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## **Muslim Education in Post-Independent India –Issues, Factors and Prospects**

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### **Abstract**

The real journey of education in general and higher education in particular in India started after 1947. Education is its journey can't stand alone but institutional roles need to be included to assess the contribution as a whole. The institutions of higher learning are considered the most important agency of social change, social transformation, and entire development of the country. Muslim education has always been a serious issue despite availability of so many academic institutions in general and minority institutions in particular. The poor condition of the Muslims' education can't be attributed to the government only, but the society, home, economy, motivation, employment and similar factors. The present article is a modest attempt towards exploring and analyzing the miserable state of Muslim education and associated factors.

**Keywords:** *higher education, Muslim education, social change, economy, transformation*

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## Introduction

Muslims being the largest minority of the largest democracy of the world play a decisive role in the socio-economic growth of the country. Yet, the maintenance of the actual records of population, education, poverty etc. has not been so accurate. For example, though the agencies have been blaming the Muslims for the population explosion, the total population could not cross even 18 crores (180 millions) according to many NGOs or even government reports. Therefore, it does not seem appropriate regarding the available data, but to talk about the relevance of the topic. The fact that the Indian Muslim population is only behind the largest Muslim populated country (Indonesia, and much more than Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Iraq, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and any other Muslim states.

The National Sample Survey, India (1990) revealed that only 2.3% male and 0.8% female Muslims had graduated in the country. According to the survey Muslims participation in higher education in urban and rural areas in 1999-2000 was 3.9% and 0.8% respectively as compared to the Hindu's participation rate was 11.5% and 1.8% respectively. In urban India, the Muslim illiteracy rate that was as much as 14 percentage points higher in 1993-94 had narrowed a bit to 11 percentage points by the end of the decade.

Several provisions concerning education of minorities were incorporated in the National Policy of education- 1986 and in its Programme of Action (1990), it was proposed to design varied kind of programs and schemes to modify the *madrassah* curriculum, minority education and its development. But, the whole efforts might not achieve any significant targets for different reasons: lack of incentives, gap between theory and practice, government's indifferent attitude. But, the fact could not change and Muslims remained backward in economy, education and development. Not only this, the prime minister's 15 Point Programme was issued with guideline 11 and 12 pertaining to education which could not change the fact but some statistics.

### Status of Muslims Education in India

The condition of Muslims in India as a whole is not good at all: be it is economy, education, employment, or any other aspect of life. The Sachar committee Report (2006) made it quite clear that Muslims are far behind other communities.

The case can be contended by referring to the Sachar committee reports on many issues related to the Indian Muslims. The overall literary rate in India has been around 70% for quite some time, the literary rate of Muslims is around 60%. The data later falls down with the increase in the level even at the high school level due to drop out scenario. Muslims fall far behind others, where, in general, 26% of those aged 17 years and above have completed matriculation. This percentage is only 17% amongst Muslims.

The rate of literacy (female Muslims) is as low as 50.1% is not only much worse than their male counterparts (67.6%), but it is also lower than the national female literary rate of 53.2%. In northern and eastern states, the literary rates have been lower than their all India literary rates, whereas these rates were somewhat higher in many southern states than their national rate of literary. The reasons can't be exactly predicted.

It may be noted that 64.3% Muslims live in rural areas, while literary rate of all Muslims is 59.1%. The situation is worse for the rural Muslims who are only 52.7% literate, and among them, the rural female literary rate is much below. About 50% urban Muslims with 70% literary rates are much better off than Muslims in rural areas and are also closer to the all India urban literary rate of 79.9%. According to the 61st round of the National Sample Survey, literary rate among rural Muslim women was 41%. The case has not much changed even now. Muslims are facing the same problems despite some changes in the facts and the figures.

### Higher Education: the Muslims' Perspective

Education without higher education or professional education can't help a community to contribute to the nation's ultimate development. Higher education related goals can't be attained without secondary education and good financial status.

Muslims' limited attainment of education at the higher secondary stage shows its adverse effect on their higher education. While some progress has been made in their enrolment in higher education, still they are far behind other communities in this sector of education.

The proposal of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU)'s 5 out-reach campuses has faced many issues, but expected to be sorted out in near future in order to facilitate the minority community. Recently, AMU initiated bridge course (for Madarsa background students) will bridge the gap between religious education and modern education. Thanks to Maulana Azad's foundation for allocating needful

funds. Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, in on the same path of opening the proposed ‘*nayi manzil*’ scheme for Madarsa pass outs to learn necessary skills of English and join the mainstream.

### Problems of Muslim Education in India

Despite the fact that the Indian government tried to provide equal opportunities for all sections of the society, Muslims are found to be faced with many problems of varied kinds, the backwardness of Muslims in different spheres has been vigorously projected by scholars of the Muslim community. Hasan (2005) opines, Muslim’s poor condition in education is largely due to the existing poverty and considerable neglect by the government. Majority of the Indian Muslims work as labourers, peasants, artisans, petty shopkeepers. It is really pity to find out the fact that more than half the urban Muslim population lives below the poverty line.

The Sachar Committee Report, the latest among others, raised some serious concerned and suggested some means. The government has been trying its level best to implement some of the suggestions, and even after around 10 years, nothing much changed. The committee further observed: Muslims are among the most economically, educationally and socially backward sections of Indian society. Like any other reports, the Sachar report is also useful for understanding the seriousness of this Muslim education issue.

### The Sachar Committee Reports Summarised

The committee took many facts and figures into consideration. The following are some of them that are directly or indirectly related to the Muslim education. The literacy rate among Muslims was 59.1%, which was below the national average of 64.8 %; less than 4% of Muslims are graduates or diploma holders compared to about 7% of the population aged 20 years and above. It is estimated that only one out of 25 students enrolled for an undergraduate programme, and only one out of fifty students enrolled for a postgraduate programme is a Muslim. The percentage of Muslim men enrolling for a degree course is lower than that of women.

It is clear from this report and many others that the epic of Muslim Education in general (from admissions to drop outs and graduation) is quite poor as the data required were provided by some well established universities like: Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi; Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna Garhwal University, Uttarakhand, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh and Allahabad University, Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh etc.

The other significant topic that the Sachar Report explicitly brought into the socio-academic arena was that the poverty problem faced by the Muslims. Many researchers, policy makers and, in fact, common Muslims believe that education can be the only mechanism to enhance their socio-economic status and facilitate entry into better paid jobs. But, it is a fact that socio economic status surely helps in pursuing higher education. In other words, both the education and economic development are the two sides of the same coin.

Singh et al (2010) collected data from Hindu, Muslim and Christian respondents to estimate ‘perceived fairness scores’ across different areas of opportunity - social, economic, employment, education and political issues. The study included data from Hindu, Muslim and Christian respondents to estimate ‘perceived fairness scores’ across different areas of opportunity - social, economic, employment, education and political – different spaces that we referred to earlier. Table -1 reports the mean scores along with the information on the significance of difference in these perception scores. A few features stand out:

Table 1. Perceived fairness for five different opportunities as function of respondents religions

Opportunities	Hindus	Muslims	Christians	F
Social prestige	10.20a	8.48b	8.72c	4.58**
Economic	11.92a	9.04b	10.24c	20.11**
Educational	11.32a	8.12b	11.36a	34.16**
Employment	10.92a	8.60b	9.48c	18.40**
Political	12.24a	8.08b	8.00b	56.13**

Source: Singh et al (2010)  
(Perceived fairness of Hindu)

Engineer (2002) points out that Indian Muslims constitute more than 12 per cent of Indian population which is quite sizeable by any account and they are more than 100 million in terms of absolute numbers. It is maintained and rightly so that they are next only to Muslim population in

Indonesia. Their economic and educational progress is, therefore, very crucial for the progress of the country. No country can boast of development if its sizeable minority lags behind and if its large population remains illiterate and poor.

It was sadly noted that eleven of 100 Muslims in India take up higher education – the lowest as regards religion-based enrolment in higher education. In comparison, 20% Hindus and 31% Christians pursue higher education, states a draft report compiled by the union ministry of human resource and development.

Hasan and Menon. (2005) studied about the education of Muslim Girls by doing a logical Comparison of Five Indian Cities and found some similarities and many disparities regarding the issue. The issue of educational disparities were among the most striking factors. Among Muslims, Shariff (1995) said, the literacy rate is about 59 percent, compared with more than 65 percent among Indians as a whole. On average, a Muslim child attends school for three years and four months, against a national average of four years. Less than 4 percent of Muslims graduate from school, compared with 6 percent of the total population. Less than 2 percent of the students at the elite Indian Institutes of Technology are Muslim. Equally revealing, only 4 percent of Muslim children attend *Madrassas*, Shariff pointed out (ibid).

India's Muslims have the lowest living standard in the country on a per capita basis, according to a government survey. Muslims, who account for about 14.4 percent of India's vast population, according to data from Pew Research, spend, on average, only 32.7 Rupees (\$0.52) per day. At the other end of the wealth spectrum, on average, India's tiny minority of Sikhs spend 55.3 Rupees per day. Christians (51.4 Rupees) and Hindus (37.5 Rupees) stay somewhere in between the two figures.

### **Problems of Indian Muslims**

Indian Muslims face mainly four basic problems that can be divided into many sub groups. These problems more or less cause hurdles in the process of aspirations and targets: educational, economic and socio-political.

The first and foremost problem is the absence of a vision which cannot be conceived without a genuine leadership. The present Muslim leadership seems to be fragile or they are the spokespersons of the ideology of some political groups.

The second problem of Indian Muslims is lack of security. Riots, communal violence have become a sad reality of India's life and the majority of the victims of riots in India are Muslims. The next problem of Muslim community is income. Although the economic and social situation of Muslims is not the same throughout India, one cannot deny the fact that poverty adversely affects the actual educational development of the community. In 1999, a team of researchers at the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), led by Shariff, (2010) published the results of a nationwide survey of 33,000 households. This study collated information according to socio-economic status, caste - and religion. Which clearly shows that a larger proportion of Muslims than other religious minorities suffer from low levels of consumption.

Muslims generally are disadvantaged and the issue has already been connected with various socio-economic factors: poverty (Bhagat and Praharaj 2005, Unni 2001), landownership (Kulkarni 2002) and income (Khandker, 1992). Muslims suffer from poverty more than other communities in India such as Hindus, Christians and Sikhs. .

About 23 percent of India's total population is poor compared to 31 percent of Muslims. In urban areas, Muslims experience the highest poverty rate (38.4) compared to scheduled castes and tribes (36.4), other backward castes (25.1), upper caste Hindus (8.3) and other minorities (12.2). Muslims in rural areas are slightly better off, experiencing the second highest poverty rate (26.9 percent). Scheduled castes and tribes have the highest poverty rate (34.8), while other backward castes (19.5), upper caste Majority group –Hindus (9.0), and other minorities (14.3) experience considerably lower poverty rates (Government of India, 2006). Jeffery etc (2005) especially studies the problems of girls education in Uttar Pradesh (the largest state/province in India) and revealed many factors that were quite similar to the Indian scenario.

In rural areas, landownership is an important basis for material well-being. There are more landless Muslims compared to Hindus. Among rural dwellers, 35 percent of Muslims are landless compared to 28 percent of Hindus (Shariff, 1995).

Muslims also experience disadvantage in employment compared to Hindus. The work participation rate, defined as the percentage of workers to the total population, is 31.3 percent for Muslims compared to 40.4 for Hindus. In addition, Muslims are underrepresented in both public and private sectors (Hasan, 2005) and are largely confined to non-farm self-employment (Das 2002).

Muslims are also less likely to be employed in the protected sector, as a result, the community is more vulnerable in the context of employment (Khandker, 1992).

### **Factors Affecting Muslim Education in India**

There are various factors affecting the educational backwardness among the Muslims in India such as socio-economic problem, religious education, medium of instruction. Women education, therefore, is also attributed for the better conceptualization of the educational backwardness of the Muslims. The following issues need to be analyzed systematically. Chicken-egg controversy continues in the process of deciding as to who is more responsible for such a miserable condition for Muslim education in India. The government blames the parental attitude and environment for the outcome while the parents accuse the governmental initiatives and indifferent attitude for the condition. Moreover, the following viewpoint may shed some light on the facts:

#### **Social Problem**

One of the major factors responsible for the educational backwardness of the Muslims in India is the social factors: family background, environment, parental education, locality etc.

#### **Economic Problem**

It is indeed a dispute if the economic problems contribute to the educational attainments. The argument is that all the Muslims are not equally socio-economically backward, and those who are more economically well off, are found to be less motivated to education than those who are less economically sound. In this context, Kamat (1981, 1985) pointed out that Muslims are not a homogenous community. It is, therefore, necessary to go into other significant factors to study in real sense.

#### **Religious Education**

It may not be agreed that the major factor attributed to the educational backwardness of Muslims due to the making of the mind set because of religious education. In recent years, most modern Muslim Americans are sound in Islam, Islamic education as well as western education.

#### **Medium of Instruction**

The medium of instruction is another factor responsible for the educational backwardness of the Muslim in the field of education. It is believed that some Urdu medium students can't compete with their counterparts especially English medium students. Sometimes, many Muslim families are found to educate their wards in initially Urdu as it is close to culture and Islamic studies.

Hussain (1995) argues Islam stresses education as a duty for all Muslims, including women, but yet many muslim families do not give attention to their daughters education based on a survey of 100 Muslim girls studying in four villages in Hyderabad.

#### **Factors: Summary**

Strangely enough, nearly 45 % of Indian Muslims live in poor and underdeveloped states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Is...>)

#### **Economic:**

Muslims have rarely been able to make lasting business enterprise for personal, economic, and even political reasons.

#### **Political:**

There is a dearth of national leadership as there hasn't been a great Muslim community leader except Maulana Abul Kalam Azad before and after independence.

In sum, there are many other factors: educational, demographic, geographic etc. that are responsible for the poor condition of Muslim education in India.

### **Prospects of Muslim Education**

Muslims are found to have been suffering from multiple discrimination: as a minority, poor, politically deprived etc. The new policy of education is likely to appear in 2016, however it has been felt that all the policies on education namely 1965, 1979 and 1956 were conscious of the education and problems of minorities in this country, nothing significant could be though. The national policy on

education 1968 has envisaged that educational institution conducted by minorities have a special place in the National system of education the documents further stated that the administration at the centre and in the states should not only respect the rights of minorities but help to promote their educational interests.

The national policy on education 1979 envisaged that the institution run by religious and linguistic minorities can help in achieving the goal of an integrated Indian community. While the national policy on education 1986 has further given importance to minorities a greater attention will be paid to the education of these groups in the interests of equality and social justice. This will include the constitutional guarantees given to them to establish and administer their own educational institutions and protection to their languages and culture simultaneously objectively will be reflected in the preparations of text book and in all schools activities and all possible measures will be taken to promote an integration based on appreciation of common national goals and ideals, in conformity with the core curriculum.

Government says it is committed to address the existing backwardness in education of minorities especially the Muslims. Therefore, schemes like the prime minister' s 15 point programme inter-alia, aims to enhance opportunities for education of minorities ensuring an equitable share in economic activities and employment.

### **Conclusion**

Muslim education can't be ignored in India because Muslims constitute 13-15% of the total Indian population. It has been noticed that the status of Muslim education as a whole is below average. Many factors can be attributed to the condition. Starting from the individual, parents, home, society and politics, almost each factor has a significant role to play, however the degree may vary. The family as well as the government have to take some responsibilities to further the education of the Muslims. If some NGOs take genuine interest, it will be far better.

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