

EDUCATION OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Education is the most important tool for empowering women. According to the 2011 Census, the literacy rate of Muslim is 51.9%. Of all religious communities, they are the least educated and most deprived section of society. The reasons behind this backwardness are large family size, poverty, negative attitude towards girl education. In the post-Independent era, the issues of women have attained a lot of attention and the nation is party to various conventions like UDHR 1948, CEDAW 1979, etc. Besides these, a number of rights are also guaranteed under the constitution of India to protect and safeguards the rights of women. In spite of these proactive measures taken by the government, the educational status of women is still in a deplorable condition.

The present paper deals with the educational status of Muslim women and its various provisions provided under the constitution of India. The study also identifies the educational backwardness of Muslim women and also discusses some measures for improving their status. The paper also suggests that the government should take more initiatives for improving their participation in every aspect of life so that they can contribute to the socio-economic development of the nation.

Keywords: *Status, Conditions, Rights, Education, Issues*

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Introduction

“Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that a son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine, that a child of a farm worker can become the President of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another”. **Nelson Mandela**

Education is one of the significant social indicators for the growth of an individual as well as the community. “A well-educated population, adequately equipped with knowledge and skill is not only essential to support economic growth but is also a precondition for the growth to be inclusive since it is the educated and skilled person who can stand to benefit most from employment opportunities which growth will provide” (Parida, 2013).

However, it is very fortunate that in the 21st Century the problems of women still exist and in some cases, they are worse than they were in the primitive age. As a result, everywhere in the world, it has become a vital issue. In general, even as the problems of women are many and common to most of them, it is Muslim women who are the worst sufferers in our society (Goswamee & Barbhuyan, 2015). For ages, they are discriminated and have not been given equal opportunities in many social, economic and cultural spheres. Merely, it does not only obstruct their own development but also affects the progress of the entire nation if we do not involve women in development activities. The status of women could be the best indicator of a nation’s progress and their role is regarded as an integral part of a progressive social system (Devi, 2014). Education is a key indicator of human development and is included in the Human Development Indices, such as those developed by UNDP. These indices focus on enrolment at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. So far as the minorities in India are concerned, Muslims are the largest minority in the country constituting 13.4% of the population, are seriously lagging behind in terms of most of the human development indicators (Devi, 2014, p. 661). According to the 2011 Census, the literacy rate of male and female are 82.14% and 65.14%. Among the three socio-religious communities (SCRs), the literacy rates of Muslims, Hindus, and Christians, stand at 57.1%, 63.1%, and 74.3% respectively. In comparison to Hindu (55.9%) and Christian women (71.9%), Muslim women have the lowest literacy rates of 51.9%. Muslim men with a literacy

rate of 62.4% too, compare unfavorably with Hindu men (70.7%) and Christian men (76.7%) (Census, 2011).

Perhaps, Islam is the first religion which has given greater importance to learning. From the Holy Qur'an, a number of verses and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasize the acquiring of knowledge by Muslims whether male or female. The Holy Qur'an refers directly or indirectly to the significance of education. However, Muslims, unfortunately, deviate from these religious injunctions, resulting in a tremendous gap between men and women with respect to knowledge. No one can cite a single instance where women in Islam have been given less importance in receiving an education (Gowamee & Barbhuyan, 2015, p. 59).

Education does not mean merely the acquisition of knowledge or experience but it means the developments of habits, attitudes, and skills which help a person to lead a full and worthwhile life. It also plays an active role in educating women's position and promoting their rights in society. Broadening the scope of education among women, exploitation, and oppression of women will be reduced considerably (Ashraf & Ahmad, 2012).

Review of Literature

M. Indus Menon (1979) in his research paper "Education of Muslim Women: Tradition Versus Modernity" tried to discuss some of the major factors which are responsible for hindering educational progress of Muslim women are as such: 1) insistence on religious education 2) early marriage 3) seclusion and 4) absence of socially defined occupational role for women in Muslim community. The paper also described that the traditional attitude of the Muslim community is the most important reason for the low level of education among them.

Rowena Robinson (2007) in her article "Indian Muslims: The Varied Dimension of Marginality" highlighted the Sachar Committee Report with respect to the development and marginalization of different socio-religious groups, in particular, the Muslims including the Muslims women in the country. The author scrutinizes the social, political and economic profile of Indian Muslims emerging from the Sachar Committee Report (SCR) in terms of its regional, gender and other variations; and the implications thereof.

A study conducted by Laxmi Devi (2014) entitled “Socio-Economic Development of Muslim Women: Impact of Education”. The objective of this paper is to study the status of Muslim women in India, the reasons for their backwardness and its impact on socio-economic development. The author suggested that the state government need to provide special provisions for improving their participation in secondary, higher technical and professional education so that they can contribute effectively to the socio-economic development of the nation.

Objective

1. To study the educational status of Muslim women in India.
2. One of the main objectives of the research paper is to examine the literacy rate among the religious communities.
3. To find out the causes responsible for the educational backwardness of Muslim women in India.
4. Further, the study also throws some shed of light on the educational provisions of girls.

Research Methodology

The data taken under this study is secondary in nature and has been collected from the website of the office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India. Various articles and journals have been concerned. Literacy rate among religious communities has been taken from the 2011 Census.

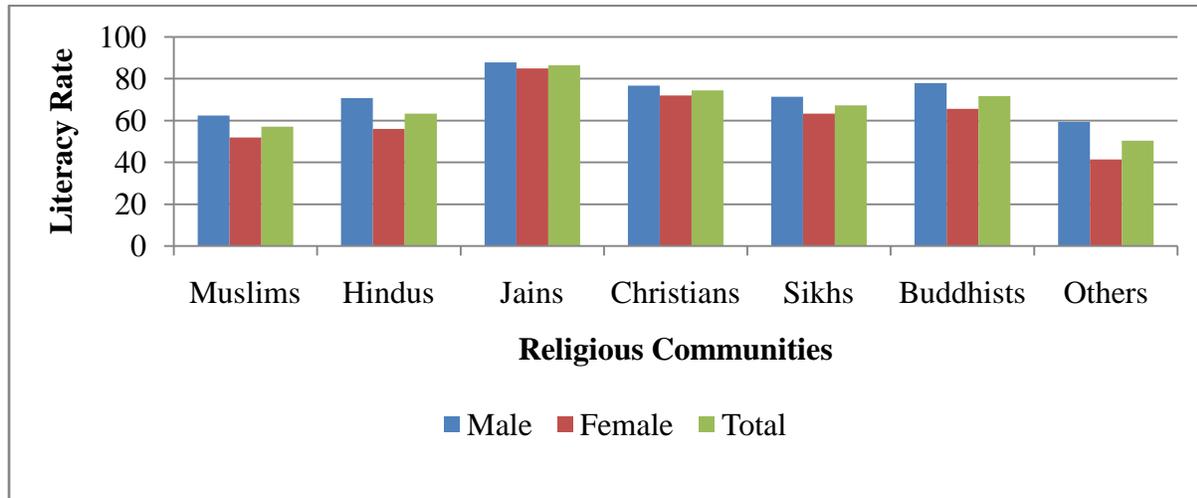
Table -1: Literacy Rate among Religious Communities (in % age)

Religious Community	Male	Female	Total
Muslims	62.41	51.9	57.15
Hindus	70.78	55.98	63.38
Jains	87.86	84.93	86.39
Christians	76.78	71.97	74.37
Sikhs	71.32	63.29	67.30
Buddhists	77.87	65.6	71.73
Others	59.38	41.38	50.38

Source: 2011 Census

According to the 2011 Census, the above table depicts the literacy rate among the religious communities in India. It clearly shows that the literacy rate of Muslim females is lower than all religious communities which are only 51.9%.

Fig 1: Literacy Rate among Religious Communities



Causes responsible for the educational backwardness of Muslim women in India

The Civilization of India is distinct in nature where each ethnic group has the liberty to maintain their own religious identity. The Muslim society is very heterogeneous in nature mainly due to the influence of the caste system and also the most backward society among all religious communities in India. Despite the constitutional provisions, they are not aware of their educational advancement. Some of the important reasons for the educational backwardness of Muslim women in India are as follows:

1. Traditional apathy for education on account of social environment conditions or occupational handicaps (Maheshwari, 1991). In traditional societies, female children are engaged in domestic duties and are not allowed to leave their home place. So, there should be encouragement from the higher authorities for the enhancement of female education.
2. The financial burden is one of the main factors that affect the continuation of female education. It is because most of the parents are from the poor financial background and are engaged in agriculture or unskilled labor for their livelihood.
3. Due to poverty, unemployment among Muslim communities; and lack of a sufficient number of educational institutions in rural areas to educate their children.

4. Living in remote regions; lack of proper communications, and inadequate educational aid, in the form of scholarship, monetary grants for the purpose of books, clothing and hostel facility.
5. Failure of governmental policies for the enhancement of education.
6. A cultural notion like early marriage of girls is one of the major reasons of drop out of Muslim female students.
7. There is a negative attitude towards girl's education among Muslims. Often, there is a misconception regarding the purity of girls if they go for higher education outside their native place. Further, the reason is that there is difficulty in finding educated groom if the girl becomes highly educated.
8. Another reason for the backwardness of female education is that the Muslims generally prefer to send their daughters in Madarsa and Maktabas, which are running still at the traditional pattern. There is no influence of modern education in their syllabus.

Constitution Provisions for Women

The pre- Independence period witnessed a dark scenario so far as the educational status of women is concerned. It was only due to the efforts of social reformer movements that the women's educational and social conditions gradually underwent changes.

The 1931 Census shows the literacy rate for men and women is 11.7% and 1.9%. For Muslim women, the literacy rate was just 1.2%. The participation of women in education was very slow, so the constitutional framers made some provisions through various articles, After Independence, much emphasis was given to women's education including Muslim women too. The state shall provide free and compulsory education for all children in the age group of 6-14 years without any discrimination based on caste, creed, religion, and gender under article 45, 21- A of 86th constitutional amendment 2002. The National Educational Policy (NPE, 1986), Right to Education Act, 2009 have substantiated this view of the constitution (Girija & Basavaraja, 2014). Similarly, a number of constitutional provisions are also provided for the protection and promotion of the interests of these minority groups. "Article 29(1) & (2) of the constitution grant citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script, and culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same and no citizen shall be denied

admission into any educational institution maintained by the state or receiving aid out of state funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them. Article 30 (1) & (2) grants right to all minorities, whether based on religion or language, to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice and the state shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language.”

Various Committees, Commissions & Policies on Girl's Education

Since Independence, the government of India has appointed various committees and commissions and policies to promote and strengthen the education of a girl. With regard to the education of minorities, some of the important committees, commissions and policies are discussed below:

Following committee and commissions were setup after independence is as follows:

- University Education Commission (1948-49)
- Second Education Commission (1952-53)
- National Committee on Women Education
- Smt. Hansa Mehta Committee (1961-62)
- Kothari Education Commission (1964-66)
- National Policy on Education (1979)
- National Policy of Education (1986)
- The National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000)

The Prime Minister of India, Smt. Indira Gandhi in 1983 had issued 15 point programme for the welfare of minorities.

- Point 11 directs the state authorities to take steps for starting of coaching classes in minority educational institutions to train minority students to compete successfully in admission and recruitment.
- Point 12 directs the states to make arrangement to set up ITIs and Community Polytechnics by Government or Private Agencies in predominantly minority areas to encourage admission in these institutions of persons belonging to the minority communities (Nuna, 2011).

The programme of Action 1986 set the following four targets for the various minorities in the remaining years of the Eighth Five Year Plan (1986-87 to 1989-90).

- Setting up of Resource Centres at Aligarh Muslim University, Jamia Millia Islamia, Kashmir University, Marathwada University and Osmania University at Hyderabad for training and guidance to minority educational institutions; and in the Seventh Five Year Plan, opening of 5 more community Polytechnics and Early Childhood Education Centre in the areas predominantly inhabited by educationally backward minorities.
- A number of decisions were taken in the Programme of Action for Primary, Middle, Higher Secondary, Vocational and Technical Education (Nuna, 2011, p. 13)

The National Policy on Education, 1986 and its programme of Action (Revised in 1992) first took note of the existing programmes for the Muslim Minorities and suggested a large number of short- term, medium- term and long-term measures to promote education of minorities and led to the formulation of major programmes like the Area Intensive Educational Development and Modernisation of Madrasas, Maulana Azad National Fellowship for Minority Students as Central Government Schemes of the MHRD (Nayar, 2007).

Gopal Singh committee identified the Muslims and Neo- Buddhists as educationally backward minorities at the national level. So, the committee recommended the special efforts to look into the educational status of backward classes, minorities and deprived groups in the country and to bring them at par with the rest of the society.

The Sachar Committee felt it necessary to review and recast the 15- point programme because of the gaps in the previous programme with regard to the amelioration of socio-economic and educational conditions of the minority groups. With a view to removing this lacuna and having a more comprehensive programme for minorities, the Prime Minister's new 15-point Programme for Welfare of Minorities was formulated and approved by the Cabinet on 22nd June 2006. This programme includes enhancing opportunities for education. (Misra Commission report excerpts, 2009).

In general, all the policies, commissions and committees emphasized the problem of women but not particularly for Muslim women.

Conclusion

To sum up we can say that, in spite of the constitutional guarantees and other safeguards, women in general and Muslim girls, in particular, are still lagging behind in achieving the literacy status. There might be various reasons for female education such as poverty, custom, and cultural practices, gender-based discrimination and the traditional notion of families. Therefore, the government should provide special facilities for Muslim women to receive an education so that they could contribute to the development of the country.

Suggestions

1. The educated, employed and empowered Muslims women should come forward and must take an effective step to get rid of the curse of illiteracy which is the root cause of the socio-economic backwardness of Muslim women at large.
2. The recommendations of the Sachar Committee Report for the socio-economic development of Muslims and 15 point programme for the uplift of minorities should be implemented rigorously.
3. Various schemes must be initiated by the government for providing financial assistance to women, for higher education as well as for educated unemployed.
4. National Commission of Women (NCW), National Minority Commission (NCM) and National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), should deal with an effective role in regarding the matters of the violation of the rights of minorities.
5. Religious scholars should create proper awareness among men and women about the social, economic and educational rights given to women in Islam. Once these issues are addressed properly, Muslim will march in the direction of progress and development and in turn Muslim women will realize the dream of equality of status and empowerment.

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