

Participation of Muslims in Education

Policy Perspective and Provisions

SAVITA KAUSHAL*

Abstract

This paper presents analytical review of the policy perspective and schemes initiated to facilitate inclusion and participation of Muslims in education in India. It seeks to map the measures and resultant outcomes, in an effort to identify gaps and suggest suitable initiatives to better understand the drivers and facilitators of the exclusion, and how the challenge for inclusion of Muslims in education in India could not be met. In the light of the available data, the paper re-examines the existing government policies to tackle the educational backwardness of Muslims in terms of the extent to which they have been successful in dealing with their problems.

INTRODUCTION

It is well known that education squarely leads to the development of the disadvantaged groups in the society. Without educating them it is not possible for the nation to develop as well as deal with the issues of oppression. In this context it will be appropriate to cite what eminent sociologist Durkheim (1956) stated about six decades back 'education

is to arouse and develop physical, intellectual and moral states'.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENTS

The equality of opportunity and social justice were not seen in isolation from each other and they have been recognised as the guiding principles of development planning in independent India. As a result, there are several constitutional provisions that give

* Assistant Professor, Department of Training and Capacity Building in Education, National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA), New Delhi -110016.

stress on safeguarding interest and rights of Muslims as a minority. In Indian Constitution, there are certain fundamental rights (Articles 15-17, 25 - 30) and directive principles (Articles 330-339 and 380) that are meant for protection of minorities in the Nation. Article 29 talks about the minorities in terms of protection of their interests (1A). As per this Article, any sections of the citizens residing in India have a right to conserve their own distinct language, script or culture. Furthermore, it also states that on grounds of religion, race, caste, language or any of them, no citizen will be refused admission into any educational institution maintained by the state or receiving aid out of the funds of the state.

Article 30 of the Constitution focused on the rights of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions. As per this Article, all minorities (based on religion or language) have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. Furthermore, it also states that while granting aid to educational institutions the state shall not show any distinction or discrimination for any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority (based on religion or language).

The Article 29 (2) aims at providing the protection not only of the religious minorities but also of local or linguistic minorities. As per this Article, on the grounds of

caste, race, religion, or language no citizen will be denied admission into any educational institution that is maintained by the state or receiving aid out of state funds.

Here, it would be relevant to cite the Supreme Court judgement of 12 August 2005 as per these unaided intuitions (minority as well as non-minority) had full right to admit students of their preference in medicine, engineering and other professional courses without government interference. The bench also said that that the minority institutions would be given freedom to grant admission to students as per their own choice, including students of non-minority community and also members of their own community from other states, both to a limited extent only and not in a manner and to such an extent that their minority educational institution status is laid out. On doing so, they lose the protection of Article 30 (1) of the constitution relating to minority communities.

INTERVENTIONS INITIATED

A number of programmes were initiated and institutions were set up by the Government of India from time-to-time for meeting the constitutional provisions and also plan requirements. At first in 1978 the National Commission for Minorities was. In 1993 it was granted the constitutional status. The commission took up number of functions for the effective implementation of

safeguards provided under the Constitution for protection of the interests of the minorities and making recommendations in this context to the central government or the state government as per the requirements of the case. There is also a minority cell under this commission which looks after the problems being faced by minority educational institutions with a view to recognition, affiliation, grant-in-aid, etc.

In order to give more attention of government schemes and programmes to minorities, a list of 41 minority concentration districts was prepared in 1987. This list was based on criterion of 20 per cent or more minority population in a district based on the data from 1971 Census.

Minorities kept on getting the developmental benefits along with other backward classes till the Seventh Five Year Plan. The Government of India set up Maulana Azad Education Foundation (MAEF) for providing educational plans and schemes for the advantage of educationally backward minorities and also weaker sections. It also helps in setting up residential schools particularly for girls in order to provide up to date education to them and also promote research and other initiatives for the advantage of educationally backward minorities.

The Foundation provides grants-in-aid to NGOs for construction and expansion of schools/hostels, technical/vocational training centres having emphasis on girl students and scholarships to meritorious

girl-students. The different schemes run by the Foundation are financial assistance for purchase of equipments and furniture and also for setting up/strengthening vocational/technical training centre/institutes. It also gives Maulana Azad Literacy Awards.

The National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation (NMDFC) established in 1994 aims at promoting economic activities amongst the backward sections of notified minorities. The NMDFC provides concessional finance for self-employment activities to the poorest of poor among the minority communities. In addition to this, it also gives education loans to them.

In the year 2005 on the occasion of Independence Day the Prime Minister, declared a 15-point programme that aimed at the well-being of minorities. The programme aimed at ensuring that the benefits of the government schemes for the underprivileged reached the targeted sections that are basically underprivileged sections among the minorities. The 15-point programme also intended to ensure even handed flow of benefits of the scheme to minorities. It also emphasised that the minority concentration areas should be allocated some proportion of the development projects. It specifically mentioned that, wherever possible, 15 per cent of the outlays and targets under the different schemes should be outlaid for minorities. The programme basically intended to

enhance opportunities for education and ensuring an equitable share for minorities in economic activities and employment, not only through the existing government schemes but also through new government schemes. It also focused on support for self-employment by the way of credit support and recruitment to state and central government jobs. It also envisaged at ensuring an appropriate share for minorities in infrastructure development schemes thereby improving living conditions of minorities. The programme objective is also to prevent and control communal disharmony and violence.

The plight of Muslims was elaborated in the Sachar Committee Report, 2008 (Government of India, 2006: 14-15). The appalling socio-economic plight of the Muslim community was presented by the Justice Rajinder Sachar Report. It emphasised the urgent need to implement special measures for the upliftment of the socio-economic conditions of Muslims. Accordingly, the Multi-Sectoral Development Programme was conceived as a special initiative of the follow-up action on the Sachar Committee recommendations. This scheme was launched in 2008-09 in the beginning the Eleventh Five Year Plan and launched in the year 2008-09. It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) approved by the Government. It was introduced in 90 Minority Concentration Districts (MCDs). It is an area development initiative that

aims at addressing the development deficits of minority concentration areas by creating socio-economic infrastructure and providing basic facilities. The programme mainly aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of minorities and also providing basic amenities to them for improving the quality of life of the people and reducing imbalances in the identified minority concentration areas during the Twelfth Five Year Plan period. The projects to be taken up under Multi-Sectoral Development Programmes (MsDP) would be associated with the provision of better infrastructure for education, skill development, health, sanitation, pucca housing, roads, drinking water, besides schemes for creating income generating opportunities. The scheme aimed at providing additional resources and taking up projects for the welfare of the minorities was to plug in the gaps in the prevalent schemes of the Government of India.

In addition to this, there is centrally sponsored free coaching and allied scheme that aimed at empowering the students/candidates of notified minority communities in terms of their skills and capabilities to make them employable in industries, by assisting them as well as those institutions working for them, to the market dynamics on a continuous basis so that they were not deprived of the professional wisdom demanded by business sectors in addition to the government sector.

'Project Hunar' initiated by National Institute of Open Schooling keeping in mind the unique existential problems of the young Muslim girls. It was initiated as collaboration in between through Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC), Bihar Government and Government of India. National Institute of Open Schooling and 'Project Hunar' was aimed at providing free, skill based training to poor, Muslim girls (11-14/16 years) mostly out of school. The project was successful in Bihar and as a result, later on, the Project was also started in walled city area of Delhi which has a large Muslim population.

GAPS STILL UNFULFILLED

This socio-economic backwardness of Muslims is not simply established by the individual surveys, researches, and papers and voluntary organisations but also by various Committees appointed by Government of India from time-to-time. Under the chairmanship of Dr Gopal Singh a High Power Panel, that was set up with the purpose of knowing about the socio-economic state of the Indian minorities established that the Muslims are backward. After three decades, the findings of the Prime Minister's High Level Committee under the chairmanship of Justice Rajinder Sachar, constituted to find out into educational and socio-economic position of Muslims (GOI, 2006) reaffirmed these findings.

Along with this, the Gopal Singh Report, the reports of 43rd Round and

55th Round and 64th Round of the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) and the programme for action under the new education policy of 1986 also showed that the Muslim minority is educationally the most backward segment of the nation. The NSSO confirmed that in educational front, Muslim minority which is the India's biggest religious minority is the most backward community. In higher education also, Muslims' ratio is lower than even that of the Scheduled Tribes (STs) who are considered to be most backward. On the basis 64th round household survey, the NSSO brought out a report that presented the state of participation and expenditure in education. Under this survey, a random sample of more than four hundred thousand persons (4, 45,960) were covered. These persons were from 63,318 rural households and 37,263 urban households from nearly eight thousand villages (7953) and about five thousand urban blocks (4682), spread over the entire geographical area of the country. As per the report out of every hundred Muslims in the education system, just ten moved higher up the ladder and got enrolled in high school and above. In fact, this ratio for Scheduled Tribes (STs) is eleven, Scheduled Castes (SCs) twelve and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) fourteen thereby indicating that position of Muslim was worse than that of the Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes and the Other Backward Classes. Another astonishing fact that was brought forth by the report was

that high education among Muslims in rural areas was more than their counterparts in urban areas.

As per the Sachar Committee Report, there was 85.3 per cent enrolment of children in the age-group of 6 to 14 years at the all-India level. It was further noted that the enrolment of Muslim children of this age-group was lower than the national average (81.8 per cent – as well as relative to ‘All Others’ (89.9 per cent). The report however stated that enrolment of Muslim children in the age-group of 6 to 14 years was higher than SCs/STs (79.3 per cent). The report further stated that the gap between Muslims and other SRCs advanced as the level of education became higher. As per the report, there has been spreading out of educational opportunities since Independence (Chapter 4, Section 3, Page 60). This has not resulted in the convergence of Muslims and ‘all others’. In its chapter four the Report, (Section 10, Page 85) states that Muslims have appreciably low achievement level in higher secondary attainment rate and this is one of the main reasons for low participation of Muslims in higher education. Muslims appear to have considerable disadvantages *vis-à-vis* most SRCs (socio-religious communities). The report also concludes that that this community feels that it is getting increasingly marginalised and discriminated.

The Committee further stated that the Muslim Community felt discriminated as they had

experienced deprivation in quality education not only in absolute but also in relative terms. They felt alienated as they were feeling that are getting increasingly marginalised. The findings pinpointed that the overall literacy rates of Muslims was lower (59.1 per cent as against 65.1 per cent - national average) and also lower in comparison with growth rate of literacy across different SRCs, in terms of enrolment rates, attendance rates, dropout rates and matriculation completion rates, mean years of schooling, differentials in educational attainments of different SRCs. On the basis of the findings, the report finally concluded that Muslims have one of the lowest enrolment rates at school level. In addition, among Muslims, it is the girl child’s condition which is most vulnerable. As per the report, the biggest stumbling block in access to higher/technical education was the elementary education. This restricted their employment and income generating potential. It cited that state could make urgent interventions firstly in the field of elementary education; secondly, it could also promote Urdu medium schools in the immediate neighbourhood; thirdly integrate traditional educational institutions like *Madarsas* and *Maktabas* into the mainstream education system and last, but not the least, by the way of imparting suitable skill/vocational based training at elementary/secondary level to Muslim children, both girls and boys.

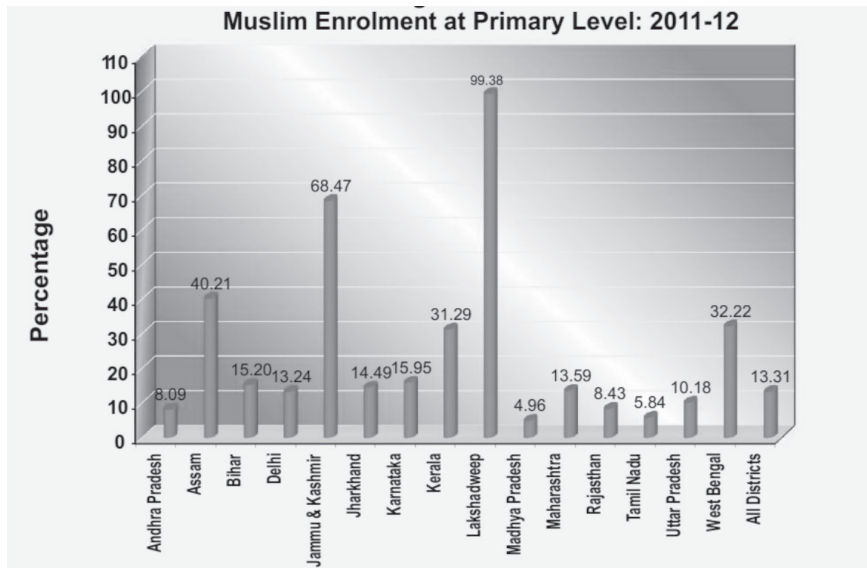


Fig. 1

Source: NUEPA (2013) : Elementary Education in India : a Graphic Presentation Based on DISE Data

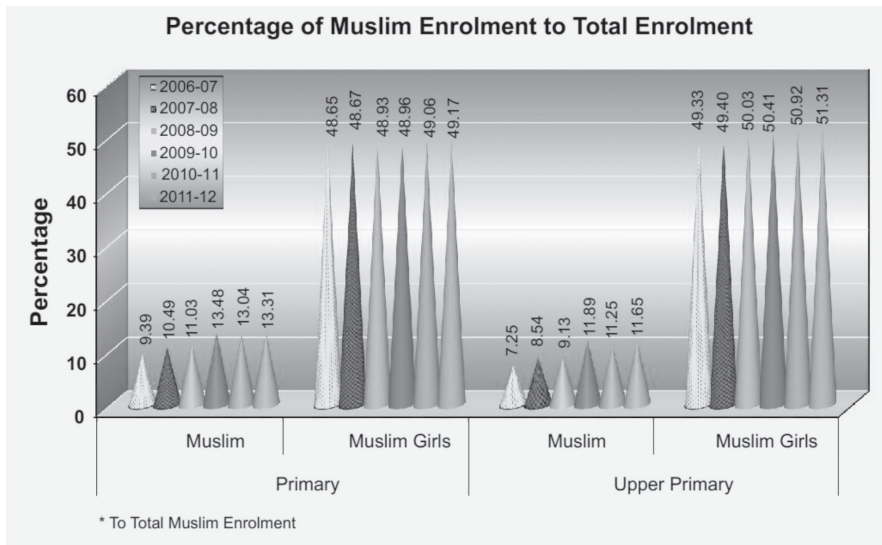


Fig. 2

Source: NUEPA (2013) : Elementary Education in India : a Graphic Presentation Based on DISE Data

As per the DISE data, the representation and subsequently per centage of enrolment of Muslim girls in the total Muslim enrolment at primary level has shown a slight improvement from 48.65 per cent to 49.17 per cent at primary stage over a span of 6 years i.e. from 2006-07 to 2011-12. Likewise, at upper primary level also there is slight improvement in enrolment of girls from 49.33 per cent to 51.31 per cent at upper primary level from the year 2006-07 to 2011-12 (Figure 2)

(Dreze and Kingdon, 1999) found in their study that the parents' decision and the situation in the child's household play the most influential role in children's participation in school. Other factors include poverty and lack of education that determine Muslim children's participation. These major factors play a greater role than the notion that Muslim culture is inimical to schooling. As per (Ramachandran, 2013) higher number of people in poverty, those from disadvantaged communities (SC, ST, new migrants, Muslims) end up attending schools that are more likely to have very poor facilities, indifferent teachers (in government schools) or poorly qualified teachers (in low-cost private schools) or are multi-grade with two or more classes sitting together with one teacher. Such schools are now referred to as high-poverty schools. Such schools exist in both the government sector as well as the private sector. Income inequality has led to the increasing

spatial segregation of high-income families from middle-income and low-income families – with the poorest often relegated to the outskirts of cities or specific habitations in rural areas.

As per the National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities Report (2007) within the minorities, Muslims (65.31 per cent) are better off at primary level of education but their proportion goes down at the higher level as evident from data — secondary (10.96 per cent) and senior secondary (4.53 per cent) stages. At the primary level, Christians (45.79 per cent) are lower than the national average but situation is not so as their level increases not only at the secondary level (17.48 per cent) but also at the senior secondary (8.70 per cent) level. In national average is being followed by other religions.

(The Prime Minister's High Level Committee, 2010) in its report entitled "Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India" stated that in India there have been a broad range of programmes and policy initiatives by different governments from time-to-time for promotion of the economic, social and educational development of the minority communities. The Muslims have made some noticeable improvement, but the view still remains that the educational and economic gap among the community and the rest of the SRCs has been widening. By providing equal opportunity and rights to all its citizens, the Indian

Constitution makers hoped that the problem of minorities in India could be solved and, some day, minorities and the majorities could form 'one community', but it could not.

The Muslims comprised 12.4 per cent of the population of India as per the 2001 Census. In the year 2012-13, the enrolment figures clearly showed that the per centage of Muslim children in elementary level exceeded that number. The enrolment of Muslim children at primary level was 14.2 per cent. For upper primary level, it was slightly low (12.1 per cent) in 2012-13. As per this the enrolment of Muslim students at the elementary level 13.15 per cent. There has been a visible increase in enrolment from barely 8.3 per cent to more than 13 per cent is due to improvement in access to elementary education.

It is also observed that there is increase in enrolment of Muslim girls in schools and their retention. As a result, the number of dropouts from the community came down from three crore in 2001 to 30 lakhs by March 2013. The Maulana Azad Taleem-e-

Baligan has also been drawn up to impart functional literacy to a crore Muslim adults in the 15-plus age-group (quoted from news item entitled 'Enrolment of Muslims in elementary schools' (Hindu, 7th January, 2014). The figures for the National Literacy *vis-a-vis* Muslim literacy for the 2001 and 2011 indicate that over the last decade, there has been not much improvement in terms of Muslim literacy (Table 1).

Recent data on development (India HDI 2011; NSSO, 2011; NSSO 2013) does not demonstrate any noteworthy improvements in the status of Muslims, which is a serious folly. It is also right that data collection, systematic tracking as well as analysing of performance of Muslims is a bit sketchy and is not profound at best. The fact that there are insufficient academic thoughts on Muslim deprivation and development, one is not fully aware as to what works best for Muslims, countrywide. This is a noteworthy gap, keeping in view of how important their outcomes are for inclusive growth and development.

Table 1
Literacy Among Muslims vis-a-vis National Literacy

Year	Muslim Literacy			National Literacy			Difference of Average Muslim versus National
	Male	Female	Average	Male	Female	Average	
2001	67.6%	50.10%	59.10%	75.3%	53.7%	64.8%	5.7%
2011	74.9%	50.3%	67.69%	82.14%	65.46%	74.6%	6%

CONCLUSION

The minority issue in Indian society and polity is a very broad one involving several dimensions: social, political, religious, linguistic, cultural and ethnic. In recognition of the unique problems of the Muslims, the Indian government has consistently developed policies for their economic, social and political empowerment. The Constitution of India has provided safeguards to Muslim minorities in respect of their religious and cultural freedom. In light of various reports regarding the educational backwardness of Muslims, government has framed different

programmes with enough monetary allocations to tackle the inequity faced by minority communities in particular the Muslim minority community in the social, economic and educational sphere. Though these policies and constitutional provisions aim to bring out some positive change, however, the process of transformation has been extremely slow in reducing the gaps between the Muslim community and the rest of the Indian society. Keeping this in view, India has to make appropriate interventions for inclusion of Muslims and face challenges of their education and subsequent empowerment.

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