

## Education for Muslim Women - Myth and Reality

Dr. Qamar Parveen

Hyderabad

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#### \*Corresponding Author

Email: hmdprvn[at]yahoo.com

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### ABSTRACT

*Education is a very strong tool that empower the person. It not only provides opportunity to earn the living but also makes the living decent and dignified. Education is the soul for any country and determine its progress and development. It provides the very base on whose foundation the prosperity of nation stand strong. Best human capital is the best national asset. It helps in reducing the poverty and has the potential to transform the developing or underdeveloped country into developed one. Education is a criteria for Human Development Index and Millennium development goal and then agenda 2030 signify its importance. They consider it as a significant tool of women empowerment also. However still there are many who are not so fortunate to avail this opportunity. Reasons may be many, different for different people. The present paper deals two important aspects with regard to the education of minority women which is actually the largest majority among the minorities. Their discrimination has been discussed in the light of various reports. The paper has utilised a large number of primary sources along with the secondary data.*

Education plays a very important role in one's life. It makes an individual to internalize the value and norm of the society and simultaneously offer the specific skilled persons to serve different functions in the society.

In 1950, India resolved to secure Justice, Liberty and Equality for all its citizens. Education may be considered the best tool in hand to realize these noble goals. Constitution of India, through its Art. 21A has guaranteed education as the basic condition necessary for a dignified life for all the citizens of India. These fundamental rights are minimum conditions a person requires to live a decent life irrespective of any discrimination.

### 1. Framework used

Goal 4 of Agenda 2030 ensures inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Under the same goal it is said by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university, achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

### 2. Introduction

Recognizing the ideals of equality, almost all the constitutions regard men and women with equal rights. In fact in the Constitution of India there are provisions when women have been accorded special protection keeping in view their age-old discrimination. Fundamental rights in the constitution are particularly important from the perspective of Human Rights of Women. Article 14 of the Constitution of India provides equality before the law; Prohibition of discrimination on the bases of caste, colour, creed, religion and sex is provided under Article 15 of the Indian Constitution. Similarly its Article 16 provides equality of opportunity in matters of Public

Employment. The Article 21 of the same says No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law. The said Article is a guarantee to his/her life. And to live a decent and dignified life education is an important tool, thus, under Article 21 A of the constitution it is said as "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine". (Instituted by Amendment in the constitution of India in 2002) and was enacted as an Act in the form of Right to Education Act, 2009. The children included in the Act are irrespective of their sex or religion. Further, the provisions are irrespective of any condition, nothing debar any child from getting education. Though the provision was already there in the the form of Article 37 in chapter IV i.e Directive Principles of State Policy however, keeping in view of its importance it was made a part of fundamental rights to help achieve 100 percent literacy. Even after seven decades of Independence gender discrimination is very often seen in every field and education is not any different. Typical is the case when the girl is muslim. They are deprived under multiple layers of discrimination. Many reports of the government have indicated that Muslim women are poorest a lot. Gopal Singh Committee in 1983 declared Muslims as "Backward Community" . Sachar Committee agreed with these findings. The report says on an average muslim men and women are far less educationally accomplished than their non-muslim counterparts. This is not only in one or few states but almost every state presents the same scenario. Based on various reports it was concluded that the enrollment ratio has been increased in all socio-religious groups. But this increase is low (65 percent among muslims) as compared to others infact schedule caste and schedule tribe (with 95 percent)

### 3. Present Scenario

According to the census 2011, illiteracy is listed in Table 1

**Table 1:** Level of Illiteracy among different Communities

Religious Community	Percentage of Illiteracy	Percentage of Literacy
Muslims	42.7	57.3
Hindus	36.4	63.6
Sikhs	32.5	67.5
Buddhists	28.2	71.8
Christians	25.6	74.3
Jains	13.5	86.4

Source: Census of India, 2011, available on [http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/population\\_enumeration.html](http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/population_enumeration.html)

In 2001, 64.5 percent of the country’s 461 million non-muslim men were literate as compared to 55 percent of 71 million muslim males. In case of women 46 percent of India’s 430 million non-muslim women were literate as compare to 41 percent of the country’s 67 million muslim females. Though the comparison does not seems to be very alarming but in all India literacy rate, it is about 14 points lower in case of muslim

women than muslim males. In urban areas it is even more i.e. about 17 percent. In proportion to their population, muslims were worse-off than even scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in Higher education. Muslims comprise 14percent of India’s population but account for 4.4 percent of students enrolled in higher education, (All India Survey on Higher Education, 2014-15 ).

**Table 2:** Caste/Category wise percentage of Students in Higher Education (18-23 years)

Caste/Category	Enrollment in %age		
	Male	Female	Total
SC	12.4	12.5	12.4
ST	4.2	4.1	4.1
OBC	31.0	32.4	31.6
Muslim	4.3	4.6	4.4
Other minorities	1.7	2.5	2.0

Source:[http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/statistics/AISHE2011-12P\\_1.pdf](http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics/AISHE2011-12P_1.pdf) retrieved on jan., 2020

**Table 3:** Graduates in various communities

Community	Graduates (Percentage)	Percentage of Female Graduates among their own community
Jain	25.6	44.8
Christians	8.8	49.8
Sikhs	6.3	49.9
Buddhists	6.1	38.1
Hindus	5.9	37.5
Muslims	2.7	36.6

Source: *India Releases Report on Education Level...* available on <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/news/story/muslims-census-2011-eduaction-338581-2016-09-01>, on feb., 2020.

It is interesting to note that percentage of female graduates is quite good among their own communities and so is with muslim women. However in total, as compare to other communities it is quite low. This shows that they are potentially capable but hindered by lack of opportunities.

On an average muslim child attends school for about three years and four months as against the national average of four years. In elite schools muslims are only 2%. The dropout rate is very high among muslims. Survey conducted in 21 states to assess the dropout rate at elementary school level under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The study revealed that muslim

girls are more regular and high in attendance but 6 percent are forced to dropout.

This difference existed across almost all states. However muslim - non muslim literacy disparities were less in the economically advanced states of west and south India as compare to north India’s Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Assam, West Bengal and Jammu & Kashmir. Unfortunately these five states with high disparity accounted for over 61 percent of the country’s muslim population.

Also the muslim women are not represented very sound in jobs. Hasan and Manon (2004) found that there are very few

muslim women in high profile jobs. Going by the All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE ) report 2011-12, muslims

in general and muslim women in particular are low represented in teaching and non-teaching jobs.

**Table 4:** Caste-Category wise percentage of teaching and non teaching staff.

Caste/Category	Enrollment of Teaching Staff			Enrollment of Non-Teaching Staff		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
SC	7.81	6.52	7.28	12.30	13.46	12.62
ST	2.08	1.89	2.00	3.55	3.67	3.58
OBC	25.25	26.32	25.68	25.77	26.77	26.04
Muslim	3.41	2.70	3.12	3.68	2.35	3.31
Other minority communities	2.51	5.19	3.60	2.24	4.26	2.80

[https://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/statistics/AISHE2011-12P\\_1.pdf](https://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics/AISHE2011-12P_1.pdf)

**4. Account of Discrimination**

There are actually two schools of thoughts, one consider muslims as orthodox and conservative and perceive the typical stereotype image of burqa-topi clad whose condition is due to the restrictions put by the religion on its followers more particularly and so by the community. In other words it is the religion that play an orthodox role and responsible for their present awful status. The other school of thoughts consider it as the lack-luster attitude of various agencies towards the community.

Regarding the former thought, it is not correct to assume the stereotyping image of muslim community because in Islam, Right to education had never been accorded to one group, making the other group deprived. Qur’an never stops women to get education, The very first revelation IQRA means to read or recite. Though people differ in the meaning as it is read or recite or both but it is a fact that it is a flow of wisdom. Prophet received the command from the God and he (Prophet) used to teach the people what he learnt/ received in the form of commands from God. Those teachings were not restricted to any particular group rather for the whole humanity. In fact reciting Qur’an is mandatory for every muslim. Whoever recites, will be rewarded. But how can one recite if s/he is not literate. So literacy is the mandatory condition to acquire knowledge through reading and know the things. It needs to be “pass-on” to others and even cause to preserve. So one can recite or read only if s/he is literate. The messenger of God said: “the best amongst you is the one who learn the Qur’an and then teaches it to others” . Here not only to learn but also teach others what you have learnt. Since the teachings were same for all, (not different for men or women) it means learning is an utmost important thing in one’s life. Surah Ta-Ha; 20:114, in Qur’an reads as “Rabbi zidni ilma”, meaning, “O my Lord advance me in my knowledge”. In this verse one is requesting from the almighty to make advances in his/her knowledge. It is also evident here that whatever knowledge one acquires, shall not be considered enough but it is an ongoing process - keeps going on and on to achieve more and more. Knowledge does not have an end.

Surah Alaq, verse 4 reads as “Al lazee 'allama bil qalam” meaning “who taught by the pen” here it is almighty’s blessing upon the humanity to learn, acquire and preserve knowledge with the help of pen. It is not only to read and understand but also write for future use just like precious things are saved for future use so that others would also be benefited. Verse 5 of

the same surah reads as “Al lamal insaana ma’lam y’alam”, meaning “taught man that which he knew not”. Infact whatever knowledge and whoever that serves the community and for the benefit of community is as good as other virtues. Can any one deny the goodness of a doctor’s service to the community or the policeman’s duty to maintain law and order in the country? If the knowledge is for the good of humanity, it can not be restricted in the name of religion. The only important thing while acquiring knowledge is that it should be “Meaning full and Accurate. It should also be valid and innovative.

**5. Prolific Examples**

Actually the teachings of Islam are same for all, be it man or woman. The only difference between man and women is the division of some labour and not the division of opportunity. There is nothing in differentiating between the two on the bases of gender as they both enjoy the same rights and duties to learn and teach. Thus, it is wrong to presume that girls or woman’s education is restricted in Islam. There are many examples when muslim women contributed immensely as jurists, scholars, businessperson, marketing, administration and legal experts. So many examples are there. Hazrat Aiysha, daughter of first Caliph Abubakr and wife of Prophet was a great scholar and jurist; Hafsa, the daughter of Umar was entrusted with the task of writing Qur’an after her father died. These women not only learnt for themselves but they used to teach others also including the men who themselves became the great scholars of their time. Karimah al-Marwaziyyah, had a great authority on the *Sahih* of Al-Bukhari in fifth century. Abu Dharr of Herat, one of the leading scholars of that time praised her so much that he advised his students to study *Sahih* under no one else but her because of the quality of her scholarship. Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi and Al-Humayd were among her scholars. Aisha, the daughter of Sa’ad bin Abi Waqqas was a jurist and scholar. Imam Malik, the renowned scholar and founder of the Maliki School of *Fiqh* was her scholar. Imam Shafi’i, another great scholar, and founder of the Shafi’i School of *Fiqh* was taught by Sayyida Nafisa, who was the great grand daughter of Prophet Muhammad and daughter of Hassan bin Ali bin Abu Talib. She was considered a great teacher of Islamic Jurisprudence and people used to come from far away places to get benefited. Many more such examples are there in the history.

There was time when muslim rulers put efforts that every person whether Muslim or Non-muslim, man or woman, rich or poor be enshrined with the right to acquire knowledge. To me it

is the essence of Islam to provide fragrance of education to our wards and it is the duty of the owners of means to take care of the destitutes and consider it their primary duty.

## 6. What They Require

Now the question arises what has attributed to their (muslims) abysmal condition. It is evident from various surveys that a large number of muslims found difficult to survive on their meager income. They found it difficult in accessing good schools for their children. Resources are their distant dream. So when their survival is difficult how can they dream of good schooling for their wards?. How can they be able to get education or send their wards to get education? Even if they get education what will be the standard of their education? Economically not very sound, they are unable to bear the burden of education for all in general and for female in particular.

Based on various report of the government, the poor socio-economic condition of muslims are evident. Their representation in public sector is awfully low, also they are underrepresented in the organised sector. The number and percentage of muslims in all government sectors steadily declined from 31percent in early 1947 to 2.3 percent in 2001. Thus they found it difficult to send their children especially the girls in good schools resultant is their dropout. Though at the time of election political parties make it as their agenda item to provide good schools with all the necessary facilities but implemented a little. Here a positive change in their mindset is required to realize that muslims also have potential and talent. They can contribute equally good as their counterparts in any sector. The only things required is their needs should also be given priorities in terms of opportunities. Many institutions have failed miserably to provide inclusive social environment. If we overcome this sluggish attitude, more muslims will definitely be able to send their daughters and sisters to schools.

Not only this, muslims themselves should be smart enough to undertake their own introspection and accept what is lacking in their responsibilities and priorities. To some extent they have not prioritized their own issues and challenges successfully. Still a substantial number is ignorant about the issues. This type of thinking need not be accommodated in their minds.

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## 7. Conclusion and Suggestion

On the basis of the data on enrollment of children provided by the National Sample Survey Organisation and National Council of Applied Economic Research, Human Development Survey (2004-5), the enrollment ratio has increased in all socio-religious communities but this advancement is low (65%) among muslims as compared to even schedule tribe (95%). [National Sample Survey Organisation and National Council of Applied Economic Research, Human Development Survey (2004-05) has been used to analyse the rate of enrollment of all socio-religious communities. The Committee has also utilised the data produced by the 61<sup>st</sup> round National Sample Survey Organisation (2004-5) and compared with 55 Round National Sample Survey Organisation (1999-2000) to estimate the changes in enrollment and attendance of children over a period of time.] Though it is a very welcoming trend that the caste barricade to some extent is lifting up and people finding it easy access to things which they were denied for hundreds of years. But the similar trend is needed among all .

Since the difference in education level is not evident in the upper class muslims, it can be concluded that the needy section should be treated with positive intervention along with all others to come up on the ladder of improvement. If they are provided with sound socio-economic assistance instead of symbolic help they will definitely be able to send their daughters and sisters to schools and continue for higher education and this will bring a positive change in the society.

To provide education one need to pave the way towards the goal. The goal will automatically become easy if the path leading towards such goal is made smooth. Congenial atmosphere will help them to realize their dream. In the words of famous scientist Albert Einstein "I never teach my pupils. I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn". Believing on his words it becomes the responsibility of multiple agencies and institutions to work towards equal opportunity and the state machinery must try to realize their potentials and make their dream come true.

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