

Educational Exclusion of Indian Muslims: Issues and Problems

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Abstract:

Marginalisation due to the lack of quality education had remained a continuous trend of disadvantaged sections of Indian society. Muslims being the victims of the same problem remained a backward community in India. In this paper an effort has been made to look into the different educational indicators and status of Muslims with respect of these indicators. Though the government has taken certain specific measures to improve the academic performance of Muslims, all such measures are merely cosmetic or demonstrative. They do not get to the root cause. The paper, while using the data of different government reports, shows that Muslim deprivation increases manifold. Taking major statistics from Sachar Committee Report (SCR, 2006), the paper shows that Muslims face discrimination at various levels, they are at a double disadvantage with low levels of education combined with low quality of education. Even if government accepted the recommendations of SCR in toto, surprisingly, no progress has been made in overall conditions of Muslims, including education sector, since the recommendations were made. There is need of broad based policy initiatives combined with main streaming of Muslims in regular ministries, departments and programmes of state as well as central government.

Key words: Development, Education, Policy, Inclusion, Exclusion, Muslims, Backwardness, Madrasas, Mother Tongue, Minority

Introduction

The Constitution of India is committed to the principle of equality of all citizens. Further, it has directed the state to protect the rights of all minorities in matters of language, religion and culture. In fact, promotion and protection of the rights of minorities contributes to the stability, peace and development of a nation. Since independence, India has achieved significant growth and development. It has also been successful in reducing poverty and improving crucial human development indicators such as levels of literacy, education and health. There are indications, however, that not all religious communities and social groups have shared equally the nation's development. Among these, Muslims, the largest religious minority constituting 13.4 per cent of the population (Census 2001), are seriously lagging behind in terms of most of the human development indicators (Sachar Committee Report "SCR" 2006, 2). Muslims are facing a number of problems like issue of security, educational backwardness, and dismal representation in government employment and private sector and in rural development programmes.

Literacy and education are one of the essential human development parameters. Public policies are striving to make India a 100% literate society and also improve the quality and quantity of higher/scientific levels of education. Practically, all citizens wish to ensure that their children not only become educated but also get quality modern education, which yields higher rate of returns— monetarily and in terms of non-market gains.

In this paper, we establish the educational exclusion of Muslims based on Government sponsored reports. The purpose here is to discuss the educational status of the Muslim community in India. In this paper an attempt has been made to analyse the various indicators of educational attainment. The paper critically analyzes the various policy initiatives of

government, especially in the aftermath of Sachar Committee Report (SCR). Moreover, it will look into the impact of all those policies on the educational status of Muslim community in India.

Growth of education among Muslims

India, through the Directive Principles of State Policy, made a constitutional commitment to provide free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14, nearly 65 years ago. In 1993, in a landmark judgment, the Supreme Court of India ruled that the right to education is a fundamental right flowing from the Right to Life in Article 21 of the Constitution. Subsequently, in 2002, education as a fundamental right was endorsed through the 86th Amendment to the Constitution. Article 21-A states that “The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age six to fourteen years in such a way as the State may, by law, determine.” The 86th Amendment also modified Article 45 which now reads as “The state shall endeavour to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of 6 years”. However, despite this commitment, the number of children in this age group, who have never been to school, is alarmingly large.

Learning and scholarship are central to Islamic faith and culture. The very first verse of the Quranic revelation, to the Prophet Muhammad,^{PBUH} is a direct instruction for learning (Zaman 2001, 15). The Quran repeatedly stresses the importance of knowledge. The Prophet considered the learners as his successors; he often remarked, “one should seek knowledge from cradle to grave” (Vijapur 2007, 87). The contrast between the Islamic precepts and ideals of universalization of education and the prevailing practices among Muslims all over the world, in general, and Indian Muslims in particular, reveals that there is a yawning gap

between theory and practice. It has been widely accepted that the Muslims were a backward people compared to Hindus during British rule, as the latter were the first to reap the benefits of modern education (Kochhar 1992, 2609-2616). Even after independence, the Muslim condition remained same. According to Imtiaz Ahmad, Muslims are educationally backward because of their small size of the educated middle class. The Muslim middle class during British rule was extremely restricted in geographical spread. Following partition, most of Muslim middle class people migrated to new nation state, which further depleted their size in India (Ahmad 1981, 1457-1465). Consequently, in modern India, Muslims have occupied a niche position characterised by self-employment in petty business and urban residence. Muslims have tended to fall behind Hindus and Christians in access to formal sector jobs and education (Sonalde and Kulkarni 2008, 245-270).

The majority of Muslims were generally economically weaker and poorly educated. They are slow in picking up the benefits of education. The document of the government of India's New Education Policy of 1986 in the section of minority education, declared the Muslims along with the neo-Buddhists as educationally backward on a national level (Vijapur 2007, 89). Muslims are far behind than the other groups even when they happen to be the majority population in given geographical area or in educational institutions established for or managed by them. The high power panel set-up by the Centre Government to study the educational and economic conditions of the minorities, SCs, STs and other weaker sections has conducted extensive survey on the educational standards of the minorities and submitted the report to the government in 1983. The following data on educational standards of Muslims shows the backwardness of the community in this field.

Enrolment at elementary level: According to data collected from 45 districts in 12 states by the High Power Panel

on Minorities, gave some significant facts about the enrolment of Muslim students at the elementary school stage. It provides data on four religious minorities viz. Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, and Buddhists (Gopal Singh 1983, 19-25). The data (Table I) shows that the percentage of enrolment of Muslim students at the elementary level (class I to VIII) in 1980-81 was much lower (12.39 % of total enrolment) than Muslim population in those sample districts (17.32%). At the state level only in three states, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh, enrolment ratio of Muslims was greater than their proportion in population of the state, whereas in the states of Bihar, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh it was deplorable. The data on Uttar Pradesh revealed that while the Muslim population was 20.38%, the enrolment was only 8.46%.

Religious Group	Minority	Enrolment	Corresponding population %	Coverage
Muslims		12.39	17.32	12 states 45 districts
Christians		3.7	2.3	12 states 32 districts
Sikhs		5.8	4.0	10 states 24 districts
Buddhists		2.2	6.2	1 state 4 districts

Table I: Enrolment Levels of Minorities at Elementary Education (Class I to VII)

Source: Gopal Singh Report on Minorities.

The data on drop out ratio was collected from 27 districts in eight states for the year 1980-81. It was found that drop out ratio among the Muslim students was about 65%, which means that only 35% of the students joining class in 1976-77 reached Vth standard in 1980-81. Thus the enrolment ratio at elementary school level among the Muslims is generally lower than their proportion in the population and their drop out ratio is commonly higher than the general dropout rate (Gopal Singh 1983, 26).

Secondary and Higher School Education: The data on enrolment at secondary school stage (IX to XII) was collected from 38 districts of 11 states. It has been discovered that the Muslim participation was 10.66% of those enrolled as against their population of 18.56% in the sample districts. Muslim participation rate is low particularly in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. At the class X level data collected from eight examination boards in 1980-81 revealed that 13.44 lakh students appeared at class X examination out of which 0.54 lakh were Muslims constituting 4.01% against their proportion in population of 11.28% in the relevant states. However, the pass percentage of Muslim students was 59% against the general pass percentage of 54% (Gopal Singh 1983, 21).

The examination results of four examination boards, shows that 2.26 lakh students, appeared in class XII examination out of which 5.64 were Muslims constituting 2.49%. The number of Muslims students who appeared in these examinations was far below their population of 10.30% in these areas. Nonetheless, their pass percentage was almost at the par with general pass percentage (Gopal Singh 1983, 22).

Higher education: Higher education plays many roles in modern societies. It gives people skills they need in order to qualify for desirable career opportunities in later life and help societies by providing enough well-trained people to perform those jobs. At the same time, higher education imparts credentials that are at least as important for advancement as actual skills are.

At the graduate level the data collected from 12 universities in 11 states revealed that 2.19 lakh students appeared at B.A., B.Sc. and B.Com examination out of which 13,571 students were Muslims constituting 6.19% of the total against their representation in population of 10.73%. The information from 16 universities in 9 states showed that there were 23,723 students at M.A., M.Sc., and M.Com, level in these universities. Out of these 2,162 students were Muslims, their

percentage at this level is 9.1% where as their percentage in the population in this sample is 10.73% (Gopal Singh 1983, 23).

The participation of Muslims in professional degree courses, according to Gopal Singh Panel Committee, was gloomy. In the nine universities belonging to six states only 3.41% of the total students appearing in engineering examination were Muslims while they constitute 12.44% of the total population. In the case of medical education their percentage in M.B.B.S. course was 3.44% as compared to their population proportion of 9.55%. It may be noted that other minorities like Christians and Sikhs are in much better situation as compared to Muslims at all levels of education (Gopal Singh 1983, 20-25). Women's participation in higher education and professional courses is miserable. The study points out that Muslim women's enrolment in B. Ed. courses is negligible and in M.B.A. and M.C.A. it is nought (Vijapur 2007, 99).

Thus the participation rates of Muslims in elementary, secondary, graduate, post graduate and professional education does not commensurate with their share in population of relevant states. Although the participation rates are low the performance rates are not low as there is no much difference between the pass percentage of Muslims and others. The situation is bleak in the case of medical and engineering education in which participation rates are as low as three to four percent.

Some significant findings of Sachar Committee Report

The Report of the High Level Committee on the social, economic and educational status of Muslims in India, also known as the Sachar Committee Report (SCR, 2006), is an important attempt to provide information on conditions of the community using large-scale empirical data. It provides the basis for an informed debate, from an equity perspective, on the conditions of the

Muslims. The importance lies in the fact that report is the first sole attempt to analyse the condition of Muslims in a comparative perspective. Though its purpose was to show the status of Muslims in social, economic and educational progress, the report, at the same time, has given a comparable figure of different socio-religious categories of India.

Here we will discuss the educational findings of the committee. Sachar Committee Report shows clearly that the literacy and educational status of Muslims is particularly low. It has shown that Muslims are at double disadvantage with low levels of education combined with low quality of education; their deprivation increases manifold as the level of education rises. In some instances the relative share for Muslims is lower than even the SCs who are the victims of a long standing caste system (SCR 2006, 50).

Literacy levels (all India)

At all India level, the literacy rate, according to Census 2001 was about 65%.¹ There is a wide gap between rural and urban and across gender. The literacy rate among Muslims in 2001 was 59.1% (Table II), which is much lower than the national average (65%). In urban areas, the gap between the literacy levels of Muslims (70.1%) and the national average is 11 percentage points and in relation to all others it is 15 percent points. In contrast, Muslim women with a literacy level of 50% have been able to keep up with women of other communities and are much ahead of the SC/ST women in rural India.

¹ According to the Census 2011 it has raised up to 74%. The said Census has not given the literacy rate with respect to different socio-religious communities.

	Total	Muslims	Hindu SCs/STs	All Others
Total	65	59.1	52.2	70.8
Urban	81.1	70.1	68	85
Rural	58.7	52.7	48	66

Table: II. Literacy by place of Residence (Census 2001)

Source: Government of India, *Sachar Committee Report (SCR)*

A general analysis at the state level presents a better picture for Muslims. In states like Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat the literacy rate of Muslims is higher than the state average. But, it may not be out of place to mention here that states like Jammu and Kashmir, where Muslims are in majority (67%), their literacy level (47%) is much lower than the state's average (55.5%) (SCR 2006, Appendix Table 4.1) The state-level estimates also suggest that the literacy gap between Muslims and the general average is greater in urban areas and also for Muslim women.

Over time, there has been an improvement in the literacy levels of all communities, but the rates of progress have not been uniform. The all-India picture shows the presence of a significant gap between Muslims, SCs/STs and 'All Others' in the 1960s. Literacy levels amongst SCs/STs have increased at a faster rate than for other Socio-Religious Communities (SRCs). This enabled them to overtake the Muslims at all India level by the mid-1990s (SCR 2006, 54).² Muslims, on the other hand, have not been able to respond to the challenge of improving their educational status.

Both Mean Years of Schooling (MYS) and attendance levels of Muslims are low in absolute numbers as well as in comparison with other socio-religious communities. It was calculated that, on an average, a Muslim child goes to school only for three years and four months. Again there are regional

² SCs and STs have benefited from affirmative action in indirect ways. It has been argued that a higher probability of employment due to reservation and consequent economic security has encouraged investment in children education among SC/ST households.

variations. The MYS is lowest in states such as West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Uttaranchal and Delhi. However, Muslims have more years of schooling than SCs/STs in Kerala, Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat (SCR 2006, 56).

In order to examine the enrolment rates the Committee has used 61th Round NSSO data (2004-2005). These figures were compared with 55th Round (1999-2000) to examine the trends in attendance rates over time. It can be seen that there has been a significant increase in the current enrolment and attendance rates for all SRCs. While an increase in enrolment is observed for all SRCs, the increase has been the highest among SCs/STs (95%), followed by Muslims (65%). Though this substantial increase has not really changed the relative position of Muslims in terms of ranks, the gaps among SRCs have narrowed dramatically. In 1999-00, Muslims had the lowest enrolment rate among all SRCs except SCs/STs and this rate was 78% of the average enrolment rate for the population as a whole. More than 25% of children in the 6-14 years age group have either never attended school or have dropped out. This is higher than that of any other (SRCs) considered in analysis. The incidence of drop-outs is also high among Muslims and only SCs/STs have a marginally higher drop-out rate than Muslims (SCR 2006, 57-58)³

Differences in the attainment of higher education

In India, a significant proportion of the relevant population still remains deprived of the benefits of higher education, and the Muslims comprise an important category of the deprived communities (Table III). According to the Census data (2001), while only about 7% of the population aged 20 years and above are graduates or hold diplomas, this portion is less than 4%

³ The Muslim dropout rate about 15%, while the Hindu SCs/STs dropout rate is 14.2.

among Muslims. Only 6% of the total Indian graduates are Muslims and the technical degrees at 18 years and above among Muslims is almost non-existent (SCR 2006, 64).

Socio Religious Communities (SRCs)	Religious	Total	Muslims	SCs/STs	All Others
Number (in lakhs)	Graduates	367.7	23.9	30.8	322
	Diploma and Certificate	40.5	2.7	4.1	33.7
Percentage of 20 years + Population	Graduates	6.7	3.6	2.4	8.8
	Diploma and Certificate	0.7	0.4	0.3	0.9
Distribution across SRCs	Graduates	100	6.3	8.2	85.5
	Diploma and Certificate	100	6.8	0.2	83.0

Table III. Graduates and Diploma Holders by Socio-Religious Communities (Census 2001)

Source: Government of India, *Sachar Committee Report (SCR)*

The disparity in graduation attainment levels has been widening between Muslims and all others in both rural and urban areas since 1970s. In the initial phases of planning, Muslims had a higher graduate attainment rate than SCs and STs. That has now changed and the latter has overtaken the Muslims. Muslim disadvantage must be related to a number of factors including, of course, their economic status and generally low education levels. But the latter may be in part also due to the lack of employment opportunities. This is partially supported by the data, which shows that the unemployment rate among Muslim graduates is the highest among socio-religious communities whether poor or rich. It must also be read in light of the fact that Muslims do not see education as necessarily translating into formal employment. They are badly represented in formal employment, thus, the low perceived

returns from education do not help the cause of retention of Muslims in the education system (SCR 2006, 20, 67, 74).⁴

The Committee undertook a survey of students currently enrolled in some of the premier colleges offering streams of regular science, arts and commerce courses and the premier Medical Colleges. The enrolment of Muslims in the regular streams of science, arts and commerce courses (SCR 2006, 69)⁵ is presented in Table IV. Only one out of twenty five students enrolled in Under Graduate (UG) courses and only one out of every fifty students in Post-Graduate (PG) courses is a Muslim. The share of Muslims in all courses is low, particularly at the PG level, and insignificant in the science stream. However, it is interesting that the enrolment ratio is higher among girls than boys in UG courses. At the PG level, however, this proportion falls except in arts colleges. The representation of Muslims in the top Medical colleges is only slightly better. It is about 4% of students enrolled in all courses. Most of them are studying at the UG level namely in MBBS, Dental, Nursing etc. The representation of Muslims in other courses is trivial (SCR 2006, 69-70).

	Male	Female	Total
Sc. UG	3	3.4	3.1
Sc. PG	3.5	1	1.8
Arts UG	4	4.2	4.1
Arts PG	1.5	1.9	1.7

⁴ Committee, while interacting with the community members, found that though some of the Muslims who have been able to get degrees and certificates were unable to get employment, especially in Government and organised sector. Discriminatory practices, especially at the time of the interview, were cited as reasons for poor Muslim representations even at the class IV level or in Grade D employment where high educational qualifications are not required.

⁵ The colleges who had furnished data to the Committee are: SRC College, Hansraj College, St. Stephens College (New Delhi), Presidency College, St. Xavier's College (Calcutta), St. Xavier's College (Mumbai), BIM College of Commerce, Dr. Ambedkar College (Pune), K.J. Somaiya College, Madras Christian College (Chennai) and Mt. Carmel College (Bangalore).

Com. UG	3.3	3.8	3.5
Com. PG	2.5	0.8	1.7
Total UG	3.4	3.7	3.3
Total PG	2.3	1.2	1.4

Table IV: Proportion of Muslims in Premier Arts/Science/Commerce Colleges

Source: Government of India, *Sachar Committee Report (SCR)*.

Contrary to popular perception that a large portion of Muslim children study in the Madarsas, the committee found that only 4% of the Muslim children in the age group of 7-16 were enrolled in Madarsas, while NCERT Survey estimates are even lower than this percentage.⁶ However, the fact of the matter is that schools beyond the primary level are few in Muslim localities. Many a time Madarsas are the only educational option available to Muslim children, especially those belonging to the poor. Very often one finds that Madarsas have indeed provided schooling to Muslim children where the State has failed them. Many children go to Madarsas and thereby acquire some level of literacy/education when there is no school in the neighbourhood. (SCR 2006, 77-78). Interestingly, some Madarsas are doing a healthier job by providing secular

⁶ One reason for the misconception that the majority of Muslim children are enrolled in Madarsas is that people do not distinguish between Madarsas and Maktabs. While Madarsas provide education (religious and/or regular), Maktabs are neighbourhood schools, often attached to mosques, that provide religious education to children who attend other schools to get 'mainstream' education. Thus Maktabs provide part-time religious education and are complementary to the common belief that a high proportion of Muslim children study in Madarsas stems from the fact that they are actually enrolled in the local Maktabs. As emphasized, such local Maktabs provide not a substitute, but a supplementary educational service. In Kerala, for instance, more than 60,000 Muslim students study in both 'mainstream' institutions and Maktabs at the same time. Since private and Government aided schools do not teach Urdu adequately, children have to be taught to read the scriptures at home. Some children are taught to read the Holy Quran by their parents, relatives or by private tutors. In many cases, especially in low and medium income families, parents do not have the time or ability to teach their children themselves. Micro-level studies show that such parents admit their children to Maktabs, in addition to secular schools. In such cases, the children study in two schools.

education including religious education. A collaborative initiative in Kutch Gujarat has proved that educational initiatives of Madarsas and NGO's will not only provide a quality education to Muslims but to different marginal communities including Dalits and tribals (Skind 2008, 19-22)⁷

The advantage of providing education (especially primary education) in the mother tongue is undisputed as it enables the child to understand and apply skills more easily. Countless children perish just because the schools designed for the dominant majority fail to attract minority children. It makes them feel useless. They are clueless as all the fuss about going to a place where they do not understand the language. The school, the teachers, the texts and contexts speak a different language and belong to a different culture. It is an alien place - uninteresting, monotonous and incomprehensible. It makes many children turn their backs to schooling and it pushes out children who, sadly, are branded as "drop outs". Neglect of mother tongues of the dominated and minority language speakers in schools contributes to their capability deprivation and voicelessness (Skutnabb Kangas 2007, XIX).

Urdu, being spoken by a substantial number of Muslims in India, has not been nourished properly. As per Article 350A of our Constitution, "it shall be endeavour of every state and local authority within the state to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups; and the President may issue such directions to any state as he considers necessary or proper for securing the provision of such facilities". Further, a number of committees⁸ have also been set

⁷ A unique case of collaboration between the traditional Ulema (Muslim religious scholar) and non-Muslim civil society is running an educational project in rural Kutch in northern Gujarat. It is a joint project of the new Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind and the Ahmadabad based Janvikas through its initiative Udaan, a resource centre working on primary education, irrespective caste, colour, gender and religion.

⁸ These committees are the Gujral Committee set up in 1972 and submitted its report in 1975. This was followed by the setting up of the Ale Ahmed

up by the Central Government to look into the promotion of Urdu in India. However, despite the general agreement on the merit of this proposal, there has been more violation than adherence to it. In contradiction to the widely held belief, the Urdu-speaking population is not merely confined to the Indo-Gangetic plains. Urdu is also reported to be the mother tongue of a sizeable section of the populations of Karnataka (10%), Maharashtra (7.5%) and Andhra Pradesh (8.5%). Interestingly, in all these states, the percentage of Muslim population reporting Urdu as their mother tongue is substantially higher than the states in the Hindi-Urdu belt. In these states, the percentage of children enrolled in Urdu medium as a percentage of Muslim children in the school children going age (6-14 years) is quite high. Surprisingly, the figures for enrolment in Urdu medium in Uttar Pradesh, in particular, are dismally low. It remains unsatisfactory in Bihar and Jharkhand too (SCR 2006, 80-81).

Non-Urdu medium schools with a provision for teaching Urdu as an elective subject are few and far between. This contrasts sharply with the importance attached to, say, Sanskrit, which is offered in a majority of the schools. "The Hindi speaking States operate largely with Hindi, English and Sanskrit whereas the non- Hindi speaking States have largely operated with a two language formula" with some exceptions. The importance given to Sanskrit in the educational framework in Delhi and many north Indian States has tended to sideline minority languages. Students have to opt for Sanskrit as there is no provision to teach Urdu (or any other regional language) in many schools. Lack of Urdu medium schools, the poor quality of teaching in them, vacancies for teachers unfilled for several years and the recruitment of Hindi teachers in place of Urdu teachers are some of the problems afflicting the teaching of

Suroor Committee in 1979 which submitted its report in 1983. The year 1990 was witness to yet another report submitted by Ali Sardar Jafri to the Janta Dal government for the promotion of Urdu.

Urdu (SCR 2006, 83, 18).

Post-Sachar Scenario

From the above findings, it becomes clear that Muslims are most backward in education so far as different educational indicators are concerned. Despite the government's publicised support for the Sachar Committee Report's recommendations to increase diversity in public spaces and to ensure the minorities' proportionate benefits from mainstream institutions, the government's record is notably lacklustre. Six long years have gone, which are enough for a policy to perform, there is no perceptible improvement in the status of Muslims in different human development sectors, especially education since the Sachar Committee Report made its recommendations. In fact, the condition of Muslims has deteriorated (*The Hindu* 2013).

During the past six years, since the Sachar Report was made public, neither the national nor any major state government has made efforts to evaluate the pro-poor and pro-minority policies. Yet a minor study has been made by Abusaleh Sharif (2012)⁹ which, to some extent, has filled a gap. The study has found some noteworthy facts which show that the Muslim community which was suffering from a slow but steady decline in most of the human development parameters, including education, continues to do so.

Shariff's study noted that the rate of growth of education at all levels had remained the lowest for Muslims between 2004-05 and 2009-10. Literacy levels are high in urban areas and this advantage is uniformly similar for all SRCs, (Table. IV). An interesting scenario emerges if one analyzes the

⁹ Abusaleh Shariff, Member Secretary of SCR, has constantly being vocal of the government policies regarding the minorities. His paper, "Inclusive Development Paradigm in India: A Post-Sachar Perspective" US-India Policy Institute (USIPI) Occasional Paper No. 1. March, 2012, is one such example. In this paper Mr Shariff has used the data of NSSO of 66th Round (Employment and Unemployment Survey in India, 2009-210).

absolute change or improvement in literacy between two data periods, 2004-05 and 2009-10. It is reassuring to note that the improvements in the literacy have been considerably higher in rural areas among all communities except Muslim OBC. Note that literacy level improvement amongst the STs both in rural and urban areas has been the highest (12% improvement in rural and about 8% in urban areas). The next group recording improvements in literacy in rural areas are the SCs, Hindu OBCs, other Minorities and both categories of Muslims in that order. Overall levels of improvements for Hindu General Category are low and this is due to the base effect of high levels of literacy already achieved in the previous period. Note that relatively speaking Muslims are urban dwellers and improvement in urban literacy amongst the Muslim-general group has been low. Overall, the improvements in literacy levels for both types of Muslim groups has to catch up with the levels recorded at least in case of the SCs and the STs (Sharif 2012, 15). The following table amply demonstrates this.

	Rural	Urban	Absolute Change 2004-2005 to 2009-10	
			Rural	Urban
Hindu STs	61	79	12%	8%
Hindu SCs	62	77	8.4%	5.2%
Hindu OBCs	69	83	8.8%	4%
Hindu Gen.	81	94	5%	1.4%
Muslim OBCs	63	76	6.7%	6.1%
Muslim Gen.	68	78	6.8%	4%
Other Minorities	77	91	6.3%	-1%

Table IV: All India Literacy Rate by Socio-Religious Groups; 2009-10

Source: (Employment and Unemployment Survey in India-2009-10), NSSO.

Matriculation level entails that a child has successfully completed 10 years of schooling. This stage is recognised as a bench mark to assess both the quantity and quality of education. Table V presents achievements at matriculation of education for rural and urban areas by socio religious

communities. Keeping the base level as well as pace of improvements in mind, it can be said that the levels of matriculates both in rural and urban areas are the highest amongst the Hindu general and other minorities. The level of enrolment was the least among both the OBC and general Category Muslims in both rural and urban areas and lower than the enrolment for SCs and STs. An investigation of the absolute change during the five year period between 2004-05 and 2009-10 suggests that the improvement at matriculation level of education is the least among both categories of Muslims and considerably lower than those amongst SCs and STs. For instance, while both rural and urban levels for STs and SCs are higher than Muslims, the improvements have also been as much as 13% and 11%, respectively in urban and 10% and 9%, respectively in rural areas, compared with only about 5% to 7% improvement in rural and urban areas for both types of communities.

	Rural	Urban	Absolute Change 2004-2005 to 2009-10	
			Rural	Urban
Hindu STs	20	34	10.5%	13%
Hindu SCs	22	32.33	9.4%	11%
Hindu OBCs	26	37.22	8%	6.5%
Hindu Gen.	35	43.5	8.6%	6.5%
Muslim OBCs	19	26	6.8%	5.9%
Muslim Gen.	18	25	7.5%	6.7%
Other Minorities	28	41	6%	8.9%

Table V: All India Shares in Matriculation by Socio-Religious Groups; 2009-10

Source: (Employment and Unemployment Survey in India-2009-10), NSSO.

At higher levels of education, the distribution was even more skewed in favour of the Hindu general population, other minorities, the STs and OBCs and in urban areas in that order. (See Table VI). Muslims, whose proportion in urban areas is relatively higher, have shown the least levels of achievements

at the higher levels of education and so they have recorded the smallest level of improvement (about 2% in case of OBC-Muslims); the situation is much worse amongst the general category of Muslims who have registered about 1.5% net decline over the five year period of data comparison. Note that the rate of higher education for the STs, Hindu-OBCs, Hindu-General and the SCs all in urban areas has recorded large improvements ranging from 5% to 9% and, therefore, the gap between the Muslim community and all others is increasing day by day. The disturbing fact is that there is a net decline instead of improvement in case of the Muslim-general category. However, Muslim OBCs got some benefit that may be because of reservation; hence, reverse discrimination within Muslim community has begun.

	Rural	Urban	Absolute Change 2004-2005 to 2009-10	
			Rural	Urban
Hindu STs	4	23	1.8%	8.7%
Hindu SCs	5	14	1.7%	6%
Hindu OBCs	8	24	2.7%	6.5%
Hindu Gen	13	33	4%	4.6%
Muslim OBCs	5	9	1.9%	2.6%
Muslim Gen	3	8	1.2%	-1.5%
Other Minorities	11	28	2.5%	2.3%

Table VI: All India, Share in Higher Level Education 2009-10 by SRCs
 Source: (Employment and Unemployment Survey in India-2009-10), NSSO.

It is now clear that the literacy level and the quantum of improvements were modest for Muslims compared to other communities. At the level of matric (10 years of schooling) the situation of Muslims dropped both in terms of levels and improvements to very low levels, giving the impression that it was purposeful for the disadvantage of the Muslim community. This trend of exclusion of Muslims gets further aggravated at the higher levels of literacy where one notices even a net decline instead of improvement in case of the general Muslim

category, and hardly any improvement even in case of the OBC Muslims.

Conclusion and suggestions

Although government has taken a number of steps to ameliorate the Muslim deprivation in different development indicators including education, the results are less promising. As discussed above, Muslim exclusion is increasing rather than their inclusion. Broadly, under the revised 15-point programme, a special investment program in about 100 minority (includes substantial Christian and Muslim populations) concentration districts (MCD), is to provide “basic amenities and employment opportunities.” Only about half of the districts have Muslims, and then what these basic amenities are is not specified. Only about 30 per cent of Muslims are covered in this approach, and the question is: what happens to the remaining 70 per cent, spread all over India? So “substantial Muslim population concentrations” should have been defined at the level of the Taluks and blocks and not at the level of the district, confined to only 100 districts (Sharif 2012, 24; 2007).

The announcement of exclusive scholarships for minority candidates of elementary and higher level education are meagre, touching only a fringe of Muslim population. Since SCR highlighted status of Muslims in a comparative perspective, so in most of the policy initiatives Muslim focus is missing: by and large, problems of minorities in India are problems of Muslims.

As SCR has shown that Muslims are doing better in western and southern states, so government policy should have been specific for different states, but unfortunately the policies were generalised.¹⁰ Therefore, there is need of region specific

¹⁰ Same policy were adopted in literacy for West Bengal and Kerala, in former state Muslim performance in education is poor while in latter Muslims are doing relatively better.

policies, so that problems can be solved accordingly.

SCR has clearly highlighted that poverty is the main cause of low levels of education, which led to high dropout rates and, in turn, promotes child labour (SCR 2006, 15). For the families of landless labours, government education is either too costly or it does not fit in their scheme of things. They do not have enough money to survive and cannot be expected to buy books etc., for their children. Moreover, a child in such families is expected to contribute financially and they cannot afford to lose them to school (Alam 2011, 140).¹¹ MG-NREGA, India's flag ship program, which is supposed to provide some employment to rural and poor masses; Muslims are hardly present in this program. Only 3 per cent of all job card holders are found to be the Muslim households and much less about 2 per one hundred works are reported to be Muslims. These percentages at the all India level should be closer to about 13-14 per cent on the basis of their share in population; but since rural Muslims have higher levels of poverty and also they are more likely to be landless, their actual participation should be much higher than even 15-16% (Shariff 2012, 22)

Sometimes we see discrimination against minorities is not caused by prejudice but by difference in skills between these communities (Wilkinson 2007, 832-36)¹², which suggests a renewed focus on improving minorities access to education and skill acquisition at the elementary level, where too many from the community remained in sub-standard educational environment. The government of India has established Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas in several districts of almost all the states. These schools have shown good results in extending quality education to the deprived sections in rural areas.

¹¹ Giving free books and other things is not enough, there is need of economic empowerment of such families.

¹² Some studies, while acknowledging the continuing role of prejudice against minorities in the US, have found that a large portion of the difference in black/white success in the labour market is caused not by prejudice but by differences in skill levels between these groups.

Opening such schools in areas having a concentration of Muslim population may be a positive step towards the community.

There is a need for durable changes. Firstly, a recognition that deprivation amongst the minorities exists due to systemic causes which can be set right only through broad based public policy initiatives, not entirely through special purpose vehicles such as the minority/Muslim/Christian oriented programs¹³ but rather by assisting them to strive to access their share within the mainstream such as the regular ministries, departments and programs of government of India and many major states.

Both union and state governments concerned and Muslim community can work in tandem to remove the situation of educational backwardness. As a matter of fact, Muslims have to reconcile themselves to the fact that there would exist some degree of discrimination against them despite the constitutional professions of equality of opportunity. They themselves had took some independent steps to ameliorate the situation, with opening of community schools being be one such step (Ahmad 1981, 1457-1465).¹⁴

The gist of this paper is that in present global era, which is full of challenges, we cannot think of an inclusive society without the quality of education. If fact, when a community is

¹³ For instance Ministry of Minorities Affairs is a ministry of coordination, it cannot solve the problems of minorities or Muslims alone but the departments of various ministries have to be involved. In fact, former Union Minister for Law and Minorities Affairs, Salman Khurshid himself said that he is in total agreement with the view of a section of the society that in a country like India there is no need at all for the Ministry of Minorities Affairs, when he addressed a international conference on “Minority Rights and Identities: Challenges and Prospects in an Unfolding Global Scenario” held on April 13-15, 2012 at New Delhi, Organised by Institute of Objective Studies, New Delhi.

¹⁴ Muslims could learn a great deal in evolving and operationalising this strategy from the experience of the Jews in the United States and the Sikhs in India.

being deprived of a quality education which is an important indicator of development, this deprivation not only leads to educational exclusion but it shuts doors for a number of opportunities. So there is an urgent need to make education accessible to all unprivileged classes of our society, hence they may be able to reap the fruits of development in a nation. The Indian nation cannot march forward with a major segment of its largest minority group remaining backward, illiterate, unenlightened, unhealthy and weak. It is the duty of every section of the Indian society, the state and the civil society to help in mainstreaming this group which has fallen by the wayside.

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