



Educational Backwardness of Indian Muslims: A Review

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Abstract:

Education is one of the most important social capital that prepares an individual to better face the exigencies of life. Since time immemorial, societies have emphasized and recognized the importance of education. Equal opportunities for quality education for all sections of society ensure societal progress and prosperity. The lack of education among sizeable section of society is a cause of concern. Poverty, lack of equal opportunities, discrimination, and lack of awareness are some of the important reasons for low education among any section of the population. The Muslims in India which accounts for more than 18 per cent of total population represents a gloomy picture in terms of education. The Muslim community is besieged with problem of high illiteracy, low enrolment, high dropout, low percentage of graduates, and negligible presence in professional education. The high percent of poverty, unemployment and self-employment activities among Muslims leaves them with only two choices: low education or no education. The lower representation of Muslims in education is reflected in their lower presence in government services and in jobs with higher salary and prestige. Invariably, the

high incidence of poverty and self-employment among Muslims can be attributed among other things to lack of quality education and lower presence in higher and professional education. The Muslim community is caught in never ending vicious cycle of poverty, low education and unemployment. There is urgent need for implementation of the Sachhar Commission (2006) recommendations of providing quality basic education, provision of technical education and equality of opportunity for Muslim masses enhancing their representation in high paid jobs across sectors, both government and private. Similarly, access to formal financial institutions for loans will boost their financial resources and leverage their mindset towards accessing quality education for next generation. The issue of educational backwardness of Muslims is multi-faceted. There is need for a coordinated efforts at community, societal and governmental level to address this challenge which dragging the development and prosperity of both, the Muslim community and the nation.

Keywords: Equality, higher education, poverty, discrimination, self-employment

Introduction:

Muslims constitute the second largest religious group in India and thus the largest minority, India's Muslim population is amongst the largest in the world, exceeded only by Indonesia's and close to the Muslim populations of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Moreover, it is larger than the total populations of most countries of the world (Government of India 2006). The Census of 2011 enumerated India's Muslim population at over 17.18 crore (approximately 14.2%). The Muslims in India resides across the country and their concentration varies substantially from one state to another. The journey of Muslims in post-independent India has evinced interests in understanding their socio-economic and political status. The position of Muslims in society, their contribution and overall progress vis-à-vis other communities will provide general idea of their status in society. There is widely held belief that Muslims have remained largely unaffected by the process of economic development and social change, that have been taking place in independent India and their general economic condition has been deteriorating progressively (Ahmad, 1981). This decline is clearly visible by identifying the job profiles of Muslims, their education levels and general well-being. The low income levels and poor economic capability has affected the community by and large.

It is essential to understand that like other minorities, issues faced by Muslims are multifaceted as they simultaneously face problems relating to security, identity and equity. And the interplay of these dimensions is at the core of the socio economic and political processes that the community is exposed to on a daily basis (Basant and Sharif 2010). Hence, there are certain things which have compelled the community to go one way than other. The ghettoisation of Muslims, identification of their areas for singling out and being indifferent to their demands and appeals has in certain ways compounded the Muslim problem. The interlinking of various problems of the community has brought it to a place, where it finds itself today. The lower representation in salaried jobs both in rural and urban areas has resulted in over representation of Muslims' in self employment activities (Pandya 2010). Low level of education combined with lack of opportunities has slowly and steadily pushed the Muslim community to the lowest rungs of development resulting in widespread marginalization and exclusion of Muslims.

The dire situation in which the Muslims find themselves is a combination of several factors, both at the societal and institutional level, and at the community level too. The low opportunities for

education and employment are the root cause for dire conditions in which the Muslim community finds itself today. Muslims in India have a poor human development status. Widespread illiteracy, low income, irregular employment implying thereby a high incidence of poverty is all pervasive among Muslims (Zakaria 2004). The level of poverty among the Muslims is one of the highest as compared to other communities. The impact of poverty on health, hygiene, education, employment and status of women are manifold thereby further accentuating their deprivation levels. And with time this problems are increasing manifold for the community. However, it has been observed that, since independence, the Muslims have fallen much behind other communities, including SCs STs, and there has been a steady and continuous process of degeneration of Indian Muslims. (Shirvani, 1984).

Objectives:

1. To study the issue of representation of Muslims in educational system of India.
2. To assess the educational deficits and suggest suitable remedial measures for enhancing Muslim representation at different levels of education.

Methodology:

The methodology followed in this paper is qualitative and the data used are secondary in nature. This research paper has a descriptive and analytical research design to comprehend the issue of education among Indian Muslims. The descriptive nature of study delves in analysing problems encountered by the Muslim community in accessing education and identifies the probable remedies to overcome the challenge and improve overall representation of Muslims at different levels of education. This study extracts data from the sources like books, reports of various ministries, related scholarly articles, online resources, government policy documents etc.

An overview of educational status of Muslims:

The Muslims have low literacy (59 per cent) as compared to national average (65 per cent). The low rate of enrolment and high dropout rate (25 per cent) among Muslims is a cause of concern. This is attributed to absence of schools in Muslim concentrated areas, low or poor quality of schools and abject poverty among community preventing access to good schools. There has been increasing numbers of drop out as the students go up further in classes due to financial factors like

inability of parents to provide money for further education or requirement of child to assist in the earnings of family. The financial constraints have forced majority of Muslim parents to take their children out of learning process. After primary school, there is an alarming drop in the educational achievement of Muslim students. The percentage of Muslim drops to 11.3 % at the level of middle school. Only 4.2% is recorded for Muslims at the higher secondary level and 3.1% at graduation and above levels (Government of Maharashtra, 2013).

The education round of NSSO (2007-08) confirmed higher proportion of illiterates among Muslims. The proportion of illiterates among Muslim males is at par with the SCs, STs and higher than the OBCs. Muslim women (47.3%) count amongst the most illiterate segments of the society, their status comparable only with SC/ST (53.2%) women. In terms of levels of educational attainment, nearly one fourth (23.1%) of all Muslim males and one fifth (20.1%) of females were merely literate. A substantial proportion of this male (18%) and female (15.4%) had attained only primary education meanwhile, at the highest levels of education, upper primary and above, Muslim proportion was significantly lower than that among all other SRCs including SCs, STs and OBCs (Fazal, 2013).

Singh (2011) in his study of Muslims in Maharashtra found that nearly 97 per cent Muslim students are enrolled for general courses, while around 4 per cent have taken professional and technical courses. Similarly, the age of discontinuation is lower among Muslims (14 years) as compared to other minority religious groups (17 years). A higher per cent of Muslims i.e. about 30 per cent in rural and 25 per cent in urban areas discontinued education owing to financial constraints as compared to other groups. There is significant drop out of Muslims from educational institutions after primary level of education. The primary reason for male Muslims is monetary (48 per cent) and among female is marriage (24 per cent) followed by monetary (21 per cent). The TISS survey found only 2.2 per cent to be graduates and above. Among the graduates, 1.9 per cent belonged to humanities, Arts and Commerce; only 0.5 per cent belonged to science, engineering and technology. Only 1 per cent of the total sample had post graduation degree (Shaban, 2011). The disparity in educational attainment at higher levels is reflected in the employment situation especially, quality of employment.

In terms of higher educational achievement the performance of Muslims in the state is dismal. As compared to 24 per cent of male and 20 per cent of females among Christian, Sikh, Jain and

Zoroastrian in rural area who have completed higher education, the corresponding rate for Muslim male and female is less than 2 per cent. While in urban areas, the higher educational achievement rate for Muslim male (13 %) and female (8%) as compared to other minority religious group males (21%) and females (25%). The per cent of currently not attending and not enrolled was higher among Muslims as compared to Hindu's. Nearly 54 per cent of Muslim male and female reported not enrolled (Singh 2011). Social stratification in India along the lines of caste, ethnicity and religion is also reflected in educational attainment with a vast quantity of literature documenting inequalities therein (GOI 2006; Govinda 2002; Thorat and Newman 2009).

Impact of education on job opportunities & employment:

In terms of employment, relatively high share of Muslims (61 per cent) are engaged in self-employment activities, and their share in regular jobs is much below their share in population. Working in self-employment activities and living in Muslim areas (which are designated red zones by banks) makes them automatically ineligible for loans from banks/financial institutions. . The participation of Muslims in salaried jobs (both public and private sectors) is only about 13 per cent. In most of the departments and PSUs, the share of Muslim workers does not exceed 5 per cent. Overall, the presence of Muslims in employment guaranteeing regular source of income and respectable position is much below their share in total population (GOI 2006). 95% of Muslims of India are estimated to belong to the category of peasant, craftsman and semi skilled and unskilled labourers. In rural areas, as opposed to 28 percent Hindus, 33 percent Muslims are landless. Majority of Muslims in rural areas are landless labourers. In urban areas, Muslims are mostly traditional artisans and petty traders. Muslims are extremely underrepresented in all government services (Vempany 2003).

The participation in regular employment across different social groups is determined by the relative advantage of groups in terms of attributes and access. The lack of attributes necessary for regular employment is holding the Muslims back (Borooah 2010). Similarly, Muslims, unlike dalits, are not protected by jobs reservation- suffer from considerable access disadvantage even after taking into account the handicap of their low education levels. The access disadvantage of Muslims is considerable as compared to other communities. Though there might be possibility that Muslim choose self-employment to avoid discrimination in the formal labour market, but evidences and data point to low educational endowments, experience and other essential attributes

which are largely responsible for differentials across different SRCs in regular employment as well as earnings (GOI 2006). In lower educational categories, the unemployment rate is highest among Muslims, followed by scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribes (STs). Poverty among Muslims in urban areas was twice the national average in 2011-12 and four times more than among upper caste Hindus (Mukherjee 2014).

Government of Maharashtra (2013) report reveals that around 70.7 per cent of the total Muslims workers in urban areas are working as 'other workers' which includes industrial (non-household industry) and service sector employments as compared to 38.7 per cent of Hindu workers. Around 8 per cent of the total population and 13.4 per cent of Muslim male population of Muslim workers are engaged in self-employment. Also, there is huge casualisation of labour among Muslims: 10.2 per cent of total Muslim population and 15.5 per cent of Muslim male population is engaged as casual worker in public or other types of jobs. The share of Muslims in state government services is only 4.4 per cent

Need for intervention strategies:

Higher education generally opens up vistas of opportunities for different trades, practices and professions. The success in higher education brings a step closer of economic security and well being. However, the higher level of dropouts at higher levels of education amongst the Muslims has affected their employment opportunities. The educational condition of Indian Muslims has deteriorated to a good extent and it's just a shade of its glorious past. The Muslim community is confronted with high level of illiteracy along with higher dropout rate at the elementary stage which is reflected in their low quality of economic opportunities and consequently low standard of living. High incidence of poverty is all pervasive among Muslims due to illiteracy, low income and irregular employment thereby reflecting a poor human development status (Pervez 2011). Following remedial measures can address the issue of educational backwardness and resultant poverty and employment issues of Muslim community in India.

- Access to quality education is essential in order to compete for new opportunities that come along with economic growth and reap the benefits. There is need to establish educational institutions in mother tongue Urdu with semi English catering to school and higher education with better employability skills.

- The quality of education invariably depends upon teacher's quality. Highly qualified teachers with good academic record need to be given preference in teaching assignments in schools and colleges. Providing infrastructure with technology backup supported by Faculty Development Program for Urdu/semi English school/college teachers to enhance pedagogical skills.
- Witnessing increased percentage of girls education in Muslim community government schools with adequate teachers, skill enhancement add-on courses with community participation through NGOs should be encouraged.
- Setup dedicated ITIs and polytechnics in Muslim concentration areas in order to accommodate dropouts and qualified students for skill and diverse technical/vocational knowledge empowerment according to market demand.
- There is need for active role of stakeholders like Muslim social welfare organizations and different NGOs in creating awareness among section of Muslim masses regarding various government schemes for education and employment for better use of Muslim human resource otherwise idle/unused.

Conclusion:

Education provides bright opportunity to hitherto underprivileged sections of society to improve their economic status or standard of living. The impact of education on the distribution of economic opportunities is determined by the interaction of education with socio economic characteristics of people at three different stages; one, access to educational facilities, two, utilization of educational facilities; and three, employment and income benefits derived from education (Mehta 1990). The earnings of individuals to a certain extent are positively related with their educational attainment. Education has been identified as an important determinant of economic growth. Higher levels of educational attainment lead to a more skilled and productive workforce, producing more efficiently a high standard of goods and services, which in turn forms the basis of faster economic growth and rising living standards. There is need for better coordination between the Muslim community, state machinery and NGOs to initiate educational awareness drives, parent motivation, provision for teacher's training, financial incentives for students in increasing enrolments, reducing dropouts at elementary levels, higher graduate attainment ratio and higher enrolment in professional and

technical courses. These initiatives will help to reduce the educational gap of Muslims with respect to other communities and realize the potential of Muslim students thereby providing access to quality education, increased chances of higher education and provide better economic opportunities ensuring better wages, high living standard and dignity of life.

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