

## Educational Backwardness of Indian Muslims: Causes and Solutions

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### Abstract:

*The paper analyzes the problems Muslims are facing in India in the field of education such as enrolment, higher education and the quality education. The present study also tries to find out the causes behind these problems and what can be possible solutions and remedies. The paper analyses available data, which show the backwardness of the Muslims in the field of education. The governmental policies concerning the upliftment of educational status of Muslim are also discussed in the paper. The paper gives possible suggestions to improve the condition of Indian Muslims' education.*

**Key words:** backwardness, literacy, enrolment, higher education, women education, government policies, unemployment, modernization of Madrasas

### INTRODUCTION

After six decades of the independence, Muslims are the most backwards class educationally, in India. They are the most backward minority group. There are other religious minority groups in India but their educational level is higher than

Muslims even higher than Hindu majority. Muslims are the only minority groups who are far behind to other minority groups in all aspects of lives. They are backward in literacy, primary education, secondary education and higher education. The condition of education of Muslim women is quite pathetic. The socio-economic conditions of a backward community cannot be improved without special provisions. It is quite impossible for them to progress without active involvement of the community members themselves.

## **EDUCATIONAL BACKWARDNESS**

**Literacy:** Except Muslim all minorities in India are ahead of Hindu majority in literacy. According to 2001 census the literacy rate among Jains is 94.1 %, Christians 80.3%, Buddhists 72.7%, Sikhs 69.4%, and Hindus 65.1%, while among Muslims it is only 59.1%. NSS 66<sup>th</sup> round conducted during 2009-2010, reported that the current attendance rates in educational institutions among rural Christian males, rural Christian females, urban Christian males and urban Christian females of age 0-29 years were 58 per cent, 52 per cent, 63 per cent and 56 per cent, respectively. The corresponding rates for Muslims were 46 per cent, 38 per cent, 48 per cent and 42 per cent, respectively.

**Enrolment:** At every level of the education, Muslims are far behind in enrolment. From primary to higher education, the condition of Muslims' enrolment deteriorates in comparison to other religious communities. The dropout rate of the Muslim students is higher in comparison to other communities. *DNA* on 2013, Feb 5 reported that 11 out of 100 Muslims in India take up higher education, the lowest 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. The situation is worse in rural India, where only 6.7% Muslims take up higher education. There are very few Muslim students who are interested in science. Less than 1 % of them reach the research level. According to Sachar Committee report, in IIMs, IITs and AIIMS and other institutions of national importance, the enrolment is negligible. There are only 1.4% Muslim students in IIMs, 1.8 in IITs and 1.7 % in AIIMS. This is quite low in comparison to their population.

**Quality of Education:** The quality of the education of the Muslims is quite low. The literacy rate among Muslims is 59.1 % and among Hindus is 65.1%. There is only 6% difference in the literacy rate of Hindus and Muslims. But when it comes to employment, then there is huge difference between Hindu and Muslim communities. According to Sachar Committee there are only 4% IPS and 3% IAS Muslims, while 80% of Hindus are on these posts. They are in the ratio of their population but Muslims are far behind. There is only 2.5% representation in bureaucracy. The representation in government jobs of every religious community in India is according to the population but the Muslim community which is 14.23 % in population is only 3% in government jobs. There is no department or field where Muslims are in the jobs proportional to their population. In these situations the quality of the education which Muslims are getting can be questioned. While, there is very less difference in the literacy rate of Muslim minority and Hindu majority but in employment Muslims are near zero. Hence low quality of education is the biggest problem of getting government jobs. Among urban males, proportion of workers with secondary education and above was 58 per cent each for Christians and Sikhs whereas for Hindu was 56 per cent and Muslims constituted only 30 per cent. Among Christians, about 62 persons of urban female workers were with secondary education and above. The corresponding proportions among Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims were 48 per cent, 39 per cent and

22 per cent, respectively. Between 1999-2000 and 2009-10, proportion of literates in the workforce had increased for both urban males and urban females.

**Low Socioeconomic Status:** The socioeconomic status of Muslims is very low according to the Sachar Committee report. It is somehow higher than SC and ST but far behind that of OBC (Sachar, 237). Muslim society is engaged in informal jobs which have no social status or economic security. Illiterate or uneducated parents are not able to give proper guidance to their children. The children get engaged in the profession of their parents and discontinue their studies. At the all India level, the average Monthly Per Capita Expenditure (MPCE) of Sikh households was highest among all religious communities, Rs. 1659 (Rs. 2180 in urban areas and Rs. 1498 in rural areas) while that of Muslim households was lowest, Rs. 980 (Rs. 1272 in urban areas and Rs. 833 in rural areas).

**Madrasa Education:** Madrasa education in India is quite famous all over the world. It started after coming of the Muslims in India. Nadwatul Ulama Lucknow, Jamiatul Ashrafia Mubarakpur, Darul Uloom Deoband, and Jamia Salafia Varanasi are world famous institutions of religious learning. Foreign students also get benefitted from these madrasas. India has a special place in its religious education all over the world. But on the contrary, Muslim youths graduating from madrasas are unskilled for employment and higher education, their degrees and certificates are not recognized by the boards. They are not able to get job in government sectors, because of the lack of skill and modern education. There is less than one percent who gets education in foreign institutions. Some graduates do the job of translators of Hindi, Urdu, Arabic and Persian. Remaining of them are compelled to do the job of *Imam* or teaching in madrasas in rupees 3000 to 5000. In Islam, offering prayers and leading in prayers are considered

good deeds. But persons doing good deeds are also in the need of some personal expenses which is quite impossible to carry on in this meagre amount. After getting in financial crisis and bad experiences they leave the teaching job or the job of *Imam* and get engaged in formal or informal business. Most of them are compelled to do informal jobs. Thus we find that madrasas are fulfilling religious needs but these are not able to fulfill economic and social needs of the community. There are only 1% or 2% people who get their social and economic needs fulfilled by this system but most of them are unemployed.

**Women Education:** Education of Muslim women is not only the problem of Muslims but it is the problem of the whole country. The literacy rate among Muslim women is 50.1% and among Hindu women is 53.1%. The literacy rate among Jain women is highest, it is 90.6%. There is 30% difference between the literacy rate of Muslim women and Jain women. Census says that Muslims women's educational level is lowest among all religious communities. Likewise, work participation rate of the Muslim women is far behind the national average. Their participation is 14.8% while national average is 25.6%. Muslim women's education has always been a problem. The question arises for how long will they not get education like their male counterparts? The Quran does not differentiate between the education of males and females. The first verse of the Quran is about acquiring knowledge. There is no difference between males and females. In a Hadith Prophet Muhammad says "getting education is compulsory on every men and women" Despite these teachings there is so much difference between the education of Muslim men and women. Can the Muslim community progress without educating their women? The answer is absolutely not, it cannot progress without women's education.

A woman is not only a woman; she is a mother, a sister and a wife. For all these roles her role of education is very

important. The mother is the first school of the child. Because the child is the closest to her mother, he also spends the most of his time with his mother, so an educated mother can change the perception of the child. The mother is the biggest source of the informal education. By seeing the bad condition of Muslim women's education, the quality of education of Muslim children can easily be judged.

## **CAUSES OF EDUCATIONAL BACKWARDNESS**

**General Awareness:** Due to poverty and low socio-economic status, Muslims are not aware of education and its importance. They see education only as a source of income, nothing more than that. The general awareness of the Muslim community toward education is a great problem. They are not aware of the government policies available for them. So they are also not able to get the benefit of these policies. In the age of information the community which is not active in the field of information, will be far behind in socio-economic development. Urban population of Muslims is much aware in comparison to the rural one but still its social participation is not up to the mark. The condition of the awareness among rural Muslims is quite pathetic as very few are aware of the scholarships and other programs. Because of this ignorance they are not able to get good guidance, and choose right path. Information technology plays important role in this but majority of them are not aware about it, and thus they lag behind.

**Modern Education:** Indian Muslims have two sources of education, modern education and madrasa education. Sometimes Muslims parents are not able to decide which type of education should be given to their children. Many parents do not ask children about their preferences and interests. They compel their children to do a course without keeping in mind the interests and abilities of the children. It is seen that

students from the madrasas start to flee from the madrasas after one or two years. The world outside the madrasa is very attractive to them. So the children compel their parents to allow them to pursue the non-madrasa education. In these processes a lot of energy is destroyed. They are not able to compete with other students, because of their poor background. In madrasas, the education of English, science and computer is negligible. Some positive changes can be seen in Madrasa education but the time has come for major structural changes.

**Low Socioeconomic Status:** The research on the topic shows that SES is very crucial in the education, personality development and academic achievement. If the parents are educated and employed and have good status in the society, then it is quite possible that the children will have high academic achievement. It is very common that the child will follow the profession of the father. Thus Muslims parents' lack of education is the biggest cause of Muslims students' lagging behind in the field of education. Even though exceptions are everywhere, there are many students from deprived families who gave their contributions. But in normal conditions parents' education is very effective in the achievements of the children.

**Girls' Education:** The lack of 'only for girls' schools is the main cause of the Muslims women's low education. The tradition of purdah is another cause for low education. The parents do not want to send their daughters to co-education schools. For higher education, the parents want to send their daughters to institutions where there is adequate arrangement of purdah. It is very easy for Muslim parents to send their daughters in institutions dominated by the Muslims and where it is easy to follow purdah tradition. But the problem starts where there are no minority institutions and only for girls schools. They have to take admission in institutions dominated by other religious groups, whose cultures and traditions are

quite different from Muslims. In that situation it is difficult for Muslim girls to follow their traditions. Sometimes the situations become tense when they are taunted by their schoolmates for their dress. They have to leave the institutions, and their education is discontinued. There are many madrasas devoted for Muslims girls but there are very few residential schools for Muslims girls. The lack of Islamic culture and traditions in schools is the greatest cause of the Muslims women's lack of education. The government is opening only for girls' schools such as *Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhyalaya* and Kanya Colleges. But without the involvement of the Muslim community in the field of women education, the condition cannot be changed much.

**The Distance of the Schools:** The distance of the schools from the home is another major cause. The boys somehow manage to go but for reasons such as security and means of transportation, girls are not able to go. The Sachar Committee report says that there is the lack of the schools in the Muslim dominated areas in comparison to the population as well as the area. The Muslims are not able to send their daughters to the schools which are quite far from their homes. There are the concerns for safety and the problem of purdah.

**The Poor Leadership:** It is fact that a good guardian will create a good family, if the politician is progressive then citizens will also be progressive; likewise it is said that if the leader of the community is on the right path then community will also be on the right track. When the country got freedom, first education minister was Maulana Azad who was a Muslim. He established UGC and IITs and laid down the structure of the higher education in India. But unfortunately Muslims in the country remained far behind other communities of India in the field of education. Muslims got progressive leaders like Dr. Zakir Hussain, A.P. J Abdul Kalam and Hamid Ansari, who



decorated all important posts in India except the post of the Prime Minister. Even then Muslim community failed in the field of education. The Muslim leaders gave contributions in the field of education but they could not help the Muslims solve their major educational problems.

At local and regional level, the condition of the leaders is pathetic. They get votes in the name of Muslims but do their own progress by showing the fear of security and majority. Apart from this different controversial fatwas creates problems in the education of Muslims. What to do and what not to do creates confusion. Different schools of thoughts are also important cause of concern. A sect promotes something which other sect oppose. It creates confusion among the masses. It is very difficult to decide which path of education is good and which is bad, where to go what to do, and which path will carry the community toward education.

The Muslims of India are used by all the political parties and are thrown after the election. The Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh promised to give 18% reservation to Muslims in its election manifesto. After getting majority in the government they forgot all about it. When Chief Minister was reminded of the promise, he answered that there is 50% ceiling on the reservation hence it is not possible. The question arises did he not know about the ceiling before the election? They knew about the laws but the fact is that they misguided the community for their selfish interest. They are not alone but all the political parties and leaders are doing repeatedly the same thing for their own interest. Many times central government and states governments took reasonable steps for the modernization of the madrasas. But co-called leaders without seeing the interest of the Muslim community threw themselves in protest. This is for their personal gains directly or indirectly.

**Security:** In India, social security is a very important issue. In present days there are some incidents which destroy the social

fabric. These incidents create fear in the mind of Muslims. An IT professional in Pune was killed only because he was Muslim and his dressing style was religious. On 5<sup>th</sup> March 2015 rape accused Syed Shareef Khan, after being taken out the jail, was killed by the mob. On 28<sup>th</sup> September 2015, Mohd Akhlaq was killed in Dadri, on the assumption of keeping beef . These extra-judicial killings and riots raise the question of security of the Muslims. In these situations of fear, parents are afraid of sending these children out side home which causes great deterioration in the quality and quantity of the education. Muslim parents are afraid of sending their children specially girls in non-Muslim dominated schools. They give importance to security over education. These situations compel the Muslims to stay uneducated.

## **SOLUTIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL BACKWARDNESS**

There are solutions for every problem. Some problems may take time. But all the problems will be solved if we do not lose patience. The educational problem of the Muslims is older than independence of India. It cannot be wiped out within minutes. It will take time, patience, resources and sacrifices.

**Government Policies:** Government policies are the most important aspects for the development of the country. The governments launched many policies keeping in mind backwardness of the Muslims. Educational schemes such as *Sarva Siksha Abhiyan*, Education for All and Mid-day meal is without any discrimination; Muslims are also getting the benefits of these schemes. In July 2004 *Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhyalayas* were started, these institutions have 75 % reservations for STs, SCs, minorities and OBCs. There are 544 schools in 81 Muslims concentrated districts. 71 special focused districts for minorities have more than 25 % enrolments.

In 15-Points Programs for different categories of students, the government brought different types of scholarships. It brought Pre-metric scholarships for schools, Post-metric for higher education and Merit-cum-Means for professional education and Maulana Azad National Fellowship for the research scholars. Apart from that there are some other provisions. *Padho Pradesh*, scheme for minority students who wish to go abroad for higher studies. It is a central sector scheme of interest subsidy on educational loan for meritorious students for overseas studies. For the healthcare of minority students in schools Maulana Azad Sehat scheme is launched by Ministry of Minority Affairs. The ministry also launched Nalanda Project for faculty development programs in minority colleges.

Equal Opportunity for All Commission ensures the justice and equal opportunities for Muslims and other minorities. National Minority Development and Finance Corporation, is for the economic empowerment of minorities. Above policies and programs are important for the educational development. But keeping in mind the gravity of the problems these measures are not enough. Government should take new measures such as Direct Benefit Transfer for educationally poor families. For the assessment of the socioeconomic conditions of the Muslims there should be setup of time bound committees on regular intervals like Sachar Committee. Introduction of Islamic banking can be very helpful. SC and ST status to the poor Muslims engaged in the same profession as Hindu SC and ST is also the need of hour.

**Modernization of Madrasas:** To improve the condition of Muslims' education, the modernization of the madrasa is very important. In fact for modernization of madrasas, the demand is made from time to time and some work is also done but in reality there is not much change. It would be better to modernize all the madrasas of the country. Then the students from the madrasas will get a lot of the opportunities in higher

education and employments. They will get modern education as well as religious education. They will go in the field of science, medicine, engineering and different fields of the education. And they will get the opportunities of government employments and will not work only in maktabas and madrasas. The modernization of Madrasas cannot be achieved without the affiliation of madrasas to boards and universities. Only some universities give admission to madrasa graduates but when the degrees will be affiliated to the boards and universities then there will be more opportunities of getting higher education and employment. The madrasas also need to follow 10+2+3 pattern for the recognition of their degrees.

**Community Development:** The problems of Muslims' education are immense. The government cannot take care of all the problems, therefore responsibility also lies on the Muslim community. The responsible people from the community should come forward and establish schools and colleges in their regions. They should establish the societies and trusts for the educational advancement of Muslims. They can collaborate with other NGOs and organizations working in the field. The Christians are a minority community in India but they are self-sufficient in the field of education, they are providing education to other communities of India as well. No one can improve the education of Muslims better than Muslims themselves. Women's education cannot be improved until and unless Muslim community will not establish minority girls' residential colleges all over the country.

## CONCLUSION

The educational backwardness of Muslims is the cause of concern for the Muslim community as well as for the whole country. It has its historical root when Muslims distanced themselves from modern education, intentionally, considering it

a product of colonizers. All the problems of educational backwardness of Muslims need to be dealt systemically. There is the need of utilization of the government policies available at national and state levels. These schemes also need sufficient funding from the governments. The Muslim community should also participate actively in the promotion of the educational advancement of Muslims.

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