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Educational status of Muslim women in India: Insights from census

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Abstract

“I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved”

-Dr. BR Ambedkar

Women constitute almost half of the population of the world. Women of our country comprise a large proportion of workforce and their social status also rising in this 21st century. Unfortunately, women are suppressed socially and economically in this patriarchal society for years. So, education for women is the best way to improve their health nutrition and economical status in the society. Education is the only treasure of a woman to empower themselves in the society. Muslim women are the most backward in our modern society. Education is the true way for helping the Muslim women out of their economic misery. This paper is an attempt to analyze the educational status of Muslim women in India absolutely as well as relative to their male and female counterparts belonging to other religious communities. This study is based on the secondary source of data obtained from the census report (2011), NSS report and other published sources to throw light on the actual status of Muslim female education, various levels of educational attainment are taken into account. The finding of the study reveals that the educational status of Muslims in general and Muslim female, in particular, is not satisfactory and needs special attention. It is found that 42.72% of the total population of the Muslims in India is illiterate; among the Muslim women, illiteracy is as high as 48.11%. Technical education and higher education are meager among the Muslim women. From the findings, it is also clear that Muslims who account for almost 14% of the total population of the nation shows lowest literacy rate, the lowest percentage of higher education and lowest degree of female education.

Keywords: Women education, patriarchal society, religious communities, literacy rate

Introduction

Swami Vivekananda has rightly said that, “There is no change of the welfare of the world unless the condition of the women is improved”. A nation cannot develop without women education and development. Education is the single most important tool for social and economical development of a woman. Right to Education Act (RTE Act) gives universal and equal access to every Indian child to get free and compulsory primary education. Modern researchers suggest that woman education is more important than male education for social development of our country. According to Census report 2011 [12], 17.22 crore Muslims constitute 14.23% of total population in India. Muslims are the largest Minority group in India constituting 14.23% of the total population. They are seriously lagging behind in terms of most of the human development indicators. It is the second largest religious group in West Bengal. Muslim constitutes 26 percent of the total population of the state West Bengal according to census 2011. Muslim women are the least educated section of our society. According to the constitution everyone should have right to education. Figures for female literacy are almost identical for both Hindu (75%) and Muslim (76.1%) women in rural women's primary education for rural India, which subsequently widens across the middle, secondary and graduate levels. Muslim girls' schooling is not always encouraged. The female literacy rate is appalling. An improvement in the overall literacy rates for Muslims would not just lead to a corresponding increase in Muslim enrolment in universities and professional courses but also ensure more social opportunity for Muslim women (and men). This initial disadvantage, i.e. Muslim women's poor literacy rates, completely precludes the possibility of their entering institutions of higher education. Pragmatic scenario shows that participation of Muslim women in education is completely latent.

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Muslim women always remained socially and economically backward in our country. Their low participation in education becomes a roadblock in the path of achieving the goal of universal education.

Review of literature

Kumar SS and Palanisamy M (2023) ^[14], conducted a study on, "Impact of Education on Women Empowerment in India". Education is the key factor for women empowerment, prosperity, development and welfare. This studies the impact of education on women empowerment and also aims to find out the effect of Indian Women Education during Vedic Period, Buddhist Period, Muslim Period, Indian Women Impact of Education during British Period, and Indian Women Impact of Education during Modern Period. This study tries to find out the Reform in Women Education, Status of Women in India and etc.

Begum R, (1998) ^[15] conducted a study on, "An empirical study of Muslim women's education in two villages of rural West Bengal". From the study, I have got acquainted that, the factors which act as a barrier to the achievement of Muslim women education include lack of awareness among Muslim women, conservativeness in Muslim family, and absence of the necessities for getting formal education.

Agarwal M, (2014) ^[16] conducted, "A study on Challenge for Women Empowerment". The study explained the role of education in women empowerment and the status of women education in India. It also shows that education is the only instrument for empowering women in our country. It is the most powerful tool of attaining power in the society.

Hossain Md. I (2012) ^[17] made a study on, "Muslim Women of West Bengal: An Enquiry into their Minority Status". The study is to examine the socio-economic situation of the largest religious minority population compared to other religious minorities of the state and the status of Muslim women of West Bengal in particular. From this study I have acquainted with the socio-economic status of Muslims in various district of West Bengal and the factors which remain barriers in their development and social change and the situation of Muslim women of West Bengal.

Hoque MJ, (2016) ^[18] conducted a study on, "Muslim Education in Murshidabad District of West Bengal: Problems and Solutions". From the study I have acquainted that, the condition of minority was more pathetic in West Bengal than any other states. The reasons for backwardness in education of the Muslim community in Murshidabad were include poverty, negative attitude towards girl's education, lack of awareness among guardians, child marriage, unsuitable social environment etc.

Syed W, A Ashraf and Ahmad A, (2012) ^[19], made a study on, "Muslim Women Education and Empowerment in Rural Aligarh (A case study)". It concludes that education of women is having supreme power for the development of individuality. It is also an instrument for strengthening socially useful skills, habits and attitudes of common citizenship. The study reveals that socio economic conditions are the major determinants of women liberation than the religion.

Biswas R, (2016) ^[20], conducted a study which entitled as, "Higher Education for Muslim Women Empowerment in India". The paper discussed the status of Muslim women in higher education, their problems in access to higher education, and also governmental policies and schemes for spreading higher education to them. The paper concludes

that, the religious leaders should take active role to create proper awareness and convince the Muslim population for spreading female education. The educated and empowered Muslim women should come forward and establish NGOs in order to guide and create awareness among the deprived Muslim women about the educational opportunities.

Objectives

The major objectives of this research paper are

1. To investigate the status of Muslim female education in a comparative perspective.
2. To highlight the factors which are retarding Muslim female education.
3. To find out the literacy gap between Muslim male and female.

Research questions

In reflection to the above mentioned statement few research questions are mentioned below

1. Why Muslim women are lagging behind from the mainstream?
2. Why so many drop-outs among Muslim girls?
3. Why is there such a lack of literacy rate among Muslim girls compared to other religions?

Methodology

The entire study is based on the secondary sources of data which have been collected from the census of India (2011), various rounds of NSSO data, journals, and other published sources. Different data tables have been used to analyze the facts and findings.

Educational Status of Muslim Women in India

Educationally Muslim comprises one of the most backward communities in the country. Muslim girls and women lag behind their male counterparts and women of all other communities. Among the Muslims, 17.6% is the dropout rate, higher than the national average of 13.2%. As many as 25% of Muslim children in the age group of 6 to 14 years have either never attended school or have dropped out. Muslims have the highest dropout rate in the country. Only one out of the 25 under-graduate students and one out of the 50 postgraduate students is a Muslim in the premier colleges. The share of Muslims in all courses is low, particularly at the Post-Graduate level and marginal in the science stream (Sachar 2006) ^[21].

Table 1: Literacy rate among religious communities in% age

Religion	Female	Male	Total
Muslim	51.9	62.41	57.15
Hindu	55.98	70.78	63.38
Jain	84.93	87.86	86.39
Christian	71.97	76.78	74.37
Sikh	63.29	71.32	67.30
Buddhist	65.6	77.87	71.73
Others	41.38	59.38	50.38

Source: Census of India, 2011 ^[12]

Education is one of the important social indicators having bearing on the achievement and the growth of an individual as well as community. This is apparent to be highly suitable for providing employment and, thereby, improving the quality of life. The educational status of Muslim women in India is worse as compared to Muslim men, and women of

other communities. They have the lowest work participation rate and most of them. Although all women suffer gender based inequalities in marriage, autonomy and mobility across communities, Muslim women fare lower than the national average in certain key areas. These include socio-

economic status, occupational distribution, labour force participation and education. (Hassan and Menon 2004) [22]. The studies by Nayer (2007) [23], Hussain (2009) [24] and Jafri (2010) [11] also indicate Muslim women are marked with stark educational backwardness.

Table 2: Literates as proportion of population by age-groups

Age Groups (Years)	Hindus			Muslims	Others Minorities
	Gen	OBC	SCs/STs		
6-13	90.2	80.8	74.7	74.6	88.5
14-15	95.7	87.5	80.0	79.5	91.9
16-17	95.0	85.2	78.6	75.5	91.3
18-22	91.4	76.9	65.0	70.5	85.8
Above 23	74.0	50.6	36.5	46.1	67.0
Total	80.5	63.4	52.7	59.9	75.2

Source: NSSO 61st Round, She. 10 (2004-05)

This past estimates clearly show that in the literacy rates for the SC/ST population have risen more sharply than for Muslims; while persons of the older age groups in the Muslim community had much higher literacy levels, these

are higher for SCs/STs in the younger age groups. Therefore, the trends observed in the Census data are also evident in the NSSO data.

Table 3: Percentage of Illiteracy among religious communities

Religious Communities	Percentage of Illiteracy
Hindu	36.39
Muslim	42.72
Christian	25.65
Sikh	32.49
Buddhist	28.16
Jains	13.57
Others	49.65

Source: Census Report, Government of India, 2011 [12]

According to 2011 Census of India [12], the percentage of illiteracy among Muslim female are 48.1% whereas the illiteracy among Muslim males are 37.59%. The difference between Muslim women and non-Muslim women in urban areas was 11%, which later increased to 19% over the years.

Less than 4% of Muslims graduate from school compared to 6% of the total population. 6% of girl students are forced to stop their education as parents think that education is not required for them. Only 5% Muslim women manage to get higher studies.

Table 4: Percentage of Literacy among Muslim Population in India

Muslim Population in India	Illiterate		Literate	
	42.72%		52.27%	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
17.22 Crore	19.26%	23.45%	31.98%	25.29%

Source: Census Report, Government of India, 2011 [12]

According to the 2011 census data, Muslim literacy rate in the state West Bengal has risen to 68.74% from 57.47% recorded in the 2001 census. Whereas, the national Muslim literacy rate is 68.53%. According to the census, West Bengal has 6.15 crore literates. Around 66.66% or 4.5 crore

of them are Hindus and the remaining 23.42% are Muslims. Among the 2.9 crore illiterates in the state, 1.86 crore are Hindus and 1.02 crore are Muslims. 27.01% of the total population is Muslim in the state West Bengal.

Table 5: Percentage of Muslim population at various educational levels

Total Muslim Literate: 98658922																	
Literate without educational level		Below primary		Primary		Middle		Secondary		Higher secondary		Non-technical diploma		Technical diploma		Graduate and above	
M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
2.81	2.24	13.47	11.51	15.81	12.88	9.66	7.32	6.40	4.63	4.42	3.31	0.16	0.12	0.35	0.12	3.05	1.75

Source: Census Report, Government of India, 2011 [12], M=Male, F=Female

According to DISE 2012-13 Flash Statistics report in the year 2010-11 the percentage of Muslim girls enrollment in the state West Bengal is 49.89% and in the year 2012-13 the percentage of Muslim girls is 50.04% and in India it is

49.22%. It reveals that the Muslim girls' enrolment in West Bengal is a step forward in comparison to the National enrolment rate. So, in West Bengal the gender gap and illiteracy rate has been reducing and also the rate of Muslim

female literacy rate has been increasing.

Problems and Suggestions for Muslim Women Education in India

Some major constrain for Muslim women education are as follows:

- Poor economic condition of the Muslim parents in rural India.
- Interest of the girl's education is suppressed by giving early marriage to the Muslim girls.
- Lack of female teacher in schools.
- Engagement of the Muslim women in wage earning activities to help their parents.
- Muslim parents are illiterate and ignorant about importance of women education.
- Lack of awareness among the Muslim parent about the importance of women education.
- Religious superstitions among the parents of girl child.
- Tendency of early marriage particularly in rural India.
- Female students drop out and stagnation in the schools.
- Distance to the school or colleges from their residence.
- Madrasas and Maktabas are much preferred by Muslim people.

Some suggestions can be given to overcome this situation

- Eradicating religious superstitions is the first steps toward Muslim women education and empowerment in our country
- Making Muslim girls more confident is another true step toward women education in Muslim community.
- Increase the awareness among Muslims about the importance of education in their life.
- Muslim women should be provided professional technical and vocational education.
- Computer knowledge should be given to girls students of our country.
- Sufficient industries should be established for the employment of Muslim girls in our country.
- Different government and non-government scholarship and schemes like "Beti Bachao-Beti padhao, Kanyashree, Begum Hazrat Mahal National Scholarship, Abhilasha Scholarship, Pragati Scholarship" etc. should be promoted much.

Conclusion

Indian Muslims women are far behind in achieving the literacy status because of their poor economic conditions and superstition. Equality and empowerment of Muslim women are necessary to bring about an egalitarian human society. Empowerment is one of the pivotal concerns while addressing human right and development. The empowerment of women has become one of the most important and modern phenomenon of 21st century not only at National level but also International level. Now a day's women's participation in the process of development has become necessary in the Muslim community. Empowerment of women means a process by which women's power of self realization is promoted. The preceding analysis shows that Muslims form the largest minority in West Bengal, although they constitute 25 per cent of the population of the state, their concentration in six districts (where they form more than 25 per cent of population of the district) are of paramount significance. Women empowerment is closely connected with women's education. The government of

India and government of West Bengal are trying hard for improving the educational status of Muslim women. To improve the education level of women in India, the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act (2002) have taken a true step. Under this act elementary education is made free and compulsory for the children belonging to the age group of 6-14 years. This initiated Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in our country. The government thus should take dare steps to provide education & employment to all to make every person in our country well empowered.

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