

EDUCATION OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN INDIA : A BRIEF DISCUSSION FROM PAST TO PRESENT

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Abstract:

Women constitute almost half of the population of the world. Muslim women are the most backward in our modern society. Education is the true way for helping the Muslim women out of their economic misery. The history of Muslim women's education in India can be traced down from Muslim period, British period and after independence. During the Mughal period, the women of etiquette family were being educated. Whereas in the British period the entire Muslim community specially the women lagged behind educationally. After independence, Muslim women were made a considerable progress in education. Muslim girls going to schools and colleges also increased slowly but steadily. Muslim women are also changing slowly in our society. But still some barriers like lack of good quality schools and hostel facilities for girls, poor quality of teacher are responsible for the low level of educational attainment among Muslims women. So, Muslim women's education was also not satisfactory after independence. But it is also true that the Muslim women have a strong desire and enthusiasm for education. The Constitution of India grants the right to Equality and Right to Freedom of Religion and Protection of Interests of Minorities in regard to educational right. But certain Muslim women feel that they are deprived of such advantage and are still lagging behind in all aspects of life as compared to the majority groups. This paper highlights the progress of education of Muslim women in India since independence along with the possible solution to empower them through education.

Keywords: Education, Literacy status, Muslim, Women Education, Problems, Minority.

Introduction:

According to prophet Muhammed, "Education is more sacred, than a blood of Sahid in the battle."

Muslims are the largest Minority group in India constituting 14.23 % of the total population. They are seriously lagging behind in terms of most of the human development indicators. It is the second largest religious group in West Bengal. Muslim constitutes 26 percent of the total population of the state West Bengal according to census 2011. Muslim women are the least educated section of our society. According to the constitution everyone should have right to education. But pragmatic scenario shows that participation of Muslim women in education is completely latent. Muslim women always remained socially and economically backward in our country. Their low participation in education becomes a roadblock in the path of achieving the goal of universal education. The main objective of the paper is to highlight the progress of education of Muslim women in India since independence along with the probable causes for their disempowerment and possible solution to empower them through education. The paper is going through the secondary sources, which is appropriate for this study. The study is purely theoretical and descriptive in nature.

Review of Related Literature :

Review of related literature in the area of enquiry is a crucial component of the research process. It also enables the researcher to define the limits of his field. A review of related literature and previous researches in the present study is attempted below:

Nasrin (2013) conducted a study on, "Education of Muslim Women – A Journey from Past to Present". Her objectives of the study were to highlight the progress of education of Muslim women in education since independence and to suggest steps to empower them

through education. She found that the number of girls' school and college increased, Muslim girls going to schools and colleges also increased slowly but steadily and the Muslim parents are becoming anxious to educate their daughters along with their sons. She gave several suggestions like eradicating ill traditions, making girls more confident, providing vocational and technical education and reservation for Muslim women.

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 during Vedic Period, Buddhist Period, Muslim Period, Indian Women Impact of Education during British Period, and Indian Women Impact of Education during Modern Period. This study tries to find out the Reform in Women Education, Status of Women in India and etc.

Hossain Md. I. (2012) made a study on, "Muslim Women of West Bengal: An Enquiry into their Minority Status". The study is to examine the socio-economic situation of the largest religious minority population compared to other religious minorities of the state and the status of Muslim women of West Bengal in particular. From this study I have acquainted with the socio-economic status of Muslims in various district of West Bengal and the factors which remain barriers in their development and social change and the situation of Muslim women of West Bengal.

Syed, W., A. Ashraf and Ahmad, A. (2012), made a study on, "Muslim Women Education and Empowerment in Rural Aligarh (A case study)". It concludes that education of women is having supreme power for the development of individuality. It is also an instrument for strengthening socially useful skills, habits and attitudes of common citizenship. The study reveals that socio economic conditions are the major determinants of women liberation than the religion.

Importance of Women Education :

According to Islam, "A mother's lap is the first school for child."

"Education for all" is one of the major slogan being carried out by the Indian government but still we have the lowest female literacy rate in Asia. Education of girls and women is an area of major national concern both as a development imperative and as a human right. Indian girls and women have been subjected to various kinds of social discrimination including education. They are viewed as the most deprived and disadvantaged section of the Indian population. Parents especially in lower strata of society send their male child to school but not the girl child. Specially the Muslim women continue to be the victims of traditional social structure of the community.

According to Napoleon, "Nation's progress is impossible without trained and uneducated mothers. If the women of my country are not educated, about half of the people will be ignorant." Education is a vital factor of empowering women. Educated women not only tend to promote education of their girl children, but also can provide better guidance to all their children. Education liberates women from ignorance, increase self-esteem and helps them take control over their own lives and guide the progress of their families. Women are the backbone of a society. The role of women cannot be denied in any society or culture. An educated woman can help in removing the superstitions, conservative beliefs and norms from the society. An educated woman can be a better human being, successful mother and a responsible citizen. Napoleon once said, "Give me educated mothers and I will give you educated nations." So, several strategies were adopted to promote women education as an integral part of the planned socio-economic development of the country.

Historical Perspective of Muslim Women Education in India :

➤ **Before Independence**

- **19th Century :** At the start of 19th century the indigenous system of learning was very popular. The educational facilities for women in the indigenous system of learning were like pathshalas, maktabas and madarsas. The 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 nineteenth century..

- **1894** : Sir Maulana Hali and Sheikh Abdullah took the lead to fight of the causes of education for Muslim Women. 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 Ghulamus in annual session of Muslim Education Conference for giving some attention to the education of Muslim women.
- **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 that the school be a normal school for training of women teachers so that they can teach Muslim girls of high class families in their homes.
- **1903** : Sultan Jahan was the Begum of Bhopal and also the first women in the Indian History who believed in the emancipation of women through education. She started the first school for Muslim girls in 1903 which is 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 1906.
- **1911**: Sakhawat Memorial Girls High School started in Bengal by Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain.
- **1912** : Maulana Karamat Hussain and the Raja of Mahmudabad also supported for girl's education and started a girl's school in Lucknow in 1912.

Then the British Government came who adopted a liberal policy for promoting women education. A number of schemes were started. 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. After 1920 the college was came to be known as the famous Aligarh Muslim University.

➤ **After Independence**

Many committee and commissions were setup after independence like University Education Commission (1948-49), Second 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 development of the Muslim women is linked with socio-cultural and economics heterogeneity in 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.

Literacy Rate of Muslim Population :

According to 2011 Census of India, 42.7% of Muslims in India are illiterate. This is the highest illiteracy rate for any single religious community in the country, while the illiteracy rate for the entire population taken together is 36.9%. Muslims are the only community to have an illiteracy rate higher than the national rate among all communities. According to 2011 Census of India, the percentage of illiteracy among Muslim females are 48.1% whereas the illiteracy among Muslim males are 37.59%.

Table 1 - Percentage of Illiteracy among Religious Community in India :

Religious Community	Percentage
Hindu	36.39
Muslim	42.72
Jain	13.57
Christian	25.65
Sikh	32.49
Buddhist	28.16
Others	49.65

Source : Government of India Census 2011.

Table 2 - Percentage of Literacy by Religious Community in India :

Religion	Male	Female	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
Sikh	63.29	71.32	67.305
Buddhists	65.6	77.87	71.735
Other	41.38	59.38	50.38

Source : Government of India Census 2011.

According to the 2011 census data, Muslim literacy rate in the state West Bengal has risen to 68.74% from 57.47% recorded in the 2001 census. Whereas the national Muslim literacy rate is 68.53%. According to the census, West Bengal has 6.15 crore literates. Around 66.66% or 4.5 crore of them are Hindus and the remaining 23.42% are Muslims. Among the 2.9 crore illiterates in the state, 1.86 crore are Hindus and 1.02 crore are Muslims. 27.01% of the total population are Muslim in the state West Bengal.

According to DISE 2012-13 Flash Statistics report in the year 2010-11 the percentage of Muslim girls enrollment in the state West Bengal is 49.89% and in the year 2012-13 the percentage of Muslim girls is 50.04% and in India it is 49.22%. It reveals that the Muslim girls' enrolment in West Bengal is a step forward in comparison to the National enrolment rate. So, in West Bengal the gender gap and illiteracy rate has been reducing and also the rate of Muslim female literacy rate has been increasing.

Table – 3 Muslim Literacy Rate in Comparison to Other Religious Communities :

Population	Hindus	Muslims	Christian	Sikhs	Buddhist	Jains	Total
Male	81.12	64.61	77.20	91.37	83.09	96.46	77.02
Female	63.09	49.75	62.30	81.98	66.22	88.87	59.61
Total	72.44	57.47	69.72	87.19	74.73	92.81	68.64

Source: Nazmul Hussain, Md Zahir Abbas and Saba Owais: Islam and Societies, 2012.

Educational Status of Muslim Women in the Country :

1. In 2001, only 55% of India's 71 million Muslim males were literate compared to 64.5% of country's 461 non- Muslim men. Similarly less than 41% of country's 67 million Muslim females were literate when compared to 430 non-Muslim women.
2. 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%.
3. The difference between Muslim women and non-Muslim women. in urban areas was 11% which later increased to 19% over the years.
4. Less than 4% of Muslims graduate from school compared to 6% of the total population.
5. 6% of girl students are forced to stop their education as parents think that education is not required for them.
6. Only 5% Muslim women manage to get higher studies.
7. According to the Member Secretary of Sachar Panel, Dr Abu Saleh Sherriff, only 4% Muslim women taking up medicine at the undergraduate level and just 1.5% Muslim women are at the postgraduate level.
8. Among the Muslims, 17.6% is the dropout rate, higher than the national average of 13.2%.
9. Only one out of the 25 under-graduate students and one out of the 50 postgraduate students is a Muslim in the premier colleges. The share of Muslims in all courses is low. Particularly at the Post-Graduate level and marginal in the science stream. (Sachar- 2006)

10. The educational status of Muslim women in India is worse as compared to Muslim men, and women of other communities.

Causes of Illiteracy among Muslim women :

Following are the most frequent causes of illiteracy among Muslim women 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 subdued by that of marriage of the girls at very early age.
- Lack of female teacher in a school.
- Engagement of the Muslim women in wage earning activities to help their parents.
- Muslim parents are illiterate and ignorant about importance of education of their girl child.
- 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.
- Child Marriage.
- Female students drop out and stagnation in the schools.
- Madrasas and Maktabas running at traditional pattern in our country.

Possible Solutions :

- a) Eradicating ill-traditions is the first steps toward Muslim women empowerment in our country. Education is necessary to remove backwardness of the country, to avoid exploitation of women and also to remove the Purdah system among Muslim.
- b) Making Muslim girls more confident is another true step toward women empowerment 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.
- 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.

Conclusion :

“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.

I want to sum up that the Indian Muslims women are far behind in achieving the literacy status because of their poor economic conditions and superstition. Equality and empowerment of Muslim women are necessary to bring about an egalitarian human society. Empowerment is one of the pivotal concerns while addressing human right and development. The empowerment of women has become one of the most important and modern phenomenon of 21st century not only at National level but also International level. Now a days women's participation in the process of development has become necessary in the Muslim community. Empowerment of women means a process by which women's power of self realization is promoted. Women empowerment is closely connected with women's education. The government of India and government of West Bengal are 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. Under this act elementary education is made free and compulsory for the children belonging to the age group of 6-14 years. This initiated Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in our country. The government thus should take dare steps to provide education & employment to all to make every person in our country well empowered.

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