

Role of Madarsa Education in Empowerment of Muslims in India

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Abstract: A large population of Muslims in India are receiving education either from Madarsas or from Urdu-medium schools. Madarsa is an Arabic word which means an educational institution. They were never limited to provide only religious education. But this concept has been changed and Madarsas have become the centre of religious education only. Nowadays marginalized Muslim communities are increasingly demanding more quality education from their Madarsas. But most of the Madarsas in India are privately owned and Madarsa leaders may not feel a need to fulfil the community desires. Although Muslim parents are attracted to the safe environment of these schools, they are aware that a purely religious education will not help their children to earn a decent living, because of outdated traditional methods and technique of teaching and learning, with a negative outlook towards modern subjects and also due to lack of innovations, experiments and researches. The main concern of this paper is to find out the contribution of Madarsa education in the empowerment of Muslims and point out the shortcomings of Madarsa education. This paper suggests some remedial measures also to improve the quality of Madarsa education for overall development of Muslim community.

Keywords: Madarsa education, Muslims, Empowerment.

I. Introduction

The development of any nation depends on its educational system and it is proved that education is the key to human progress and social change. Education is a powerful tool for empowerment of individual. It helps in developing confidence in individual and community about their own capacities, inherent strengths to shape their lives and thus enhance the inner strength. Education is the means by which societies have been known in history, to grow out of oppression to democratic participation and involvement.

Empowerment is seen as matter of providing at least to some extent means of subsistence as a right. However empowerment in general is understood as means to enable to control the personal, communal and societal environment to foster their own development. Thus empowerment is defined as a matter of access and participation always being a process of getting empowered rather than being concerned with a status of being empowered. The education holds the key to the empowerment of Indian Muslims. Education is one of the most powerful factors for the political, social, economic or spiritual development of individuals and communities. It helps individuals to acquire the confidence and capability to match the levels of those who are in the mainstream in society. For empowering a community, it is required that access to quality education be ensured for the community. Nowadays marginalized Muslim communities are increasingly demanding more quality education from their Madarsas. But most of the Madrasas in India are privately owned, Madrasa leaders may not feel a need to respond to community desires.

Madrasa education seems to be working on old traditional pattern as there is no emphasis on any research. Therefore research projects should be undertaken on various aspects of Madrasa education. Scholars associated with Madrasas and Jamias as well as with modern Universities should be encouraged to work meaningfully in the area of Madrasa education. Madarsas are centres of free education. They are the nucleus of the cultural and educational life of Muslims. These Madarsas, as an invaluable instrument of traditional education, have played a vital role in spreading literacy among the down-trodden segments of the Muslim society. Only the poor segment of Muslim community is resigned to sending their children to Madarsas which not only offer them free education but also free boarding and lodging.

Most of the Madarsas are averse to the introduction of modern education. However, that some of the Madarsas have introduced modern education complemented with religious education. In majority of these Madarsas, though, the students have no access to modern secular education. If modern education is introduced in these Madarsas, it will certainly create conditions for promoting modern and secular outlook among students and empower them to participate as equal partners in an inclusive society. These Madarsas should serve as a vehicle for articulating the Islamic cultural heritage and universal values that are deeply embedded in the tradition, consciousness and identity of the Muslim community.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study are:

- To analyze the role of Madarsa education in empowerment of Muslims in India.
- To find out the problems faced by the Indian Madarsas.
- To suggest some remedial measures for improvement of Madarsa education.

Educational Status of Indian Muslims

The national educational policy (1986) stressed the need of the liberalization of education to liberate marginalized sections of the society. The policy recommended for the use of distance education media in a massive way to reach those un-reached. The Sachar Committee (2006) report indicated about the educational status of Muslims. The findings showed that Muslims were the most educationally backward community in the country. Comprising nearly 13% of India's population, Muslim enrolment at the primary school level (Class1-5) was a meager 9.39% of total enrolment figures for 2006-07.

Table-1

Percentage of Muslim Minority enrolment in India (2006-10)				
YEAR	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Primary Level	9.39	10.49	11.03	13.04
Upper Primary Level	7.52	8.54	9.13	11.47
Elementary Level	8.89	9.95	10.49	12.58

Source: District Information System for Education (DISE)

The preliminary analysis of provisional data suggests a significant improvement in participation of Muslim Minority children in elementary education programmes. Muslim children in **Primary classes** in 2009-10 was **13.04 percent**, while the percent share of Muslim enrolment during the previous year was 11.03 percent, 10.49 percent in 2007-08 and in 2006-07, it was 9.39 percent. Like enrolment in Primary classes, percentage of Muslim enrolment in **Upper Primary classes** has also improved to **11.47 percent** in 2009-10 from 9.13 percent in 2008-09, 8.54 percent in 2007-08 and 7.52 percent in 2006-07. The **elementary level** data also shows increasing trend of Muslim enrolment i.e. 8.89 percent in 2006-07, 9.95 in 2007-08, and 10.49 in 2008-09 and **12.58 percent** in 2009-10.

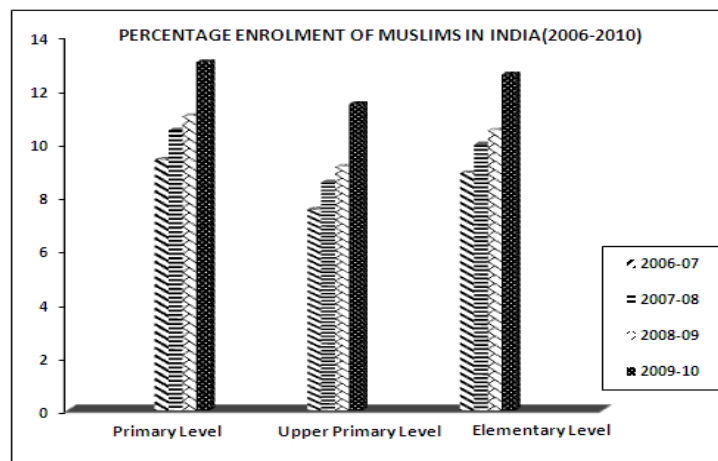


Fig.1

Table-2 which is given below used the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) data, more specifically, 66th survey (2009-10). These are the largest sample surveys in India that provide information on the caste and religion of the respondents along with information on education and employment characteristics.

Table-2

Percentage Distribution of Persons by Education for each Socio-religious Category, (17-29 years) 2009-10.									
	Hindu UC	Hindu OBC	Hindu SC	Hindu ST	Muslim OBC	Muslim GEN	Muslim All	Other Minorities	All
Not literate	5.7	16.2	24.7	30.1	26.1	18.8	22.3	8.8	17.1
Secondary & below	51.2	59.3	60.8	58.0	59.0	67.7	63.8	56.2	58.2
Higher Secondary	24.0	16.1	10.0	8.6	10.2	9.7	9.8	22.1	15.5
Graduate & above	19.2	8.5	4.5	3.0	4.8	3.8	4.1	13.0	9.2
All	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO)

Table-2 provides summary information on the distribution of population (17-29 years) by educational attainment for 2009-10. Literacy rate among Muslims is lower than most other Socio-religious Category (except for SCs and STs) and has not increased fast enough to converge with literacy rates of high caste groups. Literacy rate is lowest for Hindu-ST and also low for Hindu SC. In higher Education Hindu UC shows largest contribution, while Muslims show their highest share in the category Secondary & below. So it may be summarized that although in recent years Muslim enrolment rate has increased but most of the Muslims acquired education only up to the Secondary level.

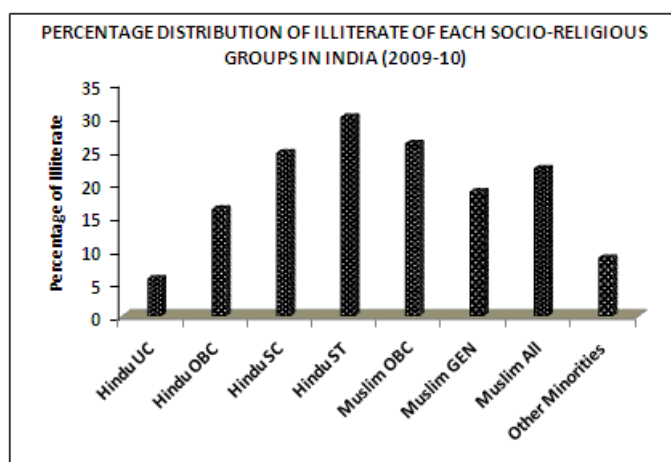


Fig.2

The situation has become so depressing that if urgent remedial measures are not undertaken the things would slip out of hand. With limited access to good quality public schools, coupled with increasing identity pride and communal prejudices, poor Indian Muslims send their children either in madarsas or in the Urdu-medium schools that serve Muslim communities. This is especially true for parents of Muslim girls who believe that their daughters will be safe in an Urdu-medium school.

Role of Madarsa Education in Empowerment of Indian Muslims

We live in a competitive world today, where education in general and professional education in particular, is in great demand. The common people are aware of the advantages of modern education and even for an enlightened and inclusive democracy, it is necessary that all sections and classes of people are well educated and intellectually equipped to shoulder the responsibility for a free nation. Education occupies a unique role in the process of empowerment of minorities especially Muslims in the contemporary Indian context. As the Muslim community has lagged behind educationally over the decades, it is necessary to advance, foster and promotes the education of this community at a quicker pace and as a matter of priority. Next to Indonesia, India is home to the largest number of Muslims in any single country in the world.

We should learn from, the words of the Prophet (Mohammad Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam): “Seek knowledge even, if it is to be found in a place as distant as, China.”

Madarsas are religious educational institutions through which the Muslim community ensures that future generations acquire knowledge of Islam. Madarsas both in historical origin and perception of those who

manage them seek to preserve religious tradition and are seen as an important instrument of identity maintenance.

The system of education followed in them is outdated and out of tune with the present-day environment of expertise. Muslims can redeem their destiny and preserve their identity by providing quality education to their children. Muslim students should strive hard to acquire knowledge of the modern world. The purpose of education is to equip and empower students to cope with the world in which they live, benefiting from available opportunities as well as contributing to the common good. Managers of Madarsas are wholly confused about the definite aims and objectives of Madarsa education. There is no uniform or scientific curriculum for Madarsas. In most of the Madarsas, even the basic infrastructure needed for a primary school, including proper building and teaching equipments is not available. The Madarsas subsist on small donations and charities and are cash-strapped at all times. These Madarsas have outdated system of examination and evaluation. What students learn in Madarsas is very largely based on religious instructions that fail to equip them with the skills required today.

Muslims in India must realize that they are actually scraping the bottom of the education barrel in an era of internationalism. Information Technology and further cultural transmission through the electronic media has brought the international community very close to each other. In order to attain integrity, peace and prosperity and basic security of their life, the Muslim community must concentrate their efforts on the task of restructuring their system of education in general and Madarsa education in particular. In respect of the Madarsa education there is a need, to preserve the delicate balance between the emphasis on the religious underpinning of the community, on which the Muslim community lays special emphasis, and the need to make education a powerful tool for empowering the community to claim its legitimate place within the educational and developmental mainstream of the country. The Madarsas will need to be revitalized to meet the challenge of the modern world. Strong emphasis will need to be laid on quality of education and expanding the base of science, information and technology. The Madarsas must focus on the relevance of Islamic teachings to modern pluralistic, secular and inclusive society.

There is a need for an integrated curriculum combining traditional Islamic themes and subjects as well as the contents of the subjects according to national syllabi. Special focus on the education of backward minorities is a significant feature of the National Policy on Education and a number of schemes have been launched in the past to promote this objective. Area Intensive Programme for Educationally Backward Minorities, Modernization of Madarsa Education Scheme for Appointment of Urdu Teachers and Part time Arabic/ Persian Teachers are some of them. It is high time that a new approach is attempted wherein all these schemes are implemented in an integrated fashion. Introduction of modern education in Madarsas will help in the balanced growth of a student's total personality and lead to the creation of a tolerant and inclusive society. The education offered through Madarsas must aim at the all-round and holistic development of every student. This is all the more important as the Madarsas are the nurseries for fostering the future religious leaders of the Muslim community. This would call for, among other things, laying emphasis on promoting a healthy physical culture through outdoor activities such as sports, games and community/social service.

Efforts for Modernizing Madarsas

The number of Madrasas in India is estimated to be 35,000 to 40,000. To make Madrasa education more acceptable, various efforts have been made by the government to modernise the system. The High Power Panel on Minorities (1980) and the Group on Minorities Education (1990) set up by the Department of Education advocates relevant changes in the curriculum. The National Policy on Education (1986) and Programme of Action (1992) and the Prime Minister's 15 Point Programme for Welfare of Minorities suggested the modernisation of traditional Madrasas, and the 'Scheme of Modernization of Madrasa' was launched as a centrally sponsored scheme in 1994 suggesting the introduction as an addition of English, Science, Mathematics and Hindi subjects on a voluntary basis. In 2004, the Standing Committee of 'National Monitoring Committee for Minorities' was constituted.

Education is the key to development. It is the most important requirement for improving the socio-economic status of the backward sections among religious minorities. The literacy and educational levels among religious minorities vary considerably from one community to the other and from one area to the other. Census statistics on the status of religious minorities reveals that the educational status of Muslims is relatively low. The need for expanding coverage and providing quality education, focusing on girl's education and strengthening vocational education is vital for educational development of Muslims in India.

The Madarsa Modernisation Scheme of the government should be suitably revised, strengthened and provided with more funds so that it can provide finances and modern education up to Standard X within those madarsas themselves which are at present imparting only religious education or to enable the students of such madarsas to receive such education simultaneously in the general schools in their neighbourhood. The Madarsa Modernization Scheme may, for all these purposes, be operated through a central agency like the Central Wakf Council or the proposed Central Madarsa Education Board.

The National Policy on Education commits itself to provide all possible means for the uplift of the educationally backward minorities. The children of the educationally backward Muslim minorities attend Madarsas with very little participation in the national mainstream education system. In order to provide them with access to education in modern subjects, the Central Government has been implementing the Area Intensive and Madarsa Modernization Scheme. These are the various schemes launched by the government for the empowerment of Muslims, but they were not successfully implemented.

Problems Faced by Indian Madarsas

Madarsas, through which the Community ensures that its future generations acquire knowledge of Islam, have become a symbol of Muslim identity in India. Often they are looked upon with suspicion by the wider society, despite the fact that they are involved in providing religious education to the Muslim community. There has been no evidence to suggest that Madarsas are producing terrorists. This exercise, even as it is insulting to the Community, has a detrimental and traumatic impact on the children studying in the Madarsas. It has been pointed out that the existence of Madarsas is necessary for Muslims as, apart from providing basic education, they serve as an important instrument of identity maintenance for the Community. Many a time Madarsas are the only educational option available to Muslim children, especially in areas where no schools have reached the Muslim masses. Very often children go to the Madarsas not out of choice but due to non-availability and inaccessibility of other schools, and a near absence of education in their mother tongue.

Modernizing Madarsas by the government has been a very contentious issue with many differing viewpoints amongst the Community. While there is a general acceptance of an urgent need for the modernization of Madarsas, the modernization scheme of the government have not really provided much relief to the community as far as quality education is concerned. Promises made with regard to modernization have proved inadequate as nothing much has been done. Science and Mathematics teachers appointed under this scheme have not been paid their salaries regularly. Besides, the salaries fixed are too low. It is widely believed that the help given to Madarsas is “on paper alone”. Giving computers to Madarsas has not been perceived to be of great help to the Community. However, Madarsa ‘modernisation’ does not mean only having science/mathematics teachers and installing computers. As mentioned earlier Madarsas need to be affiliated by regular education boards.

Some major and important shortcomings of madrasa education system are stated as below:-

- Absence of definite aims and objectives.
- Lack of basic facilities like proper building, classroom and especially furniture, black board and other equipments in some of the Madarsas.
- Outdated traditional methods and technique of teaching and learning.
- Isolation from modern developments in the area of natural sciences and social sciences and over emphasis on the traditional subjects, with a negative outlook towards modern subjects.
- Lack of coordination among various Madrasas and Maktabas.
- Defective system of examination & evaluation.
- Poor quality of planning and administration.
- Poor financial condition and management.

Suggestions

Few suggestions for the improvement of Madarsa education are given below:

- First of all, the aims and objectives of Madrasa education in this country should be specifically well-defined.
- Enlarge the scope of Madrsas beyond religious education to school teaching subjects, like Science, Mathematics, English and Computer.
- An arrangement whereby Muslim students may be able to access both religious and school education is required to ensure their completion of education till at least eighth standard.
- Infrastructural development is very important for the Maktabas and Madarsas, like classrooms, Furniture, blackboards etc
- Quality education should be provided in Madarsas with emphasis on Information and Communication Technology.
- There should be a provision of teachers training programme for the teachers who wish to associate with Madrasa education. They should be either accommodated in existing training institutes affiliated with the universities, or there should be a separate system of training for them.

- It should be the responsibilities of the Union and state Government to provide adequate grants for these Madrasas and Maktabas.
- Availability of books and teaching learning materials at all levels of madrasas is necessary to enable Muslim children attain standards of the national education system.

II. Conclusion

This study highlights the present educational status of Indian Muslims, their enrolment in schools/ Madarasas, Madarsa education and its contribution in empowerment of Muslims; important initiatives being taken by the Indian government, problems faced by these Madarasas and some suggestions for improvement of educational status of Indian Madarasas. The Madarasas will need to be revitalized to meet the challenge of the modern world. Strong emphasis will need to be laid on quality of education and expanding the base of science, information and technology, because this is the need of our present era of competition. The contribution of these Madarasas has been so important that one cannot strategize the educational development of Muslim community by neglecting or overlooking their services to the community. These Madarasas form a parallel education system which completely blocks the roads of economic growth and prosperity of the Muslims who resort to it and consequently Muslims are most backward religious community in India. So there is an urgent need to modernize or improve Madarsa education systems in India to educate the Muslims at that level which help them to compete to the children belong to modern education system. This will develop the confidence of Muslim children as well as helpful in the empowerment of whole Muslim community in India.

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