2	0.61	0.90	0.51	0.67
Zone-X3	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.67
State Average	1.00	0.53	0.43	0.76
Country Average	0.91	0.64	0.45	0.78

Source: *Author's Calculation*

Note: EDI – *Educational Development Index*; Following UNDP method, Zero and One relates to Minimum and Maximum values among the zones.

VII. Qualitative Indicators - Student Performance

When the Sarva Shiksha Mission was started in 2001, the target was to reduce the number of Out of School Children to zero by 2010, which has been practically achieved and proportion of Out of School Children has considerably decreased. But emphasis has to be given on quality education as well. So the performance of the students needs to be examined in order to evaluate the quality of education. We have tried to do so by considering the proportion of pupils who have passed in first division and the proportion of pupils who were just able to pass. Repetition Rate or percentage of pupils repeating same class has also been taken as an indicator for measuring quality of education or rather lack of it.

It is observed that irrespective of presence of backward community in districts, the pass percentage for both boys and girls is around 95 per cent in Class–V and 80 per cent for that of Class–VIII (Table-7). But significant difference can be noted if we consider students passing in First Division. It is observed that percentage of students getting first division is lowest in

Zone-M1, Zone-S1 and Zone-X1. This shows that quality of education too is lower in regions with higher share of *Socially Excluded Population*.

Table – 7
Student Performance and Minority Population

	Per cent pass in class V		Per cent pass in class VIII		First Division in Class V		First Division in Class VIII	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Zone – M1	95.5	95.1	79.8	79.9	42.1	40.3	17.8	14.7
Zone – M2	95.3	95.1	80.4	78.0	47.6	46.8	21.3	18.5
Zone – M3	94.4	94.0	78.7	78.5	43.6	42.3	19.4	16.4
Zone - S1	94.6	94.3	77.8	77.3	42.4	40.1	16.8	13.8
Zone - S2	94.9	94.5	79.5	78.7	43.3	42.6	19.5	17.1
Zone - S3	96.0	96.0	82.7	81.0	51.4	50.5	24.6	20.4
Zone – X1	94.8	94.6	78.3	77.9	41.5	39.8	17.0	14.1
Zone – X2	95.1	94.6	79.4	78.2	46.0	44.0	19.7	16.9
Zone – X3	95.4	95.2	81.6	80.3	48.0	48.0	23.4	20.1

Source: DISE, 2007-08

VIII. ARE ZONES IMPORTANT?

As statistics on educational achievement are not available separately for SC/ST and Religious Minority population in West Bengal, we have tried to evaluate the performance of the minority population dominated districts vis-à-vis the other districts using the zoning pattern already discussed. Though differences have been observed among these zones, the question is, are these Zones sufficiently important in explaining differences in educational achievements in an econometric sense? We therefore check if the variations across the Zones are systematically higher compared to that within Zones themselves. This has been done using the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) technique. The results are reported in Table 8.

It is observed that when zoning of districts is done according to the presence of Minority population in the districts, variation between the Zones is higher compared to variation within the Zones for almost all the indicators chosen. The F-statistic is also significant for most of the variables, indicating that zoning according to the dominance of minority population is quite significant in explaining differences in educational attainments. For the SC/ST level zoning too, a significant variation can be noted between the Zones for the indicators like Female Literacy Rate, and Net Enrollment Rate for both primary and middle stages. Zoning according to the concentration of *Socially Excluded Group* also explains a substantial part of the differences in educational achievements across districts. We see that variation between the Zones is very high as compared to variation within the Zones and the F statistic is highly

significant for all the indicators. It implies that share of *Socially Excluded Group* in the district affects the educational achievement of it.

Table – 8
Variation within and between groups of Districts

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Proportion of Variation Explained by</i>	<i>Zoning according to</i>		
		<i>Minority Population</i>	<i>SC/ST Population</i>	<i>SEG Population</i>
Total Literacy	Within Groups	28.7	53.5	10.7
	Between Groups	71.3	46.5	89.3
	F Stat	2.48 (0.11)	0.086 (0.43)	3.38** (0.00)
Male Literacy	Within Groups	11.9	92.3	10.2
	Between Groups	88.1	7.7	89.8
	F Stat	4.49** (0.02)	0.08 (0.92)	8.77** (0.00)
Female Literacy	Within Groups	22.0	32.8	13.5
	Between Groups	78.0	67.2	86.6
	F Stat	3.55** (0.05)	2.04 (0.16)	6.43** (0.01)
NER Primary	Within Groups	26.6	35.9	11.2
	Between Groups	73.4	64.8	88.8
	F Stat	2.75* (0.09)	1.84 (0.19)	7.94** (0.00)
NER Middle	Within Groups	28.6	21.3	18.2
	Between Groups	71.4	78.8	81.8
	F Stat	2.49 (0.11)	3.70** (0.04)	4.49** (0.03)
DOR Middle	Within Groups	39.1	50.3	16.5
	Between Groups	60.9	49.7	83.5
	F Stat	1.55 (0.24)	0.98 (0.39)	5.07** (0.02)
RET Middle	Within Groups	39.1	50.3	16.5
	Between Groups	60.9	49.7	83.5
	F Stat	1.55 (0.24)	0.98 (0.39)	5.07** (0.02)

Source: Author's Calculation

Note: NER – Net Enrolment Rate, DOR – Dropout Rate, RET – Retention Rate; Variations are in terms of percentage of TSS explained by Within and Between Groups; ** and * denotes significance at 5 and 10 per cent levels respectively; Figures in parenthesis are Significance levels.

IX. Hierarchy of Districts

In order to validate the earlier results another statistical technique has been used. Since our contention is that districts having more excluded class population will be performing relatively poorly in terms of educational achievements, we rank the districts according to the proportion of Minority, SC/ST and *Socially Excluded Group* population on the one hand and according to the educational achievement indicators like Literacy, Net Enrollment Rate, Dropout Rate, Retention Rate and completion Rate on the other. Thereafter rank correlation coefficients are calculated between rank according to population characteristics and rank according to educational indicators. It is observed that districts ranking higher in terms of *Socially Excluded Groups* are ranked lower in terms of literacy and completion and higher in terms of Dropout, supporting our hypothesis (Table 9). Only for Net Enrollment Rate and Primary Completion Rates are the results contrary to our hypothesis, possible reasons of which have already been noted. It thus appears that analysis based on secondary data quite clearly brings out the fact that districts having more number of SC/ST and Minority

population has lower educational attainment as compared to the districts having less backward class population; which in other words indicate that people belonging to *Socially Excluded Groups* have a lower educational attainment.

Table – 9
Association between Demographic Composition and Educational Attainments
Rank Correlation Coefficients

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Rank according to</i>		
	<i>SC/ST Population</i>	<i>Minority Population</i>	<i>SEG Population</i>
Ranks according to:			
Literacy	-0.399	-0.387	-0.767
Male Literacy	-0.333	-0.560	-0.835
Female Literacy	-0.468	-0.283	-0.718
NER Primary	0.286	0.497	0.769
NER Middle	0.682	0.061	0.389
DOR Primary	0.259	0.005	0.259
DOR Middle	0.300	0.709	0.864
Completion Rate Primary	0.038	0.191	0.146
Completion Rate Middle	0.418	-0.329	-0.187

Source: Author's Calculation

Note: NER - Net Enrolment Rate, DOR – Dropout Rate, RET – Retention Rate

V. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT & SOCIAL EXCLUSION: A CASE STUDY

It may sometimes be argued that analysis based on regional zoning as above may not reflect true picture as district specific characteristics may be more dominant and the differences between Zones that we obtain may be because of such regional factors and not socio-religious factors. Therefore, to eliminate such regional effects a field study was conducted in two districts of West Bengal – Hoogli, a developed district, and Purulia, a backward district, and it was examined whether educational achievements are different across socio-religious groups within those two districts as well. If so, we can certainly infer that disparity across socio-religious groups do exist in West Bengal. As per the State Human Development Report, 2004 of West Bengal, Hoogli is ranked 5th and Purulia is ranked 16th out of the 17 districts of West Bengal. Thus our results cut across development level of the region.

1. Education among various Social Groups in Purulia

In a field visit to Purulia it has been found that most of the children in the rural areas are first generation learners and have no one at home to turn for guidance. Access to Middle/High schools is difficult from the scattered villages and hence children tend to discontinue their studies after completing the primary stage in the village school. In addition, poor households are withdrawing their children from school and engaging them in odd jobs to supplement household earning. In some cases, children are not engaged in work but are looking after

household chores or simply sitting idle. In spite of such general observations, disparities across groups are clearly visible (Table 10).

Table – 10
Activity Status of Children in Purulia According to Social Group (%)

<i>Activity Status</i>	<i>Hindu – ST</i>	<i>Hindu - SC</i>	<i>Hindu–OBC</i>	<i>Hindu–GEN</i>	<i>Muslim</i>	<i>Aggregate</i>
Sample Numbers	1125	1350	2009	187	444	4671
<i>Of Which</i>						
School Going	78.8	76.4	72.8	77.0	78.4	75.5
Wage Labour	6.5	11.2	11.5	5.3	12.2	10.0
Hired Domestic Labour	2.1	3.0	0.5	1.1	0.5	1.6
Household Chores	8.7	6.2	13.4	10.7	4.7	10.1
No Where Children	3.9	3.2	1.7	5.9	4.3	2.8

Source: Field Visit, October-2009

Note: ST – Scheduled Tribe, SC – Scheduled Caste, OBC – Other Backward Classes

While for the Hindu upper castes and OBCs, most of the non-school-going children are either engaged in household chores or sitting idle, for the SCs and the Muslims, majority of out-of-school children are working as wage labourers. Thus economic condition is forcing discontinuation of schooling among a sizeable number of children. This is reflected in alarmingly low proportion of population having completed high school (Table 11).

Table-11
Educational Status of People in Purulia according to Social Group (%)

<i>Activity Status</i>	<i>Hindu – ST</i>	<i>Hindu - SC</i>	<i>Hindu–OBC</i>	<i>Hindu–GEN</i>	<i>Muslim</i>	<i>Aggregate</i>
Sample Numbers	4086	4978	6179	668	1368	15911
<i>Of Which</i>						
Illiterate	49.3	51.4	51.1	29.3	49.4	49.8
Literate bellow Pr.	14.4	12.5	10.4	11.1	14.5	12.1
Primary Passed	18.9	18.1	17.2	23.1	20.7	18.2
Middle Passes	9.1	9.1	8.8	15.0	8.0	9.2
High School & above	8.3	8.9	12.4	21.6	7.4	10.6

Source: Field Visit, October-2009

Note: ST – Scheduled Tribe, SC – Scheduled Caste, OBC – Other Backward Classes

Illiteracy is also higher among excluded groups, with the Upper Caste Hindus having literacy rate of about 70 per cent, while all the other social groups are having almost half of their population as illiterate. At the higher end too there is considerable disparity. While in aggregate, only about 20 per cent of the surveyed people have completed education up to Class-VIII, the proportion again is relatively higher for Upper Caste Hindus (about 36 per cent) and abysmally low for the Muslims (15 per cent) and STs (17 per cent). Thus (lack of) continuation of formal education is a major problem area of the *Socially Excluded Groups* of the district.

2. Education among various Social Groups in Hoogli

There are substantial differences among socio-religious groups in terms of educational achievements in the developed region of Hoogli too. Data obtained from Field Survey shows that there is not much difference between the two major religious groups in the district in

terms of Literacy, though the STs and SCs are lagging behind. However, there are substantial differences between the General Caste and OBC Hindu families and the others in terms of schooling. The average years of schooling of the Head of the Household is just 3.1 years for the STs and 4.3 years for the Muslims, compared to 6.9 years for the Upper Caste Hindus. Similarly, more than 80 per cent of the STs, SCs and Muslims are discontinuing their schooling before passing the High School stage. Only about 12 per cent of them are completing High School and about 3-4 per cent of them are completing Higher Education. This is in sharp contrast to the Upper Caste Hindus, for whom more than 10 per cent have higher education and another 24 per cent have completed high school.

Table 12
Educational Status of Various Social Groups in Hoogli

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Hindu – ST</i>	<i>Hindu - SC</i>	<i>Hindu-OBC</i>	<i>Hindu-GEN</i>	<i>Muslim</i>	<i>Aggregate</i>
Literacy Rate (Male)	74.6	79.3	91.9	91.5	82.3	85.9
Literacy Rate (Female)	59.5	66.6	82.4	83.5	72.9	75.7
Literacy Rate (All)	68.0	76.1	93.5	93.3	77.5	84.8
Average Years of Schooling of						
Head of Household	3.1	3.1	6.6	6.9	4.3	5.2
All Household Members	4.0	4.1	6.7	6.8	4.4	5.5
Percentage of Different Educational Status among members with Schooling						
Primary Passed	46.2	47.7	35.5	32.6	41.8	38.8
Middle Passed	33.8	36.3	33.3	33.8	42.9	35.3
High School Passed	16.5	12.2	22.9	23.5	11.8	18.7
Higher Education	3.5	3.8	8.3	10.1	3.5	7.2

Source: Field Survey, 2009

Note: ST – Scheduled Tribe, SC – Scheduled Caste, OBC – Other Backward Classes

It therefore is evident that even we control for regional differences, there is a sharp contrast between the educational situations of different socio-religious groups in West Bengal. The Muslims and the Scheduled Castes and Tribes are substantially lagging behind the Upper Caste Hindus.

VI. CONCLUSION

It may be thus inferred from our exploratory analysis that the disparity in terms of educational achievement among various socio-religious groups in West Bengal is substantial. Even though we do not have the caste or religion specific literacy figures for the state as a whole, educational situation is observed to be lower in regions dominated by *Socially Excluded Groups*. Most of the children of the SEGs are observed to discontinue studies after completion of their primary schooling. Though Midday Meal Programme has had a significant impact in the backward areas leading to higher enrollment, performance in terms of retaining the enrolled students has been rather unsatisfactory. Observations during the Field visit suggest that poverty among rural people in general and among the SEGs in

particular is leading to higher drop out. Rather than going to school children are either engaged in earning opportunities, or are looking after their siblings enabling their mothers to go out to work, or are simply sitting idle at home. Most of the SEG students in rural areas especially are first generation learners and their support system at home is almost absent. As a result students from backward class do not progress to higher classes every year. In this way after two or three attempts if they do not succeed, they simply leave school, and with no functional use they forget whatsoever they had learnt in few years and fall back to illiteracy. This Poverty-Illiteracy trap is one of the most vicious cycles operating among the SEGs in rural West Bengal. Under such circumstances, a new central legislation has been tabled and it has been proposed that there will be no *Detention* of students till class-VIII. While this legislation will definitely help in reducing the number of dropouts and thereby increase the completion rate, it will do so at the cost of declining quality of education. Moreover, the problem of poverty will remain unsolved by such piecemeal legislations. To improve the educational situation of the SEGs, we must have a comprehensive policy framework addressing issues of awareness, income augmentation of adults (parents), financial incentive for continuing formal education, and a flexible approach towards the schooling itself including those related to schedule, syllabus, mode of teaching etc. Otherwise, when we are moving towards a global knowledge society, the curse of *Untouchability* will emerge its ugly head again, albeit in a new functional form.

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APPENDIX

Zones According to Minority Status

Zone – M1	Per cent of Minority	Zone – M2	Per cent of Minority	Zone – M3	Per cent of Minority
Murshidabad	63.67	Nadia	25.41	Hugli	15.14
Maldah	49.72	Haora	24.44	Purba Medinipur	12.24
Uttar Dinajpur	47.36	Koch bihar	24.24	Jalpaiguri	10.85
Birbhum	35.08	North 24 parganas	24.22	Paschim Medinipur	8.54
South 24 parganas	33.24	Dakshin Dinajpur	24.02	Puruliya	7.67
Average	45.81	Kolkata	20.27	Bankura	7.51
		Barddhaman	19.78	Darjiling	5.31
		Average	23.20	Average	9.61

Zones According to SC/ST status

Zone – S1	Per cent of SC/ST	Zone – S2	Per cent of SC/ST	Zone – S3	Per cent of SC/ST
Jalpaiguri	55.58	Bardhaman	33.39	Haora	15.86
Kochbihar	50.69	South 24 parganas	33.35	Purba Medinipur	15.07
Dakshin Dinajpur	44.90	Paschim Medinipur	32.92	Murshidabad	13.29
Bankura	41.60	Uttar Dinajpur	32.82	Kolkata	6.22
Puruliya	39.36	Nadia	32.14	Average	12.61
Birbhum	36.25	Darjiling	28.78		
Average	44.73	Hugli	27.79		
		Maldah	23.74		
		North 24 parganas	22.83		
		Average	29.75		

Zones according to the presence of socially excluded group

Zone – X1	Proportion of Excluded Group	Zone – X2	Proportion of Excluded Group	Zone – X3	Proportion of Excluded Group
Uttar Dinajpur	80.18	Nadia	57.55	Hugli	42.93
Murshidabad	76.96	Bardhaman	53.18	Paschim Medinipur	41.45
Kochbihar	74.93	Bankura	49.11	Haora	40.30
Maldah	73.47	North 24 parganas	47.05	Darjiling	34.08
Birbhum	71.33	Puruliya	47.02	Purba Medinipur	27.30
Dakshin Dinajpur	68.92	Average	50.78	Kolkata	26.49
South 24 parganas	66.59			Average	35.43
Jalpaiguri	66.43				
Average	72.35				

Educational Indicators in Various Zones (%)

Indicator	Zone – M1	Zone – M2	Zone – M3	Zone - S1	Zone - S2	Zone - S3	Zone - X1	Zone - X2	Zone - X3	State
Overall Literacy	58.8	73.5	69.8	62.1	70.1	69.1	60.1	69.9	76.1	68.4
Male Literacy	67.5	80	80.3	73.8	78.4	74.6	69.1	78.6	83.6	76.8
Female Literacy	49.5	66.3	58.6	49.8	61.3	63	50.6	60.5	68.0	59.3
NER Primary	95.3	72.0	79.7	94.2	77.6	76.7	94.4	77.1	65.6	81.0
NER Middle	50.1	49.6	48.2	56.9	47.9	45.4	52.3	51.3	42.9	49.3
Drop Out Rate Primary	32.7	18.4	27.2	28.4	26.9	18.0	33.0	20.8	17.4	25.7
Drop out Rate Middle	44.2	34.2	35.7	40.4	37.0	35.2	43.8	36.2	29.0	37.5
Retention Rate Primary	67.2	81.5	72.7	71.5	73.0	81.9	66.9	79.1	82.5	74.2
Retention Rate Middle	55.7	65.7	64.2	59.5	62.9	64.7	56.1	63.7	70.9	62.4
Primary Completion Rate	64.1	58.7	58.0	67.4	56.7	62.9	63.2	61.0	54.2	60.1
Middle Completion Rate	27.9	32.6	31.0	33.9	30.2	29.4	29.4	32.7	30.4	30.8

Source: DISE (2008)