
An Overview of Educational Status of Muslim Women in India

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Abstract:

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

– Dr. B R Ambedkar

The word 'women' plays many roles in our society. A woman is the generator and also a destroyer. She is the producer of a new generation and also a transformer of the vast society. 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. Education becomes one of the pivotal concerns for all persons while addressing human right and development. While historically there has always been a gap between the education of boys and girls, especially in the Muslim family of our country India. Equality and empowerment of women both are necessary to bring about an egalitarian human society. The present study thus aimed to discuss the present educational status of Muslim women in India.

Keywords: Muslim women, Education, Empowerment, Development, Literacy.

1. 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. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing".

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, 17.22crore Muslims constitute 14.23% of total population in India. Muslims are the largest Minority group in India which is seriously lagging in terms of most of the human development indicators. Poverty, unemployment and illiteracy are the curses on the Muslim community in the country India. Among the Muslim population, approx 48% of them are women. Muslim girls and women lag behind their male counterparts in every sphere of life. Proper education can be helpful for the Muslim women to establish their socio-economical position in the present society. Financial independence can be achieved through education which is a major step towards Muslim women empowerment in this 21st century. The objectives of the present study are as follows:

- To discuss the importance of Muslim women education.
- To explain the historical perspective of Muslim women education in India
- To find out the literacy rate of Muslim population in India.
- To discuss the present educational status of Muslim women in India.
- To identify the problems of Muslim women education in India.

The study is purely theoretical and descriptive in nature. The researchers have used secondary data and various government reports to analyze the context.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

"A researcher cannot perform significant research without first understanding the literature in the field" (Boote & Beile, 2005, p.3). Review of related literature in the area of enquiry is a crucial component of the research process. A review of related literature and previous researches in the present study is attempted below:

Aggarwal, M. (2014) 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.

Hoque, M.J. (2016) 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.

Biswas, R. (2016), 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.

Begum, R. (1998) conducted a study on, "An empirical study of Muslim women's education in two villages of rural West Bengal". From the study I have get acquainted that, the factors which act as a barrier for 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.

Kumar, S. S. and Palanisamy, M. (2013), 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.

3. IMPORTANCE OF MUSLIM WOMEN EDUCATION

"Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another." - Nelson Mandela.

According Islam, "A mother's lap is the first school for child." There is no priority for men over women in relation to the right to education. Both are equally encouraged in Islam to get education. Thus importances of Muslim women education are as follows:-

- Education helps to increase self confidence within Muslim women.
- It helps to raise the status of Muslim women in the patriarchal society.
- Education helps in increasing self efficacy among Muslim women.
- Helps in upward social mobility of the Muslim women in the society.
- Education brings awareness among the Muslim women, about their rights and duties in the society.
- Education enlarged the Muslim women's career opportunities for future.
- Education increase their financial independency and autonomy in the society.
- Changing the stereotyped mindset of all Muslim individuals in the society.
- Bringing awareness of gender equity and equality in the Muslim community.
- Education helps to develop ability for critical thinking and logical reasoning among Muslim women.
- Education developed leadership qualities among Muslim women.

- Muslim women education will also help them to get empowered in every sphere of life i.e. educationally, socially, politically and economically.
- Muslim women must be educated for a healthy and a happy life. An educated woman can be a better human being, successful mother and a responsible citizen.

Napoleon once rightly said, "Give me educated mothers and I will give you educated nations."

4. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF MUSLIM WOMEN EDUCATION IN INDIA

4.1 Before Independence

- **19th Century:** At the start of 19th century the indigenous system of learning was very popular. The indigenous systems of learning in those centuries were like pathshalas, makhtabs and madarsas. The Muslim women of etiquette family were taught only to read the Quran in Arabic and incidentally to read Urdu and Persian. The struggle for formal education of Muslim women began at the end of 19th century.
- **1894:** Sir Maulana Hali and Sheikh Abdullah played major role to fight for the causes of education for Muslim Women in India. Sir Maulana Hali started a small primary school for the daughters of his family and friends in Panipat.
- **1896:** A revolution was started by Khwaja Ghulam-us-Salam in annual session of Muslim Education Conference for giving some attention to the education of Muslim women in the country.
- **1902:** Sheikh Abdullah became the secretary of the women's bench at the annual session of the Muslim Education Conference in Delhi. It was decided there that, the school be a normal school for training of women teachers so that they can teach Muslim girls of standard families in their homes.
- **1903:** Sultan Jahan was the Begum of Bhopal and also the first woman in the Indian history who believed in the emancipation of women through education. She started the first school for Muslim girls in 1903 which was the Sultania schools.
- **1904:** Sheikh Abdullah published a monthly magazine 'Khatoon', to popularize the idea of a school for Muslim girls in Aligarh.
- **1906:** A resolution was passed in the annual Muslim Education Conference session at Lucknow, to establish a girl's school in Aligarh and the school was opened in the year 1906.
- **1911:** Sakhawat Memorial Girls High School started in Bengal by Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain. It was also memorable contribution for Muslim women education in Bengal.
- **1912:** Maulana Karamat Hussain and the Raja of Mahmudabad also supported girl's education and started a girl's school in Lucknow in the year 1912.

Then the British Government came who adopted a liberal policy for promoting women education. A number of schemes were started by the British Govt. There were some memorable leaders including Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Annie Besant and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan who advocated women education in our country. In 1875 Sir Syed Ahmad Khan founded the Mohammedan Anglo Oriental (MAO) College at Aligarh which came as a turning point in the educational history of Muslims in India. After 1920 the college was came to be known as the famous Aligarh Muslim University.

4.2 After Independence

Many committee and commissions were setup after independence like University Education Commission (1948-49), Secondary Education Commission (1952-53), National Committee on Women Education (1958-59), Kothari Education Commission (1964-66), National Policy on Education (1979), National Policy of Education (1986), The National Perspective plan on women (1988), etc. All the commission and committees emphasized the problem of women in general but not specifically for Muslim women. Now in 21st century education of Muslim women is linked with socio-cultural and economical development of India. So, Muslim women's participation in education is of prime

important in our country. Education is a significant component as well as facilitator of development of Muslim women in the whole world.

5. LITERACY RATE OF MUSLIM POPULATION IN INDIA

Table 1: Literacy Rate among Religious Communities: (in percentage)

Religious Community	Female	Male	Total
Muslims	51.9	62.41	57.155
Hindus	55.98	70.78	63.38
Jains	84.93	87.86	86.395
Christians	71.97	76.78	74.375
Sikhs	63.29	71.32	67.305
Buddhists	65.6	77.87	71.735
Others	41.38	59.38	50.38

Source: Census report of 2011

Table 1 reveals the literacy rates among the religious communities in India according to the census 2011. It is seen that the literacy rate of Muslim females is only 51.9% which is lower than all other religious communities and it is even lower than the national average of females i.e. 65.46%.

Table 2: Percentage of Illiteracy among Religious Communities: (in percentage)

Religious Community	Percentage of Illiteracy
Hindus	36.39
Muslims	42.72
Jains	13.57
Christians	25.65
Sikhs	32.49
Buddhists	28.16
Others	49.65

Source: Government of India Census report 2011.

Table 2 reveals the illiteracy rates among the religious communities in India according to the census 2011. From the data we can observe that, Muslim is the highest illiterate community in India having 42.72% of illiterates. Whereas Jain is the lowest illiterate community in India having only 13.57% of illiterates.

6. PRESENT EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN INDIA

Table 3: Percentage of literacy among Muslim population in India:

Total Muslim population in India	Illiterate		Literate	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
17.22 crore	19.26%	23.45%	31.98%	25.29%

Source: Government of India Census report 2011

Table 3 reveals that, there are 17.22crore Muslims constitute 14.23% of total population in India. The percentage of illiteracy among Muslim female in India which is 23.45% of the total Muslim population in India whereas the illiteracy among Muslim males are 19.26% of the total Muslim population of India. In India also Muslim females are more illiterate than male.

Table 4: Percentage of Muslim Population in various educational levels in India: (in percentage)

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	15.18	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: Government of India Census 2011

M: Male

F: Female

Table 4 highlights the percentage of Muslim Population in various educational levels in India. Here we can observe that, Muslim female have very low percentage in every levels of education, especially in the technical education i.e. only 0.12% of the total Muslim literate population. Maximum Muslim women are at primary level i.e. 12.88% of the total Muslim literate population. The Muslim male populations are more educated in every levels of education according to the census report of 2011.

According to Sachar committee report (2006), the share of Muslims in all courses is low particularly at the post-graduate level and marginal in the science stream. Only one out of the 25 under-graduate students and one out of the 50 postgraduate students is a Muslim in the premier colleges. Muslims have the highest dropout rate in the country. The studies by Nayer (2007), Hussain (2009) and Jafri (2010) also indicate Muslim women are marked with stark educational backwardness. According to 2011 Census of India, the percentage of illiteracy among Muslim female are 48.1% whereas the illiteracy among Muslim males are 37.59% of the total population. Less than 4% of Muslims graduate from school compared to 6% of the total population.

7. PROBLEMS OF MUSLIM WOMEN EDUCATION

Following are the most frequent problems of Muslim women education in India:-

- Poor economic condition of the Muslim parents in rural India.
- Teaching and learning procedure in the schools are not attractive and effective.
- Poor student-teacher ratio in rural schools of our country.
- 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.
- Schools are not available within walking distance for which Muslim parents are a bit reluctant due to the feeling of insecurity.
- Unsuitable social environment for women education in our country.
- Socio-economical poverty prevalent in rural sector of the country.
- Lack of awareness among the Muslim parent about the importance of women education.
- Negative attitude of the government toward Muslim women education in our country.
- Prevalent child marriage in our country.
- Female students drop out and stagnation in the schools.
- Madrasas and Maktabas running at traditional pattern in our country.

8. FURTHER SUGGESTIONS

- a) Eradicating religious superstitions is the first steps toward Muslim women education and empowerment in our country.
- b) Making Muslim girls more confident is another true step toward women education in Muslim community.
- c) Increase the awareness among Muslims about the importance of education in their life.
- d) Governmental initiatives are also necessary for providing Muslim Women free and compulsory education for their upliftment.
- e) 'Right of employment' should be declared as fundamental rights for Muslim Women.
- f) Provisions should be made by the government for the reservation of employment for educated Muslim women in our country.

- g) Muslim women should be provided professional technical and vocational education.
- h) Computer knowledge should be given to girls students of our country.
- i) The government should implement the recommendation of Sachar Committee for the educational upliftment of Muslim women in our country.
- j) Sufficient industries should be established for the employment of Muslim girls in our country.
- k) Reservation should be made for Muslim Women in the appointment of teachers in women's colleges and co-educational institutions.

9. CONCLUSION

Education is the basic and fundamental requirement of a person to survive in the world. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "To educate one man, you educate one person, but to educate a woman, you educate a whole civilization". It means education not only empower the women but empower the whole society. From the study I can sum up that the Indian Muslims women are far behind in achieving the literacy status because of their poor economical conditions and religious superstition. The education and empowerment of Muslim women has become one of the most important and modern phenomenon of 21st century not only at National level but also International level. The government of India 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 of giving free and compulsory education for the children belonging to the age group of 6-14 years. This initiated Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in our country. The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but empowers the government to take special steps for the betterment of Muslim women. Now it's the duty of the Muslim women also to participate in the educational process of our country then only the educational status of Muslim women will improve in future.

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