

## **Educational Marginalization of Muslim Girls: A Study on the Role of State and Religion**

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**Abstract:** *Muslim constitutes India's largest minority but educationally they are one of the most backward communities in the country. Muslim girls lag behind their male counterparts and women from other community in the country itself. Women from different socio-economic strata have a great deal of marginalization in their life situations. There are also significant differences in women's specific status across regions, caste and class, communities and religion. Women in India have made significant strides during the six decades entering every field of education and taking on the challenges of various professions. However, masses of women remain restricted by the vicious circles of family expectations, gender role discrimination, social stereotype and stigma. The absence of gender disaggregated data by religion, particularly in respect of literacy rate, enrollment rates at different stages of education, dropout rates etc., at national, states, district levels was a formidable bottleneck in the planning and development of strategies and programmes for education of Muslim girls.*

*The study has analyzed the present educational marginalization of Muslim girls with reference to role of state and religion in India. The present paper examined socio-cultural and educational factors and forces hindering their educational participation. Through this study I discussed the backdrop of existing policies, programmes, constitutional safeguards, legal provisions and schemes to promote education of Muslim girls belonging to educationally backward minorities and being a social and economically disadvantage section of our society.*

**Keywords:** *Marginalization, State, religion, education, Muslim girls, policies*

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### **I. Introduction**

All over the world for improving women's status education is considered as the most significant instrument. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1992) in India is a landmark in the approach to women's education. It has attempted for the first time to address itself to the basic issues of women's equality. In India girls marginalization persist in the enrolment rates between boys and girls at all levels. Marginalization of girls and question of inequality related to acquire education has become a major issue in India in the recent years. This paper discusses Muslim girl's marginalization in the education and I identify and analyses various factors that cause their marginalization in education. The present paper also deals the provisions mentioned in the Constitution and law of our country which, not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them.

Marginalization is often described as a social process where people are relegated to the fringes or 'margins' of the society. It is defined as processes, in which individuals or communities are socially excluded, systematically blocked from, or are denied access to participate in social and political processes which are basic to integrate with the society. Marginalization inhibits a person, a group, a section or a community to enjoy rights, privileges, opportunities and resources that are normally available to members of a society. It may therefore be considered as a discordant relationship between those who marginalize as compared to those who are being marginalized. Then possibly the term 'marginalized' may be used synonymously with the term 'oppressed' in comparison to an 'oppressor' as Paolo Freire used in his famous 'Pedagogy of Oppressed', 'proletariat' as used by Karl Marx, 'subaltern' used by Gramsci, 'powerless' as elaborated by Michel Foucault, or exploited, vulnerable, discriminated, disadvantaged, subjugated, socially excluded, alienated or downtrodden as used elsewhere in the available literature. (Shalu Nigam: 2014)

However, there are theorists have warned that some of these words cannot be equated with each other. For example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is of the view that . . . "subaltern is not just a classy word for "oppressed", for [the] Other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie. . . . In terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern — a space of difference. Now, who would say that's just the oppressed? The working class is oppressed. It's not subaltern. . . . Many people want to claim subalternity. They are the least interesting and the most dangerous. I mean, just by being a discriminated-against minority on the university campus; they don't need the word 'subaltern' . . . . They should see what the mechanics of the discrimination are. They're within the hegemonic discourse, wanting a piece of the pie, and not being allowed, so let them speak, use the hegemonic discourse. They should not call themselves subaltern" (De Kock, Leon: 1992).

## **II. Educational Marginalization of Girl's at Global Level**

The restrictive effect of traditional sex roles, socialization in the family has its parallel in educational practices in educational institutions traditionally. Most educational fields remain sex typed, a phenomenon that compounds the occupational stratification by sex. Further, sex biased educational practices, differential curricula and text books perpetuate the traditional division of labour between sexes. This limits not only the range of occupations chosen by women but also lands them in low ranking occupations corresponding to their assisting roles in the household. Thus traditionally education has contributed to educational and occupational stratification between the sexes by encouraging and preparing girls to pursue an extremely limited number of traditionally feminine roles. High level of sex segregation exists in the work force and women enter a limited number of feminine sex stereotyped occupations, which are also low in status.

The lives of girls and women continue to be controlled by the patriarchal belief systems and structures, which use prescriptions and proscriptions to keep women in their place. All decisions are taken by men and all assets are owned by them. The process of gender discrimination begins even before birth and continues throughout the life of a female. Besides women and girls do more work than males but get much less than their legitimate share in food, health, education and training. The traditional socialization practices of a society with a marked son preference are highly discriminatory to the girl child not only in matters of food, health care, education and play but also succeed in making her believe that she is inferior and less competent than her male counterparts.

UNESCO Education For All (EFA) report on the elimination of gender disparities in Enrolments raise many questions for governments and civil societies in developing countries .It is reported that 57 per cent of the estimated 104 million children in the 5-10 years age group who are out of school worldwide are believed to be girls. The enrolment of girls in many countries is only three-fourths that of boys. The report cautions that the 2015 deadline for achieving 50 per cent improvement in adult literacy and universal primary education may remain a dream for one-third of the world's population. The 164 national governments that adopted the Dakar Framework of Action at the World Education Forum in Senegal in 2000 committed themselves to putting in place policies to facilitate these goals. The international community also held out the assurance that resources would not be a constraint. But the EFA report notes that aid flows have been disappointingly low in recent years. Paradoxically, this comes at a time when the accent on primary education has been high on the agenda of many developing countries. The gender inequality is indeed prevalent in many developing countries like India.

Further, according to Global Crisis Solution Center, some two-thirds of the 130 million children in the world currently not in school are girls. This means that about 86.7 million girls are out of school. UNICEF report indicates that the number of girls out of school in Sub-Saharan Africa rose over the last decade from 20 million in 1990 to 24 million in 2002.

## **III. Education Of Women In Islam**

The term education is mentioned in Islam as an instrument to mould the personality of human being as well as it is for the entire humanity. From an Islamic perspective an educated individual might possess similar attributes; however the necessary component that is required is belief and knowledge of how to worship God and how to live life in accordance to the Islamic laws. There is no one word that describes 'education' within the Arabic language; however scholars generally tend to use three different words. Tarbiyah comes from the root word raba (to grow, to increase, to rear, spiritual nurturing), which implies a state of ethical and spiritual nurturing in developing the individuals potential and guidance of the child to the state of complete maturity. Ta'dib is derived from the root word aduba (to be refined, disciplined, cultured, well mannered), which suggests the social aspects of a human being including the process of character development and good social behavior. Ta'lim stems from the root word of 'alima (to know, to be informed, to perceive, to learn, to discern), this refers to knowledge, the imparting and receiving of it through instruction and teaching. (B.J.Cook:1999)

Mark Halstead (2010) concludes that these three terms suggests a possible analysis in three areas of education in Islam-

- 1- Aiding individual development
- 2- Increasing understanding of society and its social and moral rules
- 3- Transmitting knowledge.

It can be said that these three dimensions offer the fundamental objectives of education in Islam. Education in Islam is for all not specifically for male or for female and it is prime responsibility of each individual to seek knowledge and it is a sacred duty; it is obligatory on every Muslim, male and female.

The textual and contextual condition related to girl's education among Muslims is different. It is not only in our country at the global level there is a marginalization regarding education among Muslim girls. The gender gap, drop out and discrimination is very high particularly related to achieve formal education in different institutions. Some traditional Ulema continue to argue that Muslim girls should be provided only a religious education. Some of them even go to the extent of insisting that girls should be taught only to read, but not to write, because if they learn how to write they might send secret love letters to their paramours! This way of thinking is a reflection of a certain mentality that can be traced back to the times of the deadly Tartar devastations of much of the then Muslim world in the thirteenth century, which caused the Ulema to take a very insular, conservative and defensive position on a host of issues, including women. For five or six hundred years, a heated debate continued to rage among the Ulema as to whether or not Muslim girls should be taught to write or not. The majority of the early Deobandi Ulema, for instance, including the noted champion of Muslim girls' Islamic education, Maulvi Ashraf Ali Thanwi, believed that Muslim girls should be given only a basic religious education, and nothing more than that, for fear that problems would arise if they learnt too much. They feared they would be led astray from their faith if they were exposed to Western-style education, which was seen, in many senses, as un-Islamic. For instance, Maulvi Ashraf Ali Thanvi insisted that Muslim girls should not learn Geography because then they might learn the routes leading to other cities, where they might escape with their lovers! It is interesting to note that this same fear was not expressed to the same extent regarding Muslim boys' secular education, because the underlying assumption was that, as compared to boys, girls were more vulnerable, that their minds were more impressionable, that they were mentally weak or less intelligent and less capable of discerning between right and wrong than males. It also reflected a subliminal fear that secular education might make women revolt against their men folk. (Maulvi Waris Mazhari: 2009)

#### **IV. Educational Development of Muslim Girls in India**

During ancient times and middle ages, education in the Indian sub continent remained in general the monopoly of higher castes; women's education was usually not encouraged. In India, the Turkish Queen Razia Sultana, other Muslim Queens and princesses like Noor Jehan, Mumtaz Mahal and Jahanara wielded political and military power. However the colonial period and industrial revolution showed a marked downtrend in the status of Muslim women but their status dipped after the Wars. This is because the Muslim community, whose governments had fallen, felt endangered and threatened by the western culture and now wanted to hold on rigidly to their own identity. With breakup of the Muslim empire after the two wars, Muslims wished to preserve their past glory somewhat as they saw at the centre of the Western culture, a misused, overworked and undressed woman as its symbol. They reacted in a natural and protective way by restricting their own women from external influences and even curbing their legitimate rights including right to education at times. This trend gradually became a custom and a practice, resulting finally in illiterate, ignorant and custom bound timid Muslim women.

Khawaja Altaf Husain Hali's 1905 in his novel *Chup Ki Dad* (Voices of the Silent) vividly captured the reality of women's oppression. Hali argued for female education; although he felt this should be imparted at home. Mumtaz Ali and his wife Mohammadi Begum founded a newspaper *Tahzib-un-Niswan* (Women's Reformer) which took up the issues of female education. Ameer Ali, a Bengali lawyer, author of the celebrated *The Spirit of Islam* (1922) argued against polygamy and emphasized the need for reform in Muslim law. Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain from Bengal an advocate of social reform – spoke out against the 'excessive absurdities' of female seclusion. She was one of the few whose concerns included the bulk of poor, uneducated Muslim women.

Individual and collective efforts notwithstanding, modernist views regarding education for Muslim women were not without their contradictions. Syed Ahmed Khan urged Muslims to gain a modern secular education. However, his vision of modern education for Muslims did not include women. Mohammed Iqbal, the renowned poet and philosopher, was also quite averse to the idea of female education. The Ulema favoured women's education but only insofar as it centered on religion (i.e. the Qur'an), family values and the moral virtue of women. In his classic text *Beheshti Zewar* (Heavenly Ornaments), Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi delineated domestic roles for women in great detail.

Despite pressures of religious orthodoxies, social prejudice and class/gender bias, Muslim women in the end of the nineteenth century successfully emerged from the isolation of traditional roles as self-aware individuals, determined to claim a greater role in public affairs. The theme of women's education was taken up by all communities including Muslims. This topic was first raised at the "All-Male Muslim Educational Congress" in 1896 and in subsequent years there were vigorous attempts by Muslim women to lobby for women's education and entry in politics. In 1906, Sheikh Abdullah and his wife Wahid Jahan Begum established a separate school for girls at Aligarh. 'Purdahnashin Madrasa' a school for girls in seclusion in Calcutta, was established in 1913. The Begum of Bhopal, Sultan Jahan Begum also founded a girls' school in 1914 at Bhopal. The activities of Anjuman-e-Himayat-e-Islam, Lahore opened a new chapter in Muslim

women's education in the north in the first quarter of the 20th century. The name of Maulvi S. Karamat Husain, the founder of Karamat Husain Girl's school, Lucknow, UP also cannot be overlooked in this regard. There were reform movements that worked for the emancipation of women, fighting the system of *pardah*, polygamy and child marriage amongst Muslims in western and southern India.

### **The Main Reasons for Educational marginalization of Muslim Girls**

With Independence, time came to review the whole educational process. The Constitution accordingly included a provision making education compulsory for all children up to the age of 14. The Muslim community was unable to take the maximum advantage of the opportunity provided by the state, because of an unsympathetic official attitude, communally surcharged national climate and its own confusion in fixing up priorities. Therefore, the Muslim community was left with the only choice of extensive voluntary efforts for elevating their educational status. Southern States realized the hard reality first. Besides societies and associations which promoted education among Muslims, there were the same philanthropists that were responsible for giving a fillip to education.

As we have noted earlier, girl's education developed largely through private initiative in the pre independence period and the State started taking interest only in the 1880s. Several education commissions and committees set up by the British rulers took cognizance of the need to educate girls and women in the larger interest of the society. After independence several committees and commissions have been set up from time to time on education, some exclusively for women's education, which as we shall notice later, has changed substantially over the last six decades.

**The National Council for Women's Education** which was set up by the Ministry of Education, following one of the main recommendations of the National Committee on Women's Education, at its thirteenth meeting held in 1974 made important recommendations for the education of women, through formal and non-formal channels.

**The Report of the Committee on Status of Women in India (CSWI)**, Towards Equality was placed before the Parliament in 1975. The Committee examined the constitutional, legal and administrative provisions which had a bearing on the status of women and noted with concern poor female literacy, the declining sex ratio, and declining work participation rates, concentration of women in low paid occupations and that women were deprived of basic needs of health, nutrition, education and employment and were in a situation of total powerlessness with no share in decision making processes.

**Education of Girls and Women in the Five -Year Plans**-different five year plan observed the need of girl's education and that was mentioned on priority basis in five years plans. Meanwhile it was only in late seventies that backwardness of education of Muslim minority started receiving attention and resulted in some action on the part of the state. The minorities' commission was set up in 1978. It was a non-statutory body until 1992, when parliament enacted the national commission

For minorities the first statutory commission was set up in 1993, called the National Commission for Minorities (NCM). However, it is only after census 2001 brought out its first Religion report that statistics on several aspects of population by religion (literacy, educational Attainment, sex ratio, work participation) became available in the public domain that has led to public Debate and action. A high power panel appointed by the ministry of home affairs and headed by Dr. Gopal Singh identified Muslims and neo-Buddhists as two educationally backward minorities at the national level and proposed that special efforts have to be made to bring the educationally backward minorities on par with rest of the society. Forty four districts with concentration of Muslim minority were identified for special attention based on 1981 census.

**In May 1983**, former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi issued a 15-point directive on welfare of Minorities. The 15-point programme for minorities was announced in 1983. The national policy on education, 1986 and revised programme of action 1992 Need to take special steps to advance education of Muslims was noted in the national policy of Education 1986 its programme of action (revised in 1992) and led to formulation of the area Intensive educational development as a central government scheme of the MHRD.

**In 2005**, The Prime Minister's high level committee on social, economic and educational status of Muslim Community (Sachar Committee) in India was set up under the chairmanship of Justice Rajinder Sachar which submitted its report in 2006. This committee noted with concern the low socio economic status of Muslim Minority, higher poverty, lower literacy and educational attainments, higher unemployment Rates, lower availability of infrastructure and lower participation in decision making, in civil Services including police, judiciary and in elected bodies, and above, all a perceived sense of Insecurity and discrimination. Some of the recommendations submitted by the committee in 2007 to Government of India to improve Muslims Socio-economic and educational conditions can be summarized below: M

- 1- Need for collecting data and creating a National Data Bank for the various Socio-Religious Communities in respect of their status.
- 2- Five-yearly monitoring of its status and regular monitoring in the interim.
- 3- Developing a Diversity Index (DI) in respect of institutions in order to mainstream the minorities and induce greater diversity, including allocation of grants to colleges and universities by the UGC.
- 4- Sharper focus on school education, scanning content in school textbooks for reflection on social diversity.
- 5- Setting up of high quality government schools in areas of Muslim concentration.
- 6- Exclusive schools for girls from 9th to 12th standard.

In 2009 – the Right to Education Act, popularly called the RTE, a landmark act was passed by both the Houses of the Parliament. The Act ensures:

1. Every child between the ages of 6 to 14 years has the right to free and compulsory education. This is stated as per the 86th Constitution Amendment Act added Article 21A. The right to education bill seeks to give effect to this amendment
2. The government schools shall provide free education to all the children and the schools will be managed by school management committees (SMC). Private schools shall admit at least 25% of the children in their schools without any fee.

The Constitution of India grants Muslims and other Minorities equality of status and opportunities with other citizens to accelerate the process of educational and socio-economic justice. The Constitution of India grants the rights to Equality and Right to Freedom of Religion and Protection of Interest of Minorities in regard to educational rights. The State guarantees equal opportunities to women and forbids discrimination in all matters relating to employment and appointment to any public office.

India has one of the most impressive sets of laws for women and girls and yet little is known about them either by women themselves. Laws in India by and large cover the women belonging to each and every religious community. But it is also very true that women are not aware towards their constitutional rights. The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. Fundamental Rights, among others, ensure equality before the law and equal protection of law; prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the Constitution are of specific importance in this regard.

To uphold the Constitutional mandate, the State has enacted various legislative measures intended to ensure equal rights, to counter social discrimination and various forms of violence and atrocities and to provide support services especially to working women. Although women may be victims of any of the crimes such as 'Murder', 'Robbery', 'Cheating' etc, the crimes, which are directed specifically against women, are characterized as 'Crime against Women'.

On the other hand it is also observed that majority of women till today do not coming forward and not raising their voice towards any discrimination. There are several reasons it may be due to illiteracy, patriarchy, ignorance, security, family norms, non cooperation by the Government officials, poverty, nature of work, purdah etc. All these reasons are also a contributing factor in their educational marginalization.

### **Steps to be taken to Improve Muslim Girls' Participation in the Schools**

In the last few decades, fortunately, there has been considerable change in the attitude of Indian Ulema circles regarding girl's modern education. One reason for this is the rapid transformation in many Arab societies as far as women's status; education, employment, public roles and consciousness of their rights are concerned. This has led many Indian Ulema to change their own views about women's roles and their education. This is reflected in an increasing number of educational institutions being set up in India for Muslim girls, where they receive both Islamic as well as modern education. Interestingly, the initiative for this is also coming from Ulema circles, including some that are often thought of as very conservative as far as women's issues are concerned. Thus, for instance, the Deobandi and Ahl-e Hadith Your browser may not support display of this image. Ulema have set up a number of girls' Madrasas and schools as well as institutions that are mid-way between traditional Madrasas and modern schools. Likewise, the Jam 'at-e Islami, particularly in Kerala (Maulvi Waris Mazhari: 2009)

This is a very welcome development. At the same time, however, much more needs to be done with regard to Muslim women's education, both religious as well as modern. There is an urgent need for the Ulema to clarify and, in many cases, revise their views on the issue. Personally, I believe that Muslim women should receive an equal education as Muslim boys. There is nothing in Islam that prohibits this. Why shouldn't we have Muslim women engineers, doctors, journalists, lawyers and social workers? We need Muslim women in all these sorts of occupations. They need to have a presence in all necessary social sectors. A woman can be a good Muslim, a good wife, a good mother, and a good professional at the same time. Such a woman can provide a good role model for others to emulate. To deny Muslim women this possibility, ironically in the name of Islam, would mean only to further reinforce ultra-secularism, in the sense of hostility to, or absence of, religion in the public sphere. (Maulvi Waris Mazhari: 2009)

I can suggest few more important points to improve the educational condition of Muslim girls in India-

1. The government should take immediate steps to fill the gap of educational facilities being offered for Muslim Girls as citizen of this country.
2. The Government should collect data on Muslim girl's educational status including dropout rates.
3. Activists, organizations and policy-makers should make the data available to the general public and for use. Such information would need to be quantitative, qualitative as well as comparative, so that conditions between Muslims and other communities can be compared and policies suitably adjusted to ensure equity.
4. Much emphasis should be given to make the data keeping in terms with gender, region, class, caste; linguistic groups etc. so that all the Muslims are not treated as a monolith.
5. Development schemes by the government should allocate resources in Muslim-dominated localities on a scale proportionate to their population; it should be suitably made and implemented.
6. Development schemes must also be culturally sensitive so that they are acceptable to the Muslim community. For instance, enforced co-education after a certain level or Hinduised or anti-Muslim biases in textbooks often act as a major hindrance to Muslim, particularly Muslim girls' education. These issues need to be sensitively addressed and approached.
7. In planning and implementing development schemes the participation of the local community, including Muslims and other marginalized groups, must be ensured.
8. Civil Society or NGOs should take a proactive action in the Muslim dominated areas of Delhi and make their presence felt.
9. Sensitization of religious Ulema to mobilize parents for their girl's education is a need of Muslim Community. So they can help and mobilize public through their lectures and literature.
10. Dialogue on Muslim social, economic and educational issues also needs to be initiated with the media, politicians, bureaucrats, and non-governmental organizations.
11. In order to improve the educational status of the Muslim minorities, efforts has to be made to improve their socio-economic status as well.
12. Muslim girls are the last to be sent to schools and in adversity, the first to be pulled out of schools. This condition essays their vulnerability and no say in decision making.
13. It is also very important that Muslim women and their family members should be aware towards their constitutional and legal rights.
14. Government should organize legal awareness camp in the Muslim locality to sensitize women, girls and male counterparts to promote Muslim girl's education.

## **V. Conclusion**

The policy makers over the years have failed to see women as equal participants or partners to change, growth and development of the country. The authors of the 'Towards Equality' Report while commenting on the role of state in marginalization of women observed, "'Women' were positioned – marginally and precariously – with the confines of a narrowly conceived social welfare sector. Marginally, because women had to jostle for space and resources within this poorly endowed sector with many other groups of citizens; precariously because the entirety of social context and situation of women, the issues thrown up and the successes achieved during the social reform and the freedom movement, the unfinished task and an overall follow up – all were missing in the social welfare lens, the cognitive map of policy makers. Even more serious, the social welfare sector did not concern itself with the legal rights and entitlements" (Sharma Kumud and CP Sujaya, 2012).

It is a responsibility of every citizen, parents, as well as the community and different institutions including judiciary to play due role in alleviating the problems specifically hindering girls from schooling. In addition the Ministry of Minority Education, Ministry of HRD and Women Commission should take on panel some of the emerging issues in gender inequality in education of Muslim community and provide the basis for an action plan. This kind of action plan can minimize the Girl's marginalization specifically in the educational field for the better future of Muslim girls.

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