

Education of Muslim Girls

Barriers, Challenges and Possibilities

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Abstract

This paper attempts to trace barriers that compel Muslim girls to discontinue their schooling at the secondary stage i.e. classes IX or X in four districts namely Bahraich, Bareilly, Bijnor and Rampur of Uttar Pradesh, based on case studies with Muslim girls aged 15–17 who had completed elementary education, but were withdrawn from schools and focus group discussions with Muslim community. Evidences from many research studies show non-availability of secondary level schooling facilities, especially in rural areas, school ethos, if available and household poverty in sending girls to schools are very important barriers that compel Muslim girls not to avail the benefits of educational opportunities at the secondary stage. Although all of these have strengths to influence parents to deprive their daughters from availing educational facilities, especially once girls attain puberty. But the argument here is that parental disinterest in Muslim girls' education is one of the significant barriers, especially when girls attain puberty. The paper explores the potentially serious problems that lead to parental disinterest with regard to Muslim girls' education at the secondary stage.

INTRODUCTION

Since independence, the issue of education and women's education in particular, has been a special concern of policy makers. The

National Policy on Education, 1986 (revised in 1992) also attempted to assign a positive interventionist role to the national system of education to address obstacles

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inhibiting women's access to, and participation in different types and levels of education. Two major reform initiatives of the Government of India endorsed greater participation of girls in education at the elementary level: the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). To some extent both the programmes succeeded in bringing the philosophy and implementation strategies of gender equality such as gender training of all officials concerned, discussion about gender in teacher development course, revision of curricula and textbooks from a gender perspective, community mobilisation for girls' education and strengthening of support services to relieve girls from household chores among others into the country's existing education system. As the country began to implement the SSA in the right earnest, with the objective of free and compulsory education upto the age of fourteen years, an urgent need was also recognized to universalize secondary education by the country's education planners. In this background, the Eleventh Five Year Plan planned several initiatives. The foremost among these was launching of a centrally sponsored umbrella scheme called, 'Scheme for Universal Access and Quality at the Secondary Stage (SUCCESS)'. The emphasis on girls' education has been reflected in this umbrella scheme also as its overall objectives were universalising access with

major reduction in gender, social and regional gaps in enrolment, dropout, retention, and improving quality with focus on Science and Mathematics. Also, at the behest of this scheme, special interventions planned in the Five Year Plan were to setup 6,000 high quality Model Schools at block level with sharing of cost by the Centre as well as the states as benchmark for excellence in secondary schooling, especially in educationally backward blocks (EBBs) which have a significant SC, ST, OBC and minority population to provide quality education, especially to the poor and meritorious children, who may not otherwise be able to access such education by paying prohibitive fees in the private (aided and unaided) schools; increase the intake capacity of schools at the secondary stage by upgrading 15,000 existing primary schools to secondary schools; increase the intake capacity of existing 44,000 secondary schools by creating enhanced facilities such as construction of additional classrooms and providing additional teachers; encourage establishment of good quality schools in deficient areas through Public and Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode; setting up of Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs) and Navodaya Vidyalayas (NVs) in hitherto unserved areas; ensuring 100% trained teachers in all schools and maintaining a healthy pupil teacher ratio of 25:1 by 2011-12; and finally by way of revamping the ICT facilities in the secondary and

higher secondary schools across the country (XIth Five Year Plan 2007-11, www.educationforallindia.com). With regard to bridging the social gaps in secondary education, the Five Year Plan also planned upgradation of elementary schools to secondary schools in ethnic concentration areas of the relevant some social groups; distribution (supply) of free uniforms, text books and footwear; bicycle/wheelchairs to the needy students belonging to some social group; stipends to deserving students; scholarships, remedial coaching; and adoption of an area-intensive approach with community participation. To act upon these proposals, the Government of India launched the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyaan (RMSA) as a centrally sponsored scheme. It was done during the Eleventh Five Year Plan period itself. As things stand now, the objectives of RMSA have been laid out to be achieved in three stages. In the first stage, the objective is to achieve 75% Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for Classes IX–X by the end of the Eleventh Plan period by providing a secondary school within a reasonable distance (5 kms) of every habitation and removal of gender, socio-economic and disability barriers. In the second stage, RMSA intends to achieve improvement in the overall quality of the secondary education by the end of the Twelfth Five Year Plan Period, in the third stage, universal retention by 2020.

Despite these multi-dimensional efforts, nearly twenty eight percent girls dropout of school between classes I–V and forty four percent between classes I–VIII and fifty two percent between classes I–X at the national aggregative level, if somehow get enrolled (GOI, 2011). Available studies on education also reveal that not enough progress has been made with regard to the education of Muslim minority girls. They are moving forward in educational attainment at a very slow rate in comparison with the girls of other communities. Lack of quantitative data makes this argument difficult to establish, but the findings of various researches and surveys enable us to determine the low level of educational attainment of Muslim girls in the secondary stage (Islam 2010, Siraj 2010, Jafri 2010, 2010, Siddiqui 2010, Hasan 2003, Hasan and Menon 2005). Although Islam provides equal opportunity to education, many Muslim girls are denied access to education. Citing the figures published by the 55th Round of the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), Hasan and Menon (2005) reported that Muslim boys and girls enrolment at the primary and upper primary levels is comparable to Hindus but most of the Muslim boys and girls dropout after the primary stage and at the secondary level. The report of the High Level Committee (2007) chaired by Justice R. Sachar while analysing socioeconomic and

educational status of the Muslim community of India found that though the enrolments of Muslim children in education have increased significantly in the recent years, incidence of never enrolled and dropouts is still very high among Muslims. The educational situation of Muslim children, especially of Muslim girls was reported very depressingly and alarmingly from lower levels of enrolment to the higher levels of education. The data published by the 66th Round of the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) revealed that at the all India level, in rural and urban areas alike, fewer Muslim girls attend schools after the elementary level. The NFHS, for example indicates that Muslim girls are the lowest number of enrolled in schools in the secondary stage.

MAIN THRUST OF THE PREVIOUS STUDIES

Over the last few decades, many studies focused on identifying barriers that affect Muslim children's education in general. But very few studies have concentrated specifically in identifying barriers in secondary education of Muslim girls. The findings of those studies available on Muslim education in India concerning low status of Muslim girls' education are varied in nature. For instance, Mander (2011) found that for children's education parents demand government institutions with both Hindu and Muslim children but

Muslim settlements lack schooling facilities. *Jeffery et. al.* (2005) in a case study of Bijnor district in Uttar Pradesh also noticed similar findings. Non-availability of schooling facilities places those in a difficult situation who otherwise have desire to educate their children. Qureshi (2010) argued that many a times school ethos also create barriers in Muslim girls' education, if somehow schooling facility is available. For instance, dress code adopted in schools influence girls education negatively as many Muslim families consider it contrary to their cultural tradition. Quite a few studies also highlight that a Muslim household's concern for girls' personal safety and security is a major barrier in Muslim girls' education, especially once girls attain puberty (*Jeffery et. al.* 2005, *Srivastava* 2001). A large section of opinion also holds that the community's social biases are the main barriers in Muslim girls' education (*Ahmed* 2008, *Hasan and Ritu* 2005, *Goswami and Kabir* 2003). Many Muslim households generally believe that girls require education that enables them to perform her role in childcare and looking after the household chores. Hence, few years of schooling is believed to be sufficient for girls. Apart from these, studies have also emphasized that programmes like the Maulana Azad Education Foundation's corpus of funds for the expansion and establishment

of schools, including residential schools and colleges for girls too have failed to make a significant dent in educational deprivation of Muslim children, especially in states having sizeable Muslim population as funds allocated to these states remained unutilised. Uttar Pradesh is one among such states (Hasan and Ritu, 2005).

Had lack of schooling facilities and issue of a girl's personal safety and security been the main factors, then poor educational status of girls would have also been there in the other communities in the State that, in fact, are now showing considerable progress in girls' education. Poverty is also not the basic barrier in this regard. The fact that majority of Muslim households irrespective of economic status are not sending their daughters to schools once girls attain puberty in rural areas of Uttar Pradesh weaken the often forwarded argument that Muslim girls' education would improve if Muslim concentrated areas equip themselves with schooling facilities. It also points out that barrier behind lack of schooling facilities, school ethos and poverty are much deeper than scholars are placing on record. This research is carried out, therefore, to explore the conundrum of why, despite rapid expansion of educational facilities and huge improvements in educational status of women in general, Muslim girls

are lagging behind in educational attainment in the secondary stage; based on field-based empirical evidences generated through case studies and focus group discussions. We specifically wanted to elucidate attitudes to, and experiences of, Muslim girls aged 15–17 who had completed elementary education, but were withdrawn from schools and how they relate to low participation of Muslim girls in the secondary education.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The paper focuses on the following two questions: (i) Are lack of schooling facilities and school ethos the barriers in secondary education of Muslim girls? (ii) Is the Muslim household's disinterest the major barrier of low level of secondary education among Muslim girls? If yes, what contributes to the parental disinterest?

SAMPLE AREA

In-depth case studies and focus group discussions with the community people were conducted in both rural and urban settlements of four districts namely Bahraich, Bareilly, Bijnor and Rampur of Uttar Pradesh with concentration of large Muslim population. The rural-urban settlements of all the four districts where case studies and focus group discussions were conducted are given on next page in table 1.

Table 1
Sample Area

Sample Districts	Sample Blocks	Rural Locations	Urban Locations
Bahraich	Risia	6 –Matera 7–Bohpatchownki	Risia town
Bijnor	Kotwali	6–Kotwali 7– Shahlipur Kotra	Nagina town
Bareilly	Mirganj	6–Sindholi 7–Parchoya	Mirganj Block Headquarters
Rampur	Shahbad	6–Pachtaur 7–Madhukar	Dakia

METHODOLOGY

The study was based on qualitative empirical evidences taken from a larger research project entitled 'Barriers in Secondary Education of Muslim Girls: A Study of Four Districts of Uttar Pradesh'. Fieldwork was carried out in 8 rural locations and in four urban locations of four districts namely, Bahraich, Bijnor, Bareilly and Rampur. The study area was purposively selected the details for which follows in the next paragraph. 20 girls were chosen for in-depth case studies in the age group 15–17 who have completed class VIII, but were withdrawn from schools. Besides, a group of people having different occupations were identified for focus group discussions. Data was collected mainly through interviews with girls and focus group discussions with community.

Case studies were carried out to explore interviewees' own attitude to reasons of low participation of Muslim girls in secondary education,

their parents' attitudes, as well as the prevailing attitudes in the Muslim community with regard to secondary education of Muslim girls.

Focus group discussions were mainly conducted to elicit Muslim community's opinion with regard to girls' education. Interviews were conducted in late 2010. All interviews were conducted in the presence of the interviewees' parents. Initial questions covered basic socio-economic and demographic information and then the interviewer asked some open-ended questions with specific follow-up prompts. The schedule was designed to broadly cover two topics: reasons of low educational status of Muslim girls in secondary education and the dynamics of Muslim household's disinterest in secondary education of Muslim girls, together with details of socio-economic and demographic backgrounds. Hence the main questions were: Do you think non-availability of secondary level

schooling facilities, especially in rural areas, school ethos, if available are very important barriers that compel Muslim girls not to avail the benefits of educational opportunities at the secondary stage? In what way non-availability of secondary schooling facility and school ethos act as barriers in their participation in secondary education? What are their experiences about parental disinterest in their education? The qualitative method was used to analyze the data. Analysis is presented in the narrative format to seek answers to the research questions.

PROFILE OF THE STUDY AREA

The National Policy on Education, 1986 revised in 1992 and its Programme of Action (POA) identified 41 districts across the country as educationally backward on the basis of female literacy rates of 1981 census. Out of these 41 districts, 13 districts were in Uttar Pradesh. Bahraich, Bijnor and Rampur were three districts among those 13 districts of Uttar Pradesh identified as educationally backward on the basis of Census data of 1981 on female literacy rates. Bareilly as a neighbouring district performed comparatively well on educational indicators was selected for the study. All the districts have high concentration of Muslim population (much higher than the state average i.e. 18.5% as per 2001 Census and low Muslim female literacy rates

(much below the state averages i.e. 38.27%). Similarly, the sample blocks selected in each district have high concentration of Muslims and have low female literacy rates.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

A total of 20 interviews were obtained from the 12 locations (8 rural and 4 urban). About 10 were from rural areas and 10 from urban towns. The content analysis of case studies indicates that there are two categories of barriers that restrict Muslim girls' education at the secondary level. The first category is system level and the second one is household level.

Some of the system level barriers that restrict secondary education of Muslim girls are:

- Government schools (secondary stage) are very few and far away, if available
- Schools, if available, fail to motivate or encourage Muslim community to send their daughters to schools especially after the primary stage.

Some of the household level barriers that restrict secondary education of Muslim girls are:

- Household poverty
- Socio-cultural and religious ethos that work against Muslim girls' and women's education

SYSTEM LEVEL BARRIERS

Poor accessibility to secondary schools generally contributes significantly in non-participation of girls in the secondary education

everywhere, but it varies from location to location and community to community. The study area is no different in this respect. The empirical evidences revealed that Muslim girls' participation in secondary education is low due to poor accessibility to schooling facilities in rural areas. In Uttar Pradesh, the average distance to secondary education generally exceeds 5 to 6 kms. in rural areas as the secondary education is linked to inter-colleges. The need to travel to long distances to inter-college is found to be a significant barrier in Muslim girls' education in the secondary stage. The Muslim community, especially the elders in the community do not favour girls' education, if girls have to go to attend school at a distant place for reasons of girls' personal safety and security.

Case Study 1

The story of a Muslim girl illustrates how non-availability of government schools or the availability of private schools is acting as a barrier in secondary education.

My parents always said that girls have no need to continue learning once they attain puberty, so I did not have a chance to go to school after the elementary stage (a Muslim girl aged 15, rural Rampur).

She narrated that she resides in the village Madhukar, Naya Panchayat Uncha Gaon, Shahabad block, Rampur district, Uttar Pradesh. Her parents belong to a Teli community (basically from backward

class). Her parents are illiterate and her father supports his family by running a small auto workshop in Dakia town. She has two sisters and two brothers. She is the third one amongst her brothers and sisters. Both of her elder sisters have already got married. Her two brothers are elder to her and help in father's occupation. She studied upto VIII standard in a village school. After VIII standard, she wanted to continue her studies and told her mother of her wish to continue studies. Her mother also wanted that her daughter continues her studies. So her mother agreed to get her enrolled in inter-college for secondary education.

She said: "There is an upper primary school in my village as well as a Madrasa run by State Madrasa Board. The inter college run by private management is available at a distance of 3 kms. from my village at Dakia. Children have to go to Dakia for schooling after class VIII. The college management charges ₹ 50/- per month as a tuition fees. I got admission in class IX in inter college in Dakia in 2009. But I left my school after six months. I could not continue my studies because the elder members of the village community oppose girls' education after a certain age. So after class VIII, I discontinued my studies. My mother wanted me to study. But the other elder members, especially males of my family, objected to my attending school and, therefore, I had to leave my schooling."

She further said that though non-availability of schooling facility near the place of residence of girls is one of the major barriers in Muslim girls' education; elder members of the village Muslim community do not like that Muslim girls attend those schools after a certain age where girls from other communities also attend. Since Madrasas are not available for secondary level education in villages for girls, Muslim girls are deprived from schooling after certain age.

Schools, if available, fail to motivate/encourage Muslim community to send their daughters to schools especially after the primary stage. It is widely recognized that the presence of women teachers tends to make schools more girl-friendly and provide parents greater confidence to send daughters to schools, particularly once girls attain puberty. But non-availability of women teachers in schools, especially in rural areas that have concentration of Muslim population emerged as one of the important barriers that restrict Muslim households to send their daughters to schools. Many schools in rural areas do not have women teachers despite recommendations of National Policy on Education, 1986 of appointing at least 50 per cent women teachers in elementary schools for more than 3 decades now. In Uttar Pradesh, 46.8 per cent primary school teachers are women, but only 21.1 per cent women teachers are in secondary schools (GOI, 2011). This is the overall scenario of the state.

The shortages of women teachers in schools discourage many Muslim parents to send their daughters to schools in rural areas, especially after a certain age.

The story of a Muslim girl from a village Pachtaur illustrates how non-presence of women teachers in schools acts a barrier in secondary education of Muslim girls.

Case Study 2

Ruksana, aged 15, resides in the village Pachtaur, Naya Panchayat Uncha Gaon, Shahbad block, district Rampur, Uttar Pradesh. Her parents belong to a Meo community (basically from Mewat region). Her father has a small piece of agricultural land. He is illiterate and supports his family by growing vegetables in his land and selling them in the market in Rampur. She has two sisters and four brothers. She is the fourth amongst her brothers and sisters. Both her elder sisters have already got married. She studied upto V standard in a village school. After V standard, she got admitted in a nearby school in class VI.

She says: "There is a government primary school as well as Madrasa run by State Madrasa Board in our village. There is a Junior High School in village *Ossi* located at a distance of about half a kilometre from my village. I studied upto V standard in the village school and got admission in class VI in Junior High School, *Ossi*. I studied in Junior High

School upto VI standard. I had to leave my schooling in VII standard as there was no woman teacher in the school. Elders in the community oppose girls' education, especially in circumstances, if girls have to go to other village for schooling and more so, if women teachers are not available in schools. I wanted to study but my uncle did not allow me to go to school. So I left the school."

She further said that if she had an opportunity to receive education as per community's aspirations in her village, she might have continued her studies.

Case Study 3

Sahnaz, aged 15, resides in a village Kotwali, Block Nagina, District Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh. She belongs to *Saiyad* community. She has two sisters and four brothers. She is the youngest amongst her sisters. Both of her elder sisters did not study at all. However, they received religious education in Madrasa. She studied upto VIII standard in a school.

She says: "Till VIII standard, I studied in the government elementary school. After class VIII, I left my school because the school was upto VIII standard. I wanted to continue my studies for which I had to get enrolled afresh in the inter-college. There was an admission fees and also the need to fulfil other formalities for which I needed my parents' support. But my parents did not agree upon getting me enrolled in a new school so I discontinued my studies."

She further narrated that if she had an opportunity to receive further education in the same school, she would have continued her studies and would have completed at least her secondary level education. The fresh process of getting enrolled in another school forced her to discontinue her studies. The government should bring out some mechanisms in Muslim concentration areas that ensure continuation of admission in schools if girls have to get enrolled afresh. This is very important in Muslim areas as Muslim parents hardly pay any attention to education of children, especially to girls' education if they have to play some role in their studies.

HOUSEHOLD LEVEL BARRIERS

Poverty emerges as another contributing barrier in the secondary education of Muslim girls. Though the government claims that education is free for girls, girls were of the view that poverty forces their parents to withdraw their daughters from school. While elementary school tuition fee is abolished by the government, parents have to bear secondary school tuition fee for their children. Girls believe that their parents have to bear not only the burden of direct cost of schooling in the form of tuition fee but also for books, stationery, uniforms, contribution to school building funds and travelling costs etc. for sending children to schools at the secondary level. Parents withdraw

their daughters from schools if they have to contribute financially in girls' education. Poverty emerges another barrier in secondary education of Muslim girls in all locations that come under the purview of the study, but it was found having a most negative impact of Muslim girls' education in sample areas of the district Bahraich.

Case Study 4

Nasreen Khaton, aged 16, resides in a village *Bhowpatchownki*, Block Risia, Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh. Her parents are illiterate. They belong to Ansari community. Her father, Mohd. Sartaj Ahmed supports his family by working as mechanic in a private workshop. She has three sisters and two brothers. She is the second one amongst her sisters and brothers. Her elder sister has already got married at the age of 17 years. She narrates that she has completed VIII standard in the year 2010 from a school nearby their locality. She wanted to continue her studies but she did not get enrolled in school after the VIII standard.

She says: "Till VIII standard, I studied in a village school. I have really enjoyed my schooling. But there is no government or private inter-college near our village. Inter-college is located at a distance of 8 kms. from my house at *Risia* or at *Matera*, which is also about 7 to 8 kms. I cannot walk 16 km. to and fro every day. If I hire transportation (rickshaw/auto-rickshaw) to go to school and come back from school,

it costs me ₹ 20 per day. There is a school fee also. In addition to school fee, it is very difficult for my family to bear the transportation costs for my studies. My father is the only earning member in my family. In all, inflation has made it difficult for my parents to feed the family. My father told me how can I think to educate you or your sisters in such a mere income? Such circumstances forced me to discontinue my studies."

She further said that she had a great dream that she will study and become a teacher. She will serve in her state and will ensure that every girl child in her community complete at least the full cycle of schooling. But poverty had broken her dreams. She felt that they are poor people. Their parents cannot afford to spend on girls' education. If schools are available within a reasonable walking distance, many girls like her, can continue their studies and reach to a *Manzil* i.e. destination.

Socio-cultural and religious ethos of Muslim households: social biases, stereotypical attitudes, and social practices prevent Muslim girls from benefitting educational opportunities at the secondary level. The analysis of empirical evidences revealed that many Muslim households believe that girls are not required education as they will get married and go to another house. Moreover, the general perception is that education is not going to change girls' social status. Social biases perpetuate low value to girls' education, especially when

girls grow little older. Low value given to girls' lives further reinforces early marriages of girls. In Bahraich, more than 40 percent girls were found in sample areas who were already engaged in matrimonial ties at the age of 14–15. Girls' marriage is recognized as a highest priority in poor Muslim households than girls' education. The overall socio-cultural and religious ethos has a great role in low educational status of Muslim girls. For most Muslim parents, a girls' education is to prepare her for marriage, childcare and household management. A few years of education is, therefore, enough for girls that provide the necessary understanding of religious matters and a good grounding in moral education. Parents often withdraw girls from schools in the pretext of their requirement in household chores.

Case Study 5

Ruksana, aged 15, resides in Madhukar village, Shahabad block, Rampur district, Uttar Pradesh. Her parents belong to Teli community. Her father is an agriculturist. She has five sisters and four brothers. She is the youngest amongst her sisters. Her three sisters have already got married. Her brothers also help in family occupation. She studied in government village school upto VIII standard. She left her schooling after VIII standard.

She says: "I studied upto VIII standard in the village school. I discontinued my studies as my mother does not keep well. We have

large family. There is so much work at home. My mother asked me to help in household chores. Though my mother does not keep good health but more so she believes that girls are not required much education. They should learn household chores so that they can handle their married life with expertise."

She further narrated that girls are always considered as a '*paraya dhan*' in her family. Her parents always talk about marriages of their daughters. Elders in the community always object education of girls, especially after the attainment of puberty. They always say that girls should learn household chores. Education will not improve their social status. Girls are considered badchalan if go to school after the attainment of puberty.

Case Study 6

Sultana, aged 16, resides in the village Matera, Risia block, Bahraich district, Uttar Pradesh. She belongs to Muslim (Khan) community. Her father is illiterate and supports his family by working as a wage labourer. She has three brothers and two sisters. Her elder sister is 17 year old and she has got married at the age of 15 years. The younger one is 11 year old. One of her brothers is 18 year old and two are younger to her. She studied up to VIII standard. She wanted to continue her studies. But her parents did not allow her to continue her studies.

She says: "There is a government elementary school and also a Madrasa in our village. There is an

inter-college at a distance of one and half kms. from my place of residence. Till VIII standard, I used to go to the village school. After VIII standard, my parents asked me not to attend school any more. I wanted to continue my studies. But family pressure did not allow me to do so. I knew that my parents took this position under the influence of community members. Majority of the people in the neighbourhood believe that girls should not be sent to school after the attainment of puberty. Education does not improve girls' social status. As per Islamic customs, girls should know the correct ways of fasting and praying along with little bit knowledge about other aspects of life. For which few years of schooling is enough".

Case Study 7

Jineet Firdosh, aged 17, resides in village Bhopat chowki (भूपतचोकी), Risia, Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh. Her parents are illiterate and belong to Ansari community. She has five brothers and two sisters. She is the youngest among her brothers and sisters.

She says: "I studied in a private school till VII standard. After VII standard, my mother asked me not to go to school. Almost all relatives and the neighbourers raise fingers if girls go to school after a certain age."

She said that she wanted to continue her studies but there is so much backwardness in their community that girls are forced to discontinue their studies after attainment of puberty. Parents believe

girl's reputation is spoiled if she goes out of a locality. The government should open counseling centre in Muslim area that can motivate community for girls' education.

Case Study 8

Parveen Begum, aged 16, resides in Sindolhi (सिंदौली) village, Mirganj, Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh. Her parents have received religious education from a Madrassa. They belong to Khan community. Her father (Halwai) supports his family by running a small shop. She has four sisters and two brothers. She is the youngest amongst her sisters. Her three elder sisters have already got married. She passed class VIII from a village school. She did not get enrolled in school after the VIII standard.

She narrates: "Till VIII standard, I studied in a village school. I have received education—religious as well as modern from the school. I have enjoyed my schooling. But there is no government or private inter-college nearby our locality. Inter-college is located at a distance of 4 kms. from my house. I cannot walk 8 kms. to and fro every day. If I hire transportation (shared—auto or rickshaw) to go to school and come back from school, it costs me a minimum of ₹ 15/- per day. My father told me that he cannot afford to pay my school fee plus transportation costs. Hence, I was forced to discontinue my studies. I had a great desire to join inter college but my family circumstances did not permit me to do so."

She further said that though poverty, non-availability of schooling facilities are major obstacles in continuation of her education, social backwardness in the community is one of most important obstacles in girls' education in her village. Her father said if he spends ₹ 10/- daily in my commuting to school, what will he get by educating me? He feels that my education is not going to get him benefitted in any way. For him important is that I should get married as soon as possible so that he gets rid of his social responsibility. She further said that our community is not only educationally backward, but also socially backward. People do not understand the value of education. The government should organize advocacy campaigns to eliminate social evils that inhibit girls' and women's development.

Case Study 9

Mumtaz, aged 16, resides in Nagina town of Bijnor district, Uttar Pradesh. She belongs to *Saiyad* community. She has seven brothers. She is the only girl child in the family. Her father runs a shop. Her two brothers are elder to her and five are younger to her. Both of her elder brothers did not study at all. They went to madarssa for four years. She studied upto VIII standard in an Urdu medium school at Nagina. There are three inter-colleges in Nagina. Girls in her *Mohalla* generally do not go to school after class VII or VIII.

She says: "Till VIII standard I

studied in an Urdu medium school in Nagina. This school is nearby my residence. After class VIII, I wanted to study but my elder brothers did not allow me to go to school. So I left the school. My mother says, education is neither going to change your social status nor you are going to work outside the home. Moreover, my mother feels that "*Abhi tak jis school mein tum padhti thi usmein sabhi ladkiyan muslim parivaron se thi. Parantu abb aagey ki shiksha ke liye hamein tumhe uchtar Madhyamik Vidhyalaya mein dakhila dilwana hoga — Jis mein sabhi vargo ki ladhkiyan pravesh leti hain. Islamic reeti rivajon ke anusar ladhkiyon ko ek khas kism ke mahoul mein palna aiwam shiksha dena awashyak hai. Kyuki uchtar Madhyamik shiksha ke liye abb hamare kasbe mein is prakaar ka school nahi hain jismein kewal muslim ladhkiyan hon aur kewal muslim mahila adhyapika hon, isliye main ab tumhe aage ki shiksha ke liye dakhila nahi dilwa sakti.*" If you go to school and something happens and then it will be difficult for us to get you married in a family of repute. Marrying a daughter in a family of repute is an important task for us for which you are required to know the basic aspects of Islamic way of life, so that you can live happily in your in-law's family. You have already received education—religious as well as modern and hence I discontinued my studies under the influence of my family members and other relatives."

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The civil society, religious leaders, government and non-government organisations, among others, are playing an important role in women's education since a very long period in India. The community plays a role in various forms in promotion of education and of girls' education in particular. They mobilize resources. Even the schools, especially in rural areas, cannot exist in isolation in a village. The Education Code also provides for the formation of school development committees, comprising of persons of the local community. One of the important functions of the Janpad Panchayat,

is to seek the cooperation of the local community in getting children enrolled in school, and in ensuring their continued attendance. With this background, focus-group discussions were conducted with parents, village school teachers, heads of local religious bodies and consultation with opinion leaders of the village communities in the areas coming within the preview of the study.

An interview schedule was developed and administered to village community that include parents, village school teachers, heads of local religious bodies and opinion leaders in four districts selected for the study.

Table 1
Occupation of community members included in focus-group discussions in the four sample districts

SL. No.	Occupation	Response Percentage in Sample Districts			
		Bahraich	Bareilly	Bijnor	Rampur
1	Labourer	4	3	3	3
2	Agriculturist	5	5	5	2
3	Businessmen	2	1	2	1
4	Sarpanch/Panch	3	1	2	3
5	School teachers	1	1	2	2
6	Women	6	7	4	6
7	Heads of local religious bodies (madrassas)	1	1	1	2
9	Others (educational officials and anganwadi workers)	4	1	1	1
	Total Responses	26	20	20	20
	Total = 86				

While selecting the persons from the local community, it was ensured that the group was representative of the village. The district-wise distribution of the persons included for the interview was—Rampur 20, Bahraich 20, Bareilly 36, Bijnor 32. In all, 106 community members were included for focus-group discussion. These were drawn from four districts in this order: Bahraich 26 Bareilly 20, Bijnor 20, Rampur 20; Occupation-wise distribution of the community members is given in Table 1 (on previous page).

The group interacted were of different socio-economic status. In respect of age, everyone was older than 40 and younger than 65 years. Their children are therefore comparatively older and have a great say in children's educational decision. Only 9 percent were literate and have received formal education. 42 percent were literate but having only religious education. Four have secondary level (class eighth to tenth) education. Two are educated upto class twelfth. Only 17 owned land. The data also shows that 6 women are literate. Two were educated upto class eighth. One was educated upto college level and was teaching in a school. 12 women in the discussion came from the middle class and the others were from a poor background.

Analysis of information ascertained through focus group discussions with the Muslim community on girls' participation

in secondary education indicates a mixed reaction on the part of community regarding this. About 18 percent members believed that there are no such barriers that restrict Muslim girls' participation in secondary education. They all were in favour of educating their daughters. They cited a number of instances of people in the community who are educating their daughters. They stated:

"We want our daughters to be educated to higher levels and able to perform all sorts of housework, and we also like them to work outside the house to contribute to the family's income. But it is important that sons are more educated than our daughters. The problem is sons are not interested in studies. They are not interested because they are forced to contribute in the family's income due to inflation. They start earning at a very young age. Secondly, many Muslim households believe that children will not get any job even if they study."

However, majority (59%) of them said that patriarchal values continue to be a major barrier in girls' education, especially after the puberty. Seeing girls as homeworkers, people object to their mobility. Girls and their families are often teased if they are sent outside their villages for schooling. As one of the respondent, Rahman from Risia, Bahraich said:

"My daughter is studying in class IX. When I go to work or sit with my

elders they tease me [saying] his daughters will become 'collector' or he will eat his daughters' income".

Another respondent, Fakir Ahmed, a school teacher said:

"The prevalent social norms and beliefs are not in favour of girls' education. Many households do not favour girls' education once they attain puberty. They think that a girl should get married as soon as she becomes older (by 16 years). If an older girl goes to school, she is seen as a loose-character girl. People in villages feel if we do not follow the norms and beliefs of the local community who will marry our daughters? In Islam, marriage is must. Marriage is a sacred activity according to *Hadith*. It should be practiced honourably. I always try to convince the people to abstain from marrying off daughters at an early age, as it is against law as well as against human rights. Girls should be educated. It is better if you send them to school and make them educated. You will reap fruits in future. But people do not listen. Moreover, they react in a very different manner. They think if they send daughters to school, somebody has to accompany them while commuting to school and back to home. More importantly, they will not find educated bridegrooms as boys generally do not study in our areas. They have to spend more money".

"Schools do not fulfill community's basic requirement as teaching of

Urdu and values of Islam (about religious understanding)", replied a majority of people, particularly in a Bijnor sample.

Najir from Nagina town area of district Bijnor whispered that "most people considered that the overall social environment is not congenial for girls. There is always fear of disgrace and danger to honour, in case girls go out of house alone".

Ruksana Begum from village Pachtaur, Shahbad, Rampur submitted that "girls do not learn anything in schools. Parents see no reason for daughters to attend school. Rather, they feel school timings are long. Girls fail to contribute in household activities if they go to school. Girls, once they attain a little maturity, they contribute a lot in household chores, especially in rural setting. Household chores not only in terms of wage-saving activities but also in wage-earning activities. For instance, many Muslim households are engaged in embroidery work. Shopkeepers from nearby towns generally come to rural areas and give work to women and some women work at home. Women get work at home. Girls too help mothers in paid work. Spending long hours in school generally does not suit Muslim households, especially poor households."

CONCLUSIONS

Overall findings of the study are positive; with wide spread enthusiasm

for educational attainment among Muslim girls. As many of the interviews/case studies showed keen interest of girls in education. A large proportion of Muslim girls are deprived from secondary education due to parental disinterest in a girls' education, especially in situations where they have to contribute either financial or physically. Though lack of schooling facilities, school ethos and poverty are used as an excuse, but it may be in some cases. Contrary to what is commonly believed, the problem of poor status of educational attainment among Muslim girls in the secondary level is not at all about schooling facilities, school ethos and poverty, but more about prejudice, patriarchal values and religious ethos. Embedded cultural and gender biases in all sample areas are found so strong that eventually hamper Muslim girls' education after a certain age (puberty). The lessons from the case studies underline a fact that Muslim households generally are more concerned for a system for a daughter's education that can provide their girls a safe learning environment that equip girls with knowledge of secular subjects as well as moral education from an Islamic perspective. Though the elders members in the sample locations are found more inclined towards shedding their responsibility by marrying of girls as early as

they get good match for them, girls and women know the value of education in their lives. Mothers are found more strong advocates of their daughters' education. But their own helplessness and lack of empowerment restrict them to play their role in decision making for their daughters' education. The efforts on the part of government for community mobilisation and gender sensitisation have not found any significant impact on girls' education in a large proportion of Muslim population, especially in rural areas. Derogatory social biases perpetuate the practice of early marriage, and girls do not know the legislation; even if they do, they are not in a position to demand their rights to be recognized. None of the organisation is found to be working closely with the Muslim community in any of the sample location to raise awareness and break down the barriers that restrict Muslim girls from achieving their rights to education. Ensuring participation of Muslim girls in secondary education is not just about ensuring school access, it is more about enabling Muslim girls to gain access. Strenuous efforts are required that could lead to better-targeted awareness programmes for making girls' education a priority for every Muslim households and making the fathers and brothers more open to safeguarding girls' right to education.

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