

Educational Status of Muslim Women in India in context of Empowerment

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Abstract

Education is a milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. The significance of education in reference to women empowerment cannot be ignored. It is an economical empowerment tool for the girl child. India is determining to become superpower, a developed country by 2020. This can become reality only when the women of this nation become empowered.

Muslims account for 14.13% of the total population of India including 9% of women population. Muslim girls and women lag behind their male counterparts. The majority of Muslim women are among the most disadvantaged, least literate, most economically impoverished and politically marginalized section of Indian society.

A complex web of circumstances makes the education of Muslim girls a hard job. These include conservatism, a general mistrust of Western-style education and a tendency to regard education for girls not entirely necessary. The state of the Muslim girl child is such that no single institution – be it government or private – can bring about lasting change.

But the conditions today represent a better scenario. Today, many educated Muslim women have come forward in the country to fight against the gender discrimination in the community. Human rights groups in general and those among the Muslims in particular have started examining the status of Muslim women and fighting for to put an end to gender discrimination. A sprinkle of high-profile Muslim women judges, academics, ministers, sportspersons is not enough.

This article is designed keeping vital factors in mind that affect Muslim women's education and their empowerment. Regardless of the debates between the 'modernists' and the 'traditionalist', what Muslim women want today is some form of knowledge that empowers them to better their lot. In the present article an attempt has been made to analyze the educational status of women Muslim in particular in the country. So that proper steps can be taken by the Government to improve their condition or the condition of whole society.

Key Terms: 1. Women Empowerment 2. Education Muslim Girls 4.Minority Education 5. Muslim Women Status and Education 6.Higher Education

Introduction

Women and girls have been victims of ruthless power struggles for centuries in all societies and cultures around the world. Sadly, but truly, many societies including some Muslim societies continue to exercise this patriarchy in different forms such as the denial to education, unequal salaries compared to men in workplaces, forced marriages and prostitution, among many others.

Muslim constitute the second largest religion and thus the largest minority. They account for 14.13% of the total population of India including 9% of women population. Muslim girls and women lag behind their male counterparts. The majority of Muslim women are among the most disadvantaged, least literate, most economically impoverished and politically marginalized section of Indian society. Women must have equal roles to play for the progress of the society but gender inequality is still a prominent phenomenon. It is a well-known fact that the change is the law of nature so is the nature of human being. Similarly, on the subject of development and change the Muslim women cannot be ignored. It is generally believed that Indian Muslim has failed to cope up with the change that is taking place in Indian society at large. Education has been regarded as a significant instrument for changing women's position in society. It not only develops the personality and capabilities of individuals, but also qualifies them to fulfill certain economic, political and cultural functions.

Minority-majority status does not really determine equitable access to education. Poverty and patriarchy pin women down more so. No religion grants full equality to women and it is the male clergy that lays down prescriptions and proscriptions, the Dos and the Don'ts for women of every group. Lives of women continue to be limited by the Personal laws that govern the private space of Indian family and actual and expected roles and norms for women in the under-life structures. Women. It is very discouraging that over the last two centuries or so the Muslims are lagging behind in the field of education as compared to other communities in India. Traditional outlook of the Muslims is, no doubt, one of the major reasons for their educational backwardness.

The orthodox section of the community creates hindrance in women's entry into educational institutions. Besides, the Purdah system, practice of early marriage, low level of aspiration and above all poverty hinder the growth of female education. Higher education makes avenue for socio-cultural and economic development as well as community empowerment. The Muslim community cannot be socially, economically and culturally developed and empowered if their female counterparts lag behind.

Status of Muslim Women in Higher Education

India is a democratic country and Indian constitution mandated equal rights for every citizen. The Rights to Education Act 2009 mandated Education for All for Children belonging to age group 6-14 which got success in increasing the gross enrolment ratio (GER) in primary and upper primary education. But still the gross enrolment ratio in higher education remain far behind. As per National Sample Survey Organisation more than 25% of Muslim children in 6-14 years age group had never attended schools or were dropouts. The rate of enrolment in case of women is poorer than their counter part. But if we analyze the gross enrolment of Muslim women in higher education we can see the condition is even more detrimental than women from different communities in India. At present, education is regarded as one of the most essential instrument for the advancement of society. Desai stated that, the significance

of education in modern societies cannot be overestimated. The literate and educated people are prerequisite both for maintenance and advancement of developing societies. The crucial need of education for the people in various spheres of modern social life –economic, political, social, ethical and others has been unanimously recognized. (Desai 1978,p.65). Education is a tool for overall development. Education plays an active role in educating women's position and promoting their rights in society. With the spread of education among women, exploitation and oppression of women will be considerably reduced. Though Constitution mandated the right to education at primary level (I-VIII) to all children belonging to age group 6-14, still, over six decades have passed after independence, less than 50% Muslim women are Literate in India while the rate is higher among the women from other minority communities- 76% literacy among Christians, 64% among Sikhs, 62% among Buddhists and 90% among Jain women. The representation of Muslim women in higher education is more discouraging. The proportion of Muslim women in higher education is a mere 3.56%, lower than even that of the Scheduled Castes (4.25%) .

Problems of Muslim Women in Access to Higher Education

Education of women is of paramount importance for the development of individuality. Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular generally lag behind in most of the spheres of life in India. The causes are multi-faceted Muslim women are the worst victims of the patriarchal Islamic society and are not given enough freedom and hardly have access to higher education. Even they cannot access the primary education easily. Madarsas teach mostly Islamic faith and do not provide secular education. They emphasize more on Quranic education given at home to the girls and to allow them to go outside the home in the name of education. The system of match fixation within kinship is also responsible for distracting the young girls and to loose interest in achieving something through education.

The parents are not interested in having their girls highly educated as it is very difficult to find educated groom If their girls are highly educated. The orthodox attitude of the Muslim community creates some misconceptions regarding the purity of girls if they have studied in universities or have travelled abroad. Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) in India pointed out, the most tragic thing is that Muslim women have accepted this happily, internalizing the kinds of roles their men want them to live with. They are told that this is what they are created for and that for this they should be happy. Moreover, lack of infrastructure and facilities, transportation problem, distance from home and non-availability of hostels and above all poverty also hinder the growth in participation of Muslim women in higher education.

Muslim Women and Empowerment

Empowerment is the process of gaining control over self, over ideology and the resources which determine power and it is exercised through a series of order or decision making capacity. Empowerment as a concept was introduced at the International Women's conference at Nairobi in 1985. The

empowerment of women has become one of the most important and modern phenomenon of 21st century not only at National level but also at the International level. Empowerment is a process, by which women gain greater control over material and intellectual resources which assist them to increase their self-reliance and enhance them to assert their independent right. Women's education and empowerment is not only essential to economic development, but it also has a transformative effect on the goals of both economic and social development. Empowerment of women implies process by which women power of self-realisation is promoted and reinforced. They develop the capacity for self-reliance cut crossing the relationship subordination on account of gender, social, economic status and the role in the family and society. It encompasses the ability to make choices control resources and enjoy participatory relationship within family and community.

Empowerment also encourage their ability to lead social movements in removing the obstacles in their progress, in a proper way through different organised sector. Women's empowerment is closely connected with women's education. It is not possible for a women to acquire freedom without economic self-sufficiency. This self-sufficiency depends on education. But Muslim girls remain deprived of education owing strict pardah system. They are not free to take education as general woman. Religious orthodoxy is very common feature for Muslim community. The inherent backwardness of the general mass of Muslim remained the same.

So very few of them got opportunities to have education of proper standard. Empowerment is one of the main ceremonial concern when addressing human rights and development. Women empowerment includes the capabilities to decisions about personal and collective circumstances, decision-making ability, ability to choose a range of options, ability to inform other perception through exchange, education and engagement, increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma, increasing one's ability in discreet thinking to sort out right and wrong etc.

Government Policies and Schemes supporting Muslim Women Education

According to Dr Shabistan Gaffar, chairperson of NCMEI's Committee on Girls' Education, "Muslim women are a minority within a minority. The Constitution gives equal rights to women of all communities. The Holy Quran also has made learning and gaining knowledge compulsory for Muslims, with no discrimination between men and women". Education, is a powerful vehicle for bringing about change, a panacea of all evils and a patient weapon for prevention, which plays a central role of the society. Some of the schemes and recommendations of Five Year Plan and the momentum of which are being continued/accelerated during the XIIth Five Year Plan which can prove to be quite beneficial as far as muslim women education is concerned are stated below:

- Scheme for providing Quality Education in Madrassas (SPQEM).
- Scheme for Infrastructure Development of Private/Unaided Minority Institutions (IDMI).
- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).
- Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVS).

- Extension of Mid Day Meals (MDM) scheme to Madrassas and Maqtabas.
- Saakshar Bharat.
- Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS).
- Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA).
- Strengthening of the National council for promotion of Urdu language (NCPUL).
- Establishment of the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (NCMEI).

Apart from these Girls hostel scheme and Setting up model schools is also worth mentioning. Moreover, Ministry of Human Resource Development have introduced many scholarship schemes, Free Coaching and Allied Scheme, Maulana Ajad National Fellowship for Minority Students Scheme, Grant in Aid Scheme to State Channelizing Agencies of National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation, Research/ Studies, Monitoring and Evaluation of Development Scheme including publicity; “Nai Roshni”- The Scheme of leadership of Minority Women Scheme, “Seekho aur Kamao (Learn and Earn)”- The Scheme for Skill Development of Minorities. “Padho Pardesh”- Scheme of Interest Subsidy on Educational Loans for Overseas Studies for the Students Belonging to Minority; “Nai Manzil”- An Integrated Education and Livelihood Initiative for the Minority Communities.

These policies and schemes are doing a lot for the empowerment of Muslim women. Still the freedom and access to higher education has shown effect only in urban areas with upper class Muslim families. The women belonging to rural, poor families remain out of touch with the welfare schemes.

Recommendations

Islam emphasizes and encourages seekers of knowledge and does not discriminate between men and women. The prophet stated that “whosoever follows a path to seek knowledge shall walk the path of paradise.” Despite such importance to education given by the religion many families restrict women from studying, ironically citing religious prohibitions clearly showing their lack of knowledge about their own faith. Therefore, religious leaders should take active role to create proper awareness and convince the Muslim population for spreading female education. Muslim women belonging to the lower ranks of the society practically have no education. In order to overcome the constraints, faced by Muslim women to achieve empowerment, a multidimensional approach and efforts at both governmental and NGO level are necessary. An initiative should be taken by the educated, employed and empowered Muslim women. They should come forward and establish NGOs in order to guide and create awareness among the deprived Muslim women about the opportunities available.

Self -help groups should be formed by Muslim women and encouragement to self-employment and savings should be made. If men want future generations to succeed in the world, it is as just important to educate their daughters as their sons; indeed, it is probably more important to educate the daughters. Keeping women ignorant meant that neither their sons nor their daughters will receive any basic education at home. The superstitions and useless customs that have crept into the culture will disappear only with proper education and enlightenment. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan should have a strong emphasis on girl child programme, with added emphasis on Muslim girls; encourage and equip a

continuous and comprehensive database; collect educational data through village education registers as is done in the Madhya Pradesh Model; provide cost free quality education for all children from BPL households; provide girls hostels in regular middle and secondary schools so that more girls can enroll, specially Muslim girls; open schools in states should waive off examination fees for girls; early marriages should be stopped; and higher percentage of GDP should be allocated for education.

Conclusion

Investment in education is the best investment one can take, because it eventually leads to intellectual property. There are a deep seated misconceptions among various communities that Islam does not encourages women to receive education and does not allow employment of women. But the very first word of the first verse in Glorious Quran emphasizes the need and importance of education. Islam puts considerable emphasis on its followers to acquire knowledge. It is imperative on all Muslim men and women to receive as much knowledge as could enable them to differentiate between what is truth and what is false. Prophet Mohammed's wife Khadeeja, was a successful business women and she was a devoted Muslim women at the same time. So women education and employment is not restricted from the Prophet's from the very beginning. The Prophet Muhammad told his followers: 1."Acquisition of knowledge is binding on all Muslims, male and female." 2."Seek knowledge, from the cradle to the grave." 3. "The person who goes forth in search of knowledge is striving hard in the way of Allah, until his/her return." Indeed, throughout history many Muslim women were involved in the founding of educational institutions. Most notable of these is Fatima al- Fihri, who established the University of Al-Karaouine. So it is not only the duty of the government and the NGOs to play active role in imparting education to the Muslim women but the whole community should cooperate in this matter. Moreover, the female themselves should have the urge of improving their situation through participation in higher education. But the truth is that Muslim Woman understands her own responsibility for education, no government policy or people cannot help her in the other word she does not depends on anybody for education except on her own will and determination. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "educate one man you educate one person; educate a woman you educate a whole nation "which means empowering a woman is empowering a whole nation. There is lot to be done to increase the growth and participation of Muslim women in the education system and ultimately providing them with the weapon of empowerment for their upliftment.

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