

Educational Backwardness of Muslim Girls: An Overview

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ABSTRACT

Muslim constitutes India's largest minority but educationally they are one of the most backward communities in the country. Majority of this community is educationally and economically extremely backward. It is observed that the Muslims do not enthusiastically provide education to their children especially their daughters. Muslim girls lag behind their male counterparts and women from other community in the country itself. It is universally accepted fact that education is the most potent and effective tool to achieve any section of society. Although it is right that socio-economic condition also makes a significant contribution in this regard, but the positive attitude towards education ensures the development of confidence and self-worth. Muslims are not only the victims of poverty; rather have accepted inequality and discrimination as their inevitable fate. They also suffer from recurring insecurity, because of devastating episode of mass communal violence. Thus they should take education as a matter of highest priority in order to improve their pathetic state of life.

1. Introduction

Education is an indispensable means for helping the Muslim women out of their economic misery because economic dependency is the major factor contributing to the low status of Muslim women. Participation of Muslim girls in educational activities has been studied by Hassan and Menon (2004) who found that very few Muslim women in India are in high profile jobs. The study reveals that less than 15% of Muslim women report themselves to be working. Generally, Muslim women are self-employed or engaged in home-based labor. This leads to a huge dropout of Muslim girls from schools. The Sachar Committee Report (2006) also reflects the same feeling that parents feel that education is not important for girls. Even if girls are enrolled, they are withdrawn at an early age to marry them off. This leads to a higher dropout rate among Muslim girls. At the all India level Muslim women are three times behind their Hindu sisters. The attainment of higher education among girls is a rare phenomenon even in the urban areas. The studies done in the field of Muslim women revealed that the lack of good quality schools and hostel facilities for girls, poor quality of teacher are believed to be some of the important factors responsible for the low level of educational attainment among Muslims women. It is worthwhile to say that Muslim women has a strong desire and enthusiasm for education, but hurdles like low access to schools in the vicinity, poverty, financial constraints and discrimination faced at school prevent them from continuing education. Determination is an element without which no person can succeed in any venture. Muslim women should create willpower or determination towards education so that they can reach to a peak of elevation. Due to the influence of ancient traditions and practices in Muslim societies especially in remote areas women lose courage from the childhood and become dependant on man, parents also discourage their female children for higher studies. Muslim women suffer more because they are not given enough freedom and hardly have access to higher education, though even the primary level education is not easily accessible to them. There is also lack of schools and colleges in the areas

where there is a higher concentration of the Muslim population. Girls are enrolled in nearby schools and are not sent far off to study due to safety reasons. Therefore, the Muslim women of the day need to develop their capabilities and making them more confident. These all demand a thorough discussion among policy makers, academician and community leaders.

2. Educational status of Muslim women

Muslims, by and large, have remained backward in their educational achievements and the pace of their educational development is quite slow. Despite improvement, Muslims still lag other communities with a literacy rate of 68.5%, compared to Hindus (73.3%), Christians (84.5%), Sikhs (75.4%) and Jains (94.9%), according to census 2011. Muslims, who comprise 14.4% of India's population, rank at the bottom of the higher-education ladder, India Spend reported on July 22, 2016. This raises concerns on the formulation, implementation and monitoring of government policies and programmes directed towards the betterment of the community. Instead of sincere attempts in building the foundation of education of Muslim children by setting up quality elementary and secondary schools, which are almost non-existent across regions, more emphasis has been given on increasing the number of schools and providing higher and professional education to Muslims, which has been less effective for the educational progress of the community. In general, poor planning and execution have led to poor educational outcomes for Muslims, especially Muslim girls.

Social norms may cause Muslim girls to withdraw from schools or may prevent them from enrolling and attending any educational institution, which aggravates the gender gap in Muslim education. Muslim family structure may inherently be overpowering and act as a barrier towards participation of females in higher education (Tyler & Ahmad, 2006), like in rural areas and in urban slums, young girls are still encouraged to stay within their homes. Moreover, as mentioned in the Sachar Committee report (2006), there exists a correlation between the place of residence and education. While this correlation is

strong in rural areas and communally sensitive neighborhoods, but positive correlation is also found in big cities. General lack of safety for women in their neighborhoods may be another reason why some Muslim parents do not send their girl children to school, especially after they attain puberty. The 'purdah' system for Muslim females, the practice of multiple marriages and unilateral system of divorce or separation in the community, and an outlook to consider education for girls as unnecessary (as higher educated girls are less likely to get a groom, etc.) may be some of the major causes behind low participation of Muslim females in education. Furthermore, several studies (Baruah&Goswami, 2012; Borooah&Iyer, 2005; Duraisamy, 2000; Gouda & Sekher, 2014; Hunt, 2008; Mugisha, 2006; Narula, 2014; Pal, 2004) have shown that socio-economic and household level factors, such as parental education, parental attitude, household income, family size, place of residence, etc., may also play important roles in determining the education participation of children in a family. Governments appointed different committees time to time to find out the causes of educational and economic backwardness of Muslims. The prime minister's high-level committee (Sachar Committee) on social, economic and educational status of Muslims in India submitted its report in 2006. The committee has clearly revealed that only 4 per cent Muslim population is educated and it is the most educationally and economically backward minority in the country. Among other issues, this committee reported on the low education status of Muslims in the country, including low literacy rate and poor educational attainments. The report showed that although the overall level of education in the country was below the universally acceptable standards, the status of education among Muslims was even worse. Most indicators of education, such as mean years of schooling and school attendance levels were lower for Muslims in comparison to that of any other socio-religious categories (SRCs). Even the highly disadvantaged Hindu Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (SCs/STs) surpassed Muslims at several instances. Although the report showed that the rate of attainment at the graduate and technical levels was low for all SRCs, attainment was even lower for Muslims. The situation was dismal for Muslim women, and more so in rural areas.

3. Problems of Muslim women in access to higher education

Muslim women are the bad 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. Madarasas teach mostly Islamic faith and do not provide secular education. They emphasize more on Quranic education given at home to the girls and to allow them to go outside the home in the name of education. Female Muslims are taught that their role is that of a wife, mother and are therefore discouraged from seeking knowledge. If their role is that of wife and mother, that doesn't mean denying them their right of education and seeking knowledge. The system of match fixation within kinship is also responsible for distracting the young girls and to lose interest in achieving something through education. The parents are not interested in having their girls highly educated as it is very difficult to find educated groom if their girls are highly educated. The orthodox attitude of the Muslim community creates some misconceptions

regarding the purity of girls if they have studied in universities or have travelled abroad. Muslim Personal Law Board in India pointed out, the most tragic thing is that Muslim women have accepted this happily, internalizing the kinds of roles their men want them to live with. They are told that this is what they are created for and that for this they should be happy. Moreover, lack of infrastructure and facilities, transportation problem, distance from home and non-availability of hostels and above all poverty also hinder the growth in participation of Muslim women in higher education.

4. Difficulties of Muslim education in India

Indian culture is distinct in nature where each ethnic group has the liberty to maintain their Religious identity. Muslim society of India is very heterogeneous in nature mainly because of the influence of caste system; Muslims are among most backwards in India. They are not taking care of their educational advancement by the advantage of constitutional provision. The problem of backwardness is a long term process. Muslims are far lagging behind than the other communities in terms of economically, socially, educationally as well as politically. There are various reasons for Muslim being educationally backward which are ---

1. The anti- Muslim attitude taken by British before independence to curtail the educational and employment opportunities of the community has laid a drastic impact on their socio-economic condition. The Muslims are facing the same problem even today. This attitude towards Muslims has pushed them in more backwardness.
2. Communal violence and insecurity, have become the norm and a sad reality in Modern India. The majority of the victims of riots in India are Muslims. This situation is affecting their economic as well as social condition.
3. Muslims are facing socio-economic poverty from past. Their vision is blurring towards education because majority of Muslim parents are illiterate, they are unaware about the importance of modern education. They live in large family size and give greater importance to early marriages. There is absent of vocation education to improve their image to develop through education.
4. There is negative attitude towards girl's education among Muslims. Due to hurdles from family they lose the zeal to achieve something through education and thus they themselves do not have academic interest. If at all they are fortunate enough to go to a good school, they are often discouraged to go for higher education, especially overseas. There is often misconception regarding the "purity" of girls if they have studied in Universities, or have traveled abroad. The most important reason is that there is difficulty in finding educated groom if the girl becomes highly educated.
5. As identified by Sachar Committee that normally Muslim Settlements are systematically deprived of access to infrastructure and public services like power, piped water supplies and sewerage. Muslim community is living in low income, filthy and poor living conditions.

6. Muslims are having poor facilities in their schools as well as proper education is also absent. Most of the schools are traditional, having problem of medium. The education is also not linked with employment opportunities.
7. Madarsa and Maktabas are still running at the traditional pattern. There is no influence of modern education in their syllabus. Students of Madarsa are having low level of knowledge regarding commerce and computer etc.
8. There is absence of committed and genuine Muslim leadership (both social and political) in pre and post independent India.
7. Government should open high quality Urdu medium schools wherever they are in demand and ensuring high quality textbooks for students in the Urdu language.
8. Government should develop Strong organization for improving the condition of all centers of primary, secondary and higher learning in India. Various educational schemes chalked out for implementation of recognition of minority education, coaching classes for competitive examination etc.
9. There is need of genuine social and political leader to reform the backbone of Muslim community.
10. There has been taken up various educational schemes for the children and school dropouts Especially for Muslim girls.
11. To enable Muslim women in achieving economic stability vocational courses in embroidery, sewing, handicrafts, designing of clothes etc. should be provide to them.
12. Periodical medical camps should conduct in the Muslim dominated areas. These camps help in improving health and nutritional status of Muslim women.

5. Suggestions

Following are the main suggestions for education of Muslim women-

1. Increase the awareness among Muslims about the importance of education, various employment opportunities, self-employment schemes as well as resultant economic wellbeing through it.
2. The Government should give more emphasis towards the concept of small family size for the improvement of socio-economic condition of Muslims.
3. All the rights under the constitution and all legal provisions, should reach the Muslim women of the society and justice should not remain a distant dream for them.
4. Governmental incentives and scholarships are also necessary for the poor and deprived Muslims. Muslims should be provided reservation in higher education and elite institutions such as the IITs and IIMs. Thus access to higher education in general and the need for offering it to all at affordable cost is required.
5. Modernization of Madarsa education to raise the educational status of traditional Muslims and there should be integration of vocational education with religious instruction in Madarsas. There is also need to link Madarsas with higher secondary school board.
6. There is need to develop more girl's school to minimize the problem of accessibility of schools. Parents should develop positive attitude towards girl's higher education.

6. Conclusion

India is in very need of policy innovations to include the lower castes, tribal and Muslim people into the development mainstream. Social inclusion has been attempted through a policy of reservation, which has failed to uplift the minorities. Even after seven decades of independence, Muslim women face considerable challenges. According to government reports Muslim woman are among the poorest, educationally disenfranchised, economically vulnerable and politically marginalized group in the country. Therefore a social and economic opportunity for Muslim women is a crucial issue needing urgent action. A movement for secularism, democracy and human rights are needed for improvement in socio-economic status of Muslim women. The impoverished status of a large number of Muslim women in India underlies the urgency for further inquiry in this area and also the need for active intervention by state agencies to implement policies to redress this imbalance and ensure Muslim women's full and equal participation in education as Indian citizens.

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