

## Muslim Women Education in India- A Voyage from Past to Present: A Review

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### Abstract

India is a country of diversities inhabited by various ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious groups. The National Commission for Minorities in India has identified Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Parsees which constitute 18.8% of the total population of the country as religious minorities, while Hindus are the majority group. Among these various minorities, Muslims occupy an important position in Indian society. The 2009 CIA World Fact Book data put the Muslim population in India at 156,254,615. Muslims are found all over India, but they are largely concentrated in 12 states where the Muslim population is more than 10% of the state population.

Education is an indispensable means for helping the Muslim women out of their economic misery because economic dependency is the major factor contributing to the low status of Muslim women. After independence women's education made considerable progress in India. The number of girls schools and colleges increased. Muslim girls going to schools and colleges also increased slowly but steadily. Muslim parents are becoming anxious to educate their daughters along with their sons. Village girls are going to schools while in towns many of them are seeking higher education. Still Muslim women are changing very gradually, some times, the change is painful slow. Because for a long time Muslim women have remained secluded and have lived the life of submission, so most of them dislike the idea of change. But studies done in the field of Muslim women revealed that the lack of good quality schools and hostel facilities for girls, poor quality of teacher are believed to be some of the important factors responsible for the low level of educational attainment among Muslims. But it is worthwhile to say that Muslim women has a strong desire and enthusiasm for education, but hurdles like low access to schools in the vicinity, poverty, financial constraints and discrimination faced at school prevent them from continuing education. These all demand a thorough discussion among policy makers, academician and community leaders.

This paper highlights progress of education of Muslim women in education since independence along with the suggestions to empower them through education.

India is a country of diversities inhabited by various ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious groups. The National Commission for Minorities in India has identified Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Parsees which constitute 18.8% of the total population of the country as religious minorities, while Hindus are the majority group. Among these various minorities, Muslims occupy an important position in Indian society. The 2009 CIA World Fact Book data put the Muslim population in India at 156,254,615. Muslims are found all over India, but they are largely concentrated in 12 states where the Muslim population is more than 10% of the state population. Accordingly, the Indian Constitution promises 'equality of opportunity' and 'education for all'. In addition, Article 29 of the Constitution grants the minorities the right to conserve their language, script, and culture. Article 30.1, states that the religious minorities have "the right to establish and administer Educational institutions of their choice". Article 350 (B) directs the State to safeguard the linguistic interests. In India, for historical and sociological reasons, certain sections of

the population are lagging behind in the educational field-this includes some religious minorities and marginalised groups defined on the basis of castes and of their belonging to various tribes. While the situation of the latter groups, named in India Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes, has been widely documented (Chatterjee 2000). The NPE 1986 also endorsed it, after which concerted efforts were made to spread education among these left out groups. The educational and economic development of this section of the population and bringing them in mainstream education are crucial for achieving major national goals. In 2006, a 'Prime Minister's High level Committee' was set up on the social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community of India under the chairmanship of Justice Rajindar Sachar, known as the Sachar Committee Report (2006), it confirmed that by most development indicators, the Muslim community is lagging behind other religious groups of India. In urban areas, the community mostly lives in slums characterised by poor municipal infrastructure. As we know, literacy is the first step in learning and knowledge building, and therefore, an essential indicator of human development. The report especially confirms that Muslims are lagging behind in literacy. According to Census 2001, the Muslim literacy rate is 59.13% and is found to be lower than that for Hindus, 65.09%, the majority religious group. There are states like Jharkhand, Karnataka and Maharashtra in which literacy rates among Muslims are higher than other states. This makes it evident that state-level educational policies and initiatives can lead to an elevation of Muslim education.

It is true that the best way to judge a nation's progress is to find out the status of women there. There is strong correlation between status of women and cultural levels of society. Therefore, to know the status of Muslim women in society it becomes essential to study complexity of roles which women perform in society in the socio-economic, cultural, religious and political fields. It is also important to find such factors as how they face the problems and situation that are concerned with their roles from birth to death and how they adjust themselves to those role situations. The inferior status of women in societies also coincided with the denial of property rights and education, as well as denial of certain occupations to them. But globalization, and industrialization has changed the picture of Muslim women. Education became a pre-requisite for playing many of the modern roles. In turn education also awakened Muslim women to a sense of their own self-importance and this encouraged them to assert many of the lights which were denied to them.

Historically, women played an important role in the foundation of many Islamic educational institutions, such as Fatima al-Fihri's founding of the University of Al Karaouine in 859 CE. This continued through to the Ayyubid dynasty in the 12th and 13th centuries, when 160 mosques and madrasahs were established in Damascus, 26 of which were funded by women through the Waqf (charitable trust or trust law) system. Half of all the royal patrons for these institutions were also women. According to the Sunni scholar Ibn Asakir in the 12th century, there were various opportunities for female education in what is known as the medieval Islamic world. He writes that women could study, earn ijazahs (academic degrees), and qualify as scholars (ulamā') and teachers. This was especially the case for learned and scholarly families, who wanted to ensure the highest possible education for both their sons and daughters. Ibn Asakir had himself studied under 80 different female teachers in his time. In nineteenth-century West Africa, Nana Asma'u was a leading Islamic scholar, poet, teacher and an exceptionally prolific Muslim female writer who wrote more than 60 works. Female education in the Islamic world was inspired by Muhammad's wives: Khadijah, a successful businesswoman, and Aisha, a renowned

hadith scholar and military leader. The education allowed was often restricted to religious instruction. According to a hadith attributed to Muhammad, he praised the women of Medina because of their desire for religious knowledge.

### **Before Independence**

- At the start of 19th century the indigenous system of learning was very popular. However the educational facilities for women in the indigenous system of learning (Pathshalas, Maktabas and Madarsas) were virtually non-existent as per the available literature.
- Among upper class Muslim families girls were taught only to read the Quran in Arabic and incidentally to read Urdu and Persian.
- Many parents disallowed their daughters to go to schools as this was considered violation of the Islamic rules.
- The struggle for formal education of Muslim women began at the end of nineteenth century. Sir Maulana Hali and Sheikh Abdullah took the lead to fight of the causes of education for Muslim Women.
- 1894 – Sir Maulana Hali started a small primary school for the daughters of his family and friends in Panipat. Unfortunately this school had to close down due to non-availability of female teachers for the school.
- 1896- a revolution was placed by Khwaja Ghulam-us-Salam in annual session of Muslim Education Conference for giving some attention to the education of Muslim women. A women's bench was set up and Murtaza Ali was appointed as secretary of this bench.
- 1902 – Sheikh Abdullah became the Secretary of the women's bench at the annual session of the Muslim Education Conference in Delhi. At that point of time the general perception of the leading personalities was that there should be a normal school for training of women teachers so that they can teach Muslim girls of high class families in their homes. Sir Sheikh Abdullah did not agree with the view because his perception was that there had to be a sufficient number of middle passed Muslim girls first and then only they could be trained as teachers.
- 1903 – Sultan Jahan, the Begum of Bhopal was the first woman in the Indian History who believed in the emancipation of women through education. She started the first school for Muslim girls in 1903, the Sultania schools. There were 140 girls below 10 years of age in the school in the very first year. The complete transport arrangements were made to bring girls to school and back to home. Urdu, English, Arithmetic, Geography and Domestic Economics were the subjects taught there. However, emphasis was mere on religious education.
- 1904 – Sheikh Abdullah started bringing out a monthly magazine 'Khatoun', to popularize the idea of a school for Muslim girls in Aligarh. The Begum of Bhopal, Sultan Jahan immediately started giving regular grants to the girl's school in Aligarh.
- 1906 – Fortunately, a resolution was passed in the annual Muslim Education Conference session at Lucknow to establish a girl's school in Aligarh and the school was opened in 1906. In the beginning there was only 6 girls in the school.
- 1911 – Sakhawat Memorial Girls High School started in Bengal by Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain.
- 1912 – Maulana Karamat Hussain and the Raja of Mahmudabad also supported for girl's education and started a girl's school in Lucknow in 1912. The British Government adopted a liberal policy for promoting girl's education. A number of schemes were started. The period after 1912 was charged with national awakening among the people as a result of the steering of the struggle for freedom by the Indian leaders, who realized that women's participation was important for social progress.

There were some notable leaders including Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Annie Besant and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan who advocated education for women, removal of their social disabilities and restoration of their legal and social rights. As modern education became a torch light for them, they came out of the four walls of the homes and took active part in various social activities. As mentioned by Seema Kazi in her MRG International Report in the late 19th century only 0.97% of Hindu girls and 0.86% of Muslim girls were attending recognized schools, and no Hindu or Muslim girls had passed the matriculation examination in either Bombay or Madras. Seema Kazi said in her report during the period of 1916-26 the number of Muslim girls school and their enrolment increased. A registered charity, federation was founded in 1933 to give advice on training and employment to girls and women. It is noticeable that before independence Hindu freely joined Muslim institutions and Muslim learnt Sanskrit. Historically, Muslims adopted the Western system of education at a later stage than Hindus. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-96) was the first to recognize this contrast between the two religions. In 1875 Sir Syed Ahmad Khan founded the Mohammedan Anglo Oriental (MAO) College at Aligarh. The founding of this college was a real turning in the educational history of Muslims. It was this college that after 1920 emerged as a prominent university of India known as Aligarh Muslim University.

#### **After Independence**

Following committee and commissions were setup after independence: 1. University Education Commission (1948-49) 2. Second Education Commission (1952-53) 3. National Committee on Women Education (1958-59) 4. Smt. Hansa Mehta Committee (1961-62) 5. Bhaktavasalam Committee (1963) 6. Kothari Education Commission (1964-66) 7. National Policy on Education (1979) 8. National Policy of Education (1986) 9. The National Perspective plan on women (1988) All the commission and committees emphasized the problem of women in general but not specifically for Muslim women. Muslim women today are different from yesterday in all spheres of life. They are coming out of their purdha and are sharing greater responsibilities in National reconstruction. Development of Muslim women is intrinsically linked with socio-cultural and economic heterogeneity in India. Hence, a region wise analysis of Muslim women's participation in education is of prime importance. Women are indeed moving forward with the passage of time breaking barriers to various spheres of life. However, the pace of moving varies from region to region. Education is a significant component as well as facilitator of development of Muslim women. As reported in The Times of India, New Delhi, dated 18th Oct. 2011 the Union Minority Affairs Ministry has enhanced the pre-matric (class X) and post-matric (class XII) scholarships for minority students in U.P. in the financial year 2011-12. As per the revised target, 5,73,086 pre-matric scholarships will be distributed to minorities – 5.51 lakh for Muslims, 3,740 Christians, 12,240 Sikhs, 5,440 Buddhists and 15 Parsis. Earlier, the target was 4.55 lakh. For this, Rs. 99.60 crore has been allocated for UP in 2011-12 in comparison to Rs. 63.32 crore in 2010-11. Further, the target of the post-matric scholarships has been fixed at 5.25 lakh for 2011-12. The total budget allocated for it in the current financial year is Rs. 450 crore. UP has been allocated 88,491 scholarships. Total amount released for the state till September 30 was Rs. 33.60 crore. Last year, the target set for UP was 67,422 scholarships. UP has got maximum share as against other states. The efforts of the Central and state governments may appear big but ground reality is differential. As per the Sachar Committee report, in UP total enrolment rate of children in 6-14 years age group in primary schools is 82.2%. While the enrolment rate of Scheduled

Castes/Tribes children is 80.2%, for the other backward classes it is 85.9%, and for upper castes 93.5%. But, for Muslims, it is the lowest – 69.4%. The average schooling years of Muslim children in 6-14 years age group is also lowest. While average of entire population is 3.43 years, for scheduled castes/tribes it is 3.09 years, for others 3.85 years and for Muslims only 2.6 years. Muslims comprise around 18% of UP's population (20 crore), which comes out to be around 3.6 crore, of which 30% (1.2 crore) are below 14 years. Of these, around 84 lakh are enrolled in schools. And, more than 90% dropout after class V. Hence, the benefit never reaches the target group. Quoting the above figures, Prof. Mohammad Muzammil, economics department, Lucknow University, said the scholarships can bring good results provided it reaches the target group.

### **Islam and Education:-**

Muslim women have played an important and historic role as scholars and leaders in education. For instance, the princess Fatima Al-Fihri established the first degree-granting university in the world, University of Al Karaouine, in Morocco in 859 CE. And during the Ayyubid dynasty, the regent queen Dafiya Khatun built numerous khanqas (Sufi convents) and madrasas (theological colleges) in Damascus and Aleppo. Those involved in the education of the Muslim girl child have not been able to reach any consensus on the sort of education to be given to the Muslim girl child and ambivalences persist about the merits of Deeni Taalim vs Duniyawi Taleem. Meanwhile, there is a growing hunger for education among Muslim girls and women that can no longer be ignored. Several initiatives have been taken by women themselves when they feel the State or patriarchal society is not giving them their due. The Minorities Vikas Manch in Jaipur is doing great work to raise Muslim women's literacy levels in Rajasthan. Elsewhere, private educational institutions have stepped in providing both secular and religious education. Often women have come forward to set up coaching schools to redress the high dropout rate among school-going girls. The states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, to some extent Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, have more successful stories to tell largely due to overall higher literacy rates and greater persistence on the part of NGOs. Established in 1966, the Anwar ul-Ulum Women's Arabic College in the village of Mongam near Calicut, is one such institution that provides a blend of modern and Islamic education. Lok Jumbish (People's Movement), an NGO specializing in education, has done excellent work among the Meos in Haryana who have almost 90% illiteracy among their women. Lok Jumbish found a simple but workable solution to the steadfast refusal among Meo fathers to send their girls to school. It offered Urdu as a medium of education. The link between poverty and illiteracy among Muslim women can not be over-emphasised.

Regardless of whether illiteracy is a consequence of poverty or vice versa, regardless of the debates between the 'modernists' and the 'traditionalist', regardless of the merits of an English-medium western-style education and an Urdu-medium traditional education, what Muslim women want today is some form of knowledge that empowers them to better their lot. At the Ibtida school, one can actually find a student whose mother begs on the streets of

Nizamuddin! Likewise, the feeder schools of the Jamia Millia Islamia cater to the disadvantaged sections, to those living in the urban ghettos of Jamia Nagar, Shaheen Bagh, Batla House, etc. and manage to attract – and retain – enough girl students right uptill middle and senior school because of its location. The morning shift school is Urdu-medium till the VIII standard and English-medium thereafter and has been showing consistently good results for both the Xth and XIIth Board examinations.

Those students who make the ‘switch’ from Urdu-medium to English manage to do well due to better teaching aids, better textbooks and most of all enough Urdu-medium teachers – a combination that is found to be lacking in most government-run Urdu schools. The government’s much-hyped madrasa-modernisation scheme or catchy slogans such as ‘Education for All’ will amount to little if the so-called incentives fail to meet ground realities. The quality of education is just as important. It has been seen that after the first few years of the primary education afforded to the Muslim girl child, one of two things usually happens. Either the girl is plucked out of formal education by the time she reaches puberty and for all practical purposes lapses into virtual illiteracy, or, if she continues in school and does climb up the education ladder, with every rung, the quality of education available to her is so inferior that it equips her for very little. The quality of education in some Urdu-medium schools as also the calibre of teachers in such schools is so inadequate that the girls who do come out from such institutions – many privately run, others with dubious affiliations from quasi-religious bodies – cannot cope in a competitive environment. The famous saying, "Educate a man and you educate an individual, educate a woman and you educate a family", applies very well in the Indian context more so in the context of Muslim women, a large section of whom have been denied education for a variety of reasons, each rooted in either government apathy or poor understanding of the religion. Historically, while there has always been a gap between the education of boys and girls in India in the case of Muslims, the gap has been a yawning chasm. The education of girls has always demanded higher investment in terms of more facilities, more women teachers, separate schools, transport and scholarships to provide the much-needed incentives. Despite pressures of religious orthodoxies, social prejudice and class/gender bias, Muslim women at the start of the twentieth century successfully emerged from the isolation of traditional roles as self-aware individuals, determined to claim a greater role in public affairs. The theme of women’s education was taken up by all communities including Muslims.

#### **Problems faced by Muslim Women to attain Higher Education-**

1. India is a land of diversity with different linguistic, ethnic, religious, groups and has a unique feature of ‘unity in diversity’. Indian culture is distinct and each ethnic group has the liberty to maintain their religious identity. Among the different religious groups in India Muslims constitute the largest minority group i.e. 13% of the India’s total population.
2. Muslim society of India is very heterogeneous in nature because of the influence of caste system, which has led to Indianisation of Islam. Indian Muslims are facing various socio-economic problems in today’s age, which has to be understood in terms of their educational background.
3. To emphasise through this discussion the problem of the educational backwardness of Muslim women. There are various reasons for Muslim women being educationally backward which include economic, social and cultural causes.
4. In general, women are the most vulnerable section of our Indian society due to its patriarchal nature. Muslim women suffer more because of the patriarchal nature of Islam and are not given enough freedom and hardly have access to higher education, though even the primary level education is not easily accessible to them.
5. In the walled city of Delhi, the sad plight which is not highlighted is the fact in Urdu medium schools, buildings are in a dilapidated condition and without basic infrastructure like drinking water. Students sit on mats whether its summers or winters, toilets are in a bad condition or are unavailable, and the behaviour of the teachers towards their wards is very bad. The girl child is abused by the female

teachers who force them to perform their household chores. They come to school, take the attendance and then go to perform the household work. This is exploitation in the name of imparting education.

6. They have more emphasis on Quranic education which is given at home to the girls and thus they are discouraged to go outside the home in the name of education.

7. Match fixing within the kinship creates distraction among young girls and they lose the zeal to achieve something through education and thus they themselves do not have academic interest. If at all they are fortunate enough to go to a good school, they are often discouraged to go for higher education, especially overseas. The most important reason is that there is difficulty in finding educated groom if the girl becomes highly educated. The problem is even more severe if the girl has studied overseas therefore. There is often misconception regarding the “purity” of girls if they have studied in Universities, or have traveled abroad.

8. Women are conditioned to such an exploitative situation in their lives and accept the laws passed by religious leaders. The only solution to liberate them from the shackles of ignorance, illiteracy, exploitation is through education.

### **SUGGESTIONS**

Following are the main suggestions for education of Muslim women-

#### **(i) Eradicating ill-traditions:**

To remove backwardness of the country, to control population rise, child care, to become independent, to avoid exploitation of women, education is necessary. Purdah in narrow sense, negative attitude of parents towards education of women. Stereotype mentality of parents and members of the society.

#### **(ii) Making girls more confident:**

- If Muslim women create willpower or determination they can reach to a peak of elevation. Determination is an element without which no person can succeed in any venture. Therefore, girls should develop will power to the fullest extent.

- Due to the influence of ancient traditions and practices in Hindu as well as Muslim societies especially in remote areas women lose courage from the childhood and become dependant on man. Parents discourage their female children. Therefore, the Muslim women of the day need to develop their capabilities and making them more confident.

- Adaptability is an important quality of Muslim women. The Muslim women should have the quality of adaptability in the environment. If a woman is adaptable to the situation she will be true Social worker. Thus adaptability helps encouragement and make Muslim women successful.

#### **(iii) Providing Vocational and Technical/professional educations:**

- Muslim women should be provided professional technical education.

- Computer skills should be taught to girls students

because it is the need of this fast changing world.

- For girls, coaching centers, career guidance and library facilities should be made available.

- Further research studies are required for meaningful domestic education, practical home science training and theoretical syllabus.

#### **(iv) Government Actions:**

- Provisions should be made for providing Muslim Women free and compulsory education for their upliftment.

- Government should implement certain programmes in rural and urban areas for providing women educational.

- Government should provide appropriate transport facility so that the women feel secure.
- 'Right of employment' should be declared as fundamental rights for Muslim Women.

**(v) Reservation:**

- Provisions should be made by the government for the reservation of employment for educated Muslim women.
- Reservation should be made for Muslim Women in the appointment of teachers in women's colleges and co-educational institutions.
- Reservations should be made for Muslim Women by the government in professional and technical institutions.

**CONCLUSION**

To sum-up we would like to say that Indian Muslims women are far behind in achieving the literacy status because of their economic conditions, no availability of schools, more drop-outs, less likely to survive educationally, lack of resources in the available schools and lack of interest in education, lack of honest leadership in the community. Taking into consideration the above discussion on education, it can be concluded that Muslim women at the prevailing circumstances should demand for special facilities for them to get education.

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