Educational Status Muslim Women in India and Government Initiatives

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Introduction to Education:

The structure of education assists in shaping the outspoken and elegant personality of the millennial and shows the path of future existence with innovation yet sustainability. One of the unsurpassed endowments of the modern education process is the increased communication between the students and their teachers. Students now are more flexible and extrovert in speaking their doubts out demanding clarifications. Modern education is the amalgamation of writing, visualizing, imagining and thinking skills. The methodology applied is intercative in nature and is far more cerebral in comparison to the traditional form of education.[1]

Education is an unbiased, birth right of every individual irrespective of the gender they belong. The states that the power of education is eternal and pervasive as it empower us with the weapon of knowledge. The effort to attain education gives a boost of confidence and self-development that leads to the progress of the nation[2].

Education and technology go perfectly well together providing exciting opportunities to learn. Another grateful aspect of modern education system is its online presence. Online education enables the independence of learning irrespective of place and time. The present generation has got the maximum exposure to the best universities and its professors in the world, sitting at one place. The incessant source of knowledge about different disciplines makes contemporary education the best way of knowledge procurement. However, conventional education system also known as the Gurukul system of education encouraged students and their mentor to avail knowledge by distancing themselves from the normal world. The teacher known as the Guru was the only spring of enlightenment and the students or the Shishya would repay the kindness by helping them in their routine chores[3].

Internet has been a boon in reducing the tiring paper work and physical presence in group assignments. With advancement in technology, assignments can be submitted online from anywhere, individually. Classrooms which facilitates the use of projectors, speakers and

internet widens the scope of learning as audio and attractive visuals stimulates our senses even more and helps the students to grasp it in an easy manner. The additional trainings like skill-development and vocational training has helped in developing the personality of an individual to a great extent. These courses aid a person to flourish as a mass influencer[4].

Status of Muslim women in India

India is a land of diversities. The diversities can be seen in its culture, language, religion and ethnicity. Based on these variations there are several groups in India. Along with various other factors which the diversity effects, the type and level of education also differs among the different groups. Moreover these diversities bridge a gap between different cultures. Education is very much important to bring all the cultures together. The objective of the Indian constitution it is to bring all the cultures at the same level bridging the gap between them. It aims at empowering the society as a whole and equalizing the status among all its citizens. In view of this aim several articles have been made by the constitution. Further the Government of India has started different policies programmes and schemes to fulfill its aim of equalization. As recognized by the National Minority Commission the minority religious groups namely Muslims, Christians, Buddhist and Jains constitute 18% of the total population of our country. As per the census 2001, among these, Muslims are the largest minority and constitute around 13.4% of the total population. However, the literacy rate of Muslims is the lowest amongst all religious minorities.During the British Rule the literacy of Muslim women rapidly declined. There was limited schooling available to the young girls. The Mugal Princesses were though educated[5].

Ever since then the retardation in the education of Muslim minorities have been an area of utmost concern and captivated many researchers towards it. Many studies have been conducted and the major factors reported are as under:

- The factors that determine socio-economic status
- Issues related to 'Gender'
- Lack of female teaching staff
- Teaching methodology and procedure in school
- Dropout of students and

- Execution of various prgorammes and stipulated policies.

In India Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal constitute above 50% of the total population of Muslims. Muslims do not have a majority in any other states or union territories except Jammu and Kashmir and Lakshadweep. In the states such as Haryana, MP, Orissa, Punjab and Tamil Nadu the population of 'Muslims' is around 5% for even less. As observed a large proportion of Muslims usually live in urban areas. As per the Anthropological survey there are around 350 regional or ethno-linguistic Muslim groups in India[6]. Shia and Sunni are the two major denominations of Islam. The majority of Muslims in India are Sunni and they reside mostly in Northern part of India. The Shia Muslims are in minority amounting to around 10-15% of Muslim population. The culture varies amongst different Muslim communities as well. Over the centuries, the diversity can be seen in habits, attitudes, languages, tradition and spread of Islam. As a result many Muslim laws and customary practices have been made within Muslim communities in India.

If we compare different dimensions like economy, education, employment etc. the overall condition of Muslims is not so good in India. The report presented by the Sachar Committee in 2006 shows that the Muslims stand far behind as compared to other communities. A reference to this report would help in facing the case related to Indian Muslims. For quite some time, the literacy rate in India has been calculated to be around 70%. However, the literacy rate of Muslims is found to be around 60%. Many students drop out in between before the high school level and as such the literacy rate falls down further. If we compare the data of general students above 17 years completing matriculation, the percentage comes to 26%. In contrast, the figure is just 17% for Muslim students. The National female literacy rate is calculated to be 53.2%. However the figure for Muslim female literacy rate is even lower at 50.1%. In case of Muslim males the figure is of 67.6%. In many southern states the literacy rates are even higher than the National literacy rates. But in northern and eastern states the percentage is quite lower as compared to all India literacy rates. It is quite difficult to forecast the reason for these differences.Even after completing 50 years of independence the Muslim women have to encounter many challenges as Indian citizens. In 2004, L.K.Mishra reported that the Muslims account to 13.4% of India's total population and is the largest minority religious group. India rank 2[nd]in Muslim population and stands just after Indonesia.

The position and level of women in a country provides the basis to judge the nation's progress. The status of women is closely related to the cultural levels of the society. Thus, it becomes crucial to get an insight of the various roles played by the women in the various fields of the society including socio-economic, cultural, religious and political. Only then the status of Muslim women in the society can be understood. It is very essential to perceive the complex characters played by them from birth till death, the difficult situations they face on a daily basis and how they cope up with the circumstances. Apart from quality education the denial to property rights and negation of certain occupations attributes to the inferior position of women in the society. With globalization and industrialization stepping in the economy, the scenario has changed for Muslim women. Education became a necessity for many modern roles. It awakened the Muslim women about their self-respect and further motivated them to fight for their rights.

Government initiatives

Soon after Independence, several committees and commissions were set up by the Government of India to solve the issue of children education. Various plans and strategies were composed in order to foster and accentuate education for all children. Concerning education of Minorities, some important suggestions are discussed as below:

Education Commission Report (1964-1966) contemplate: "a society that values social justice and is anxious to improve the lot of the common men and cultivate all available talent; must ensure progressive equality of opportunity to all sections of the population. This is the only guarantee for building up of an egalitarian and human society in which the exploitation of the weak will be minimized"[7].

The National Policy on Education (1968)[8] – "Every effort should be made not only to protect the rights of minorities but to promote their educational interests as suggested in the statement issued by the Conference of the Chief Ministers of States and CentralMinistries held in Aug. 1961."

The National Policy on Education 1979 states "The Government is aware of the valuable contribution of the country's composite culture that can be made by institutions run by religious and linguistic minorities and recognize and uphold their right to establish such

educational institutions of their choice and administer them in accordance with law, in order that the goal of an integrated Indian Community is achieved[9]."

The main aim of the policy is to promote education in and execute the relevant strategies so that the education of backward classes and communities can be ensured:

NPE is a policy formulated by the Indian Government in order to promote education for everyone. It was promulgated in 1986 and further revised in 1992. The Programme of Action (POA) under this foresees education to the educationally backward minorities in order to have equality and justice in society. The NPE states

The 1981 literacy Census shows that in many districts the general literacy rate is significantly low and it is even lower in case of females. It was also noted that maximum number of these districts had considerable Muslim population. Even in states like Kerala which are educationally forward, the districts having dominant Muslim population have a low literacy rate and are educationally backward. The POA of 1986 recognized 41 such districts which had significant Muslim population and were educationally backward. It explained the strategic measures along with the continuing programmes of the Education Department which focused on the education of kids of minority groups specially girls.

- 10 community polytechnics were set up in areas with maximum minority population in order to impart technical skills to them
- NCERT undertook the programme to evaluate the textbooks in order to establish national integration
- NCERT took the responsibility of organizing training and orientation programmes for the principals, managers and teachers of institutions of minority classes in different stages
- In order to provide coaching classes to educationally backward minorities and assistance to the colleges and universities University Grants Commission's (UGC) was started

For the betterment of the minority classes, the POA 1986 set the following 4 targets in the remaining span of the Eight Five Year Plan (1986-87 to 1989-90):

- It planned to set up resource centres at Aligarh Muslim University, Jamia Millia Islamia, Kashmir University, Marathwada University
- It aimed at setting up of Osmania University at Hyderabad for providing training and guidance to minority educational institutions
- It planned to open 5 more Community Polytechnics in the Seventh Five Year Plan period
- It aimed to set up Early Childhood Education Centers in the areas having maximum population of educationally backward minorities.

Several action plans were incorporated for the Primary, Middle, Higher Secondary, Vocational and Technical Education.

The economic and social transformation is only possible when education is given prime importance in the society. The literacy rate among Muslim population is the least among all minorities (Table 1.1). It has also been noticed that the educated Muslims accept modern education and send encourage girls for proper schooling.

Table 1.1 Literacy Percentage of Minorities

Communities	Percentage of population	Percentage of literacy
Muslims	12.4	59.1
Christians	2.3	80.3
Sikhs	1.9	69.4
Buddhists	0.8	72.7
Zoroastrians (Parsis)	0.007	97.9

Source: Census Report 2001

Table 1.1 portrays the Literacy percentage of minorities, it may be observed from the report that Muslims have the least literacy rate viz. 59.1% followed by Sikhs with 69.4. The highest literacy rate is enjoyed by Parsis 97.9%).

The Government of India has initiated a large number of schemes under the "National Monitoring Committee for Minorities' Education (NMCME)". These schemes are related to the implementation of schemes aimed at minorities with respect to their educational requirements from time to time specially in the regions where the literacy rate is high. The schemes will also find the requirements of education for minorities, district wise. The schemes specifically focus on girls' education. There is also a provision promotion of 'Urdu' language in the schemes as well as enhancing the compatibility amongst the minorities with promotional of English language knowledge.

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