



Educational Status of Muslim Women in India: A Comparative Study

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Abstract:

This paper is an attempt to analyse the educational status of Muslim women in India absolutely as well as relative to their male and female counterparts belonging to other religious communities. The study is based on the secondary source of data obtained from the census report (2011), NSS report and other published sources to throw light on the actual status of Muslim female education, various levels of educational attainment-literacy, matriculation, intermediate or pre-university, technical education and graduate and above are taken into account. The finding of the study reveals that the educational status of Muslims in general and Muslim female, in particular, is not satisfactory and needs special attention. It is found that 42.72% of the total population of the Muslims in India are illiterate; among the Muslim women, illiteracy is as high as 48.11%. Technical education and higher education are meagre among the Muslim women. From the findings, it is also clear that Muslims who account for almost 14% of the total population of the nation shows lowest literacy rate, the lowest percentage of higher education and lowest degree of female education. The information about the higher education reveals that only 1.90% Muslim women reach up to pre-university level and only 0.14% attains technical education.

Introduction:

Education is the main economic factor of personal development. Education is one of the significant social indicators having bearing on the achievement and the growth of an individual as well as the community. This is perceived to be highly suitable for providing employment and thereby improving the quality of life, the level of human wellbeing and access to basic social services.

It is the birthright of every Muslim. Islam puts considerable emphasis on its followers to acquire knowledge. Investment in education is the best investment one can make, because it eventually leads to the intellectual property. Over 48% of Muslim women in India are illiterate today — literacy being officially defined rather generously to include just about anyone who

can read and write a sentence or two. India is one of the least literate societies in the world. Within this broader picture of social disadvantage, the literacy levels of Muslim men and women are further skewed towards the bottom.

Figures for female literacy are almost identical for both Hindu (75 percent) and Muslim (76.1 percent) women in rural women's primary education for rural India, which subsequently widens across the middle, secondary and graduate levels. Muslim girls' schooling is not always encouraged. The female literacy rate is appalling. An improvement in the overall literacy rates for Muslims would not just lead to a corresponding increase in Muslim enrolment in universities and professional courses but also ensure more social opportunity for Muslim women (and men). This initial disadvantage, i.e. Muslim women's poor literacy rates, completely precludes the possibility of their entering institutions of higher education. Due to this reason the Aligarh Muslim University and the Jamia Millia Islamia – minority institutions with the specific aim of furthering education among Muslims (male and female) in India – are unable to have a majority of Muslim students in their professional schools. Yet, there are similar underlying challenges that Muslim women face in trying to receive the education. One such example is the traditional patriarchal interpretation of qiwamah, the notion that men are guardians of Muslim women. Although the Quran stipulates that both men and women are protectors of one another, the concept of qiwamah has been used to justify various restrictions on women that in turn hinder Muslim women's education. For instance, limiting women's right to free movement is a great impediment to free and equal access to education.

Educational status of Muslim Women in India:

Educationally Muslims comprise one of the most backward communities in the country. Muslim girls and women (female) lag behind their male counterparts and female of all other communities. According to census 2011, the literacy rate among Muslims (57.28%) was far below the national average (63.07%). The Muslim female literacy rate was (51.89%) below the Muslim male literacy rate (62.40%), census 2011.

Table-1: Education Level in India across Religious communities (census,2011)

Education level	Hindu female	Hindu Male	Muslim Female	Muslim Male	Christian Female	Christian Male	Sikh Female	Sikh Male	Buddhist Female	Buddhist Male	Jain Female	Jain Male	Others Female	Others Male
Literate	55.97	70.77	51.89	62.4	71.97	76.77	63.29	71.3	65.58	77.87	84.93	87.9	41.38	59.38
Primary	14.34	15.84	15.14	16.98	14.17	15.14	15.8	15.5	14.39	14.36	12.04	8.62	11.87	16.03
Matriculation	7.28	10.61	5.45	7.16	10.72	9.45	12.71	16.6	9.51	12.29	14.81	16.1	3.7	6.55
Intermediate	5.39	7.77	1.9	4.95	10.24	10.39	7.55	8.89	7.15	10.02	12.9	15.2	2.36	4.16
Technical education	0.3	0.9	0.14	0.39	2.06	2.39	0.63	0.94	0.27	0.67	0.59	1.59	0.06	0.21
Graduate & above	4.64	7.24	2.07	3.41	8.72	8.98	6.73	6.1	4.8	7.51	23.55	27.7	1.56	2.75

From the above table, it is clear that literacy rate is highest (86.43%) among the Jains, Christians occupy the second position and Buddhist third followed by Sikhs, Hindus and last Muslims in this order. A detailed analysis of the table shows that "above primary literacy rate" is highest among the Sikh females and the second position is Muslim females after that, matriculation, intermediate, technical and graduate and above, these parameters of education

are almost lowest among the Muslims. Apart from it, male-female literacy gap is also highest among the Hindu and Muslims.

Objectives:

The major objectives of this research paper are:

1. To investigate the status of Muslim female education in a comparative perspective.
2. To highlight the factors which are retarding Muslim female education in India.
3. To find out the literacy gap between Muslim male and female.

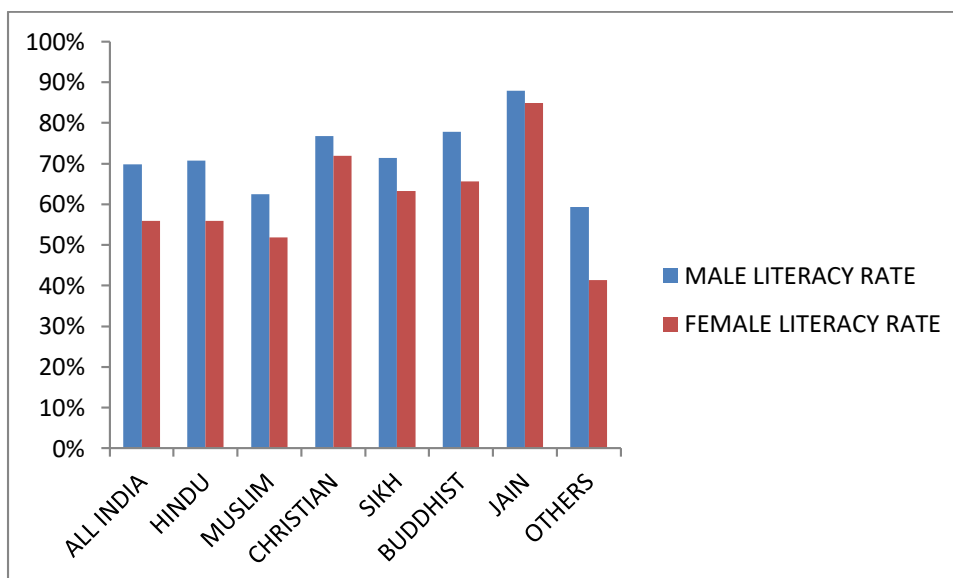
Data Source and Methodology:

The entire study is based on the secondary sources of data which have been collected from the census of India (2011), various rounds of NSSO data, journals, and other published sources. Simple comparative analysis using percentage method has been used for calculating educational status.

Table-2: Religion and sex wise literacy rate in India (Census report,2011)

	TOTAL POPULATION	TOTAL POPULATION (MALE)	TOTAL POPULATION (FEMALE)	TOTAL MALE LITERATE POPULATION	TOTAL FEMALE LITERATE POPULATION	MALE LITERACY RATE	FEMALE LITERACY RATE	GAP B/W MALE & FEMALE
ALL INDIA	1210854977	623270258	587584719	434763622	328875190	69.76%	55.97%	13.78%
HINDU	966257353	498306968	467950385	352653991	261925301	70.77%	55.97%	14.80%
MUSLIM	172245158	88273945	83971213	55084929	43573993	62.40%	51.89%	10.51%
CHRISTIAN	27819588	13751031	14068557	10557143	10124490	76.77%	71.97%	4.81%
SIKH	20833116	10948431	9884685	7808341	6255739	71.32%	63.29%	8.03%
BUDDHIST	8442972	4296010	4146962	3345185	2719598	77.87%	65.58%	12.29%
JAIN	4451753	2278097	2173656	2001519	1846072	87.86%	84.93%	2.93%
OTHERS	7937734	3952064	3985670	2346608	1649249	59.38%	41.38%	18.00%

Graphical representation of literacy gap among the communities:



In the graph above we show the gap between male and female literacy rate among the different religious communities and primarily emphasis has been laid on the Muslim male-female literacy gap. It has been found that the literacy gap between male and female is highest among the Hindus followed by Buddhists and Muslims. The least gap has been found among Jains and Christians.

Conclusion:

Muslim society of India is very heterogeneous in nature because of the influence of caste system, which has led to Indianisation of Islam. Indian Muslims are facing various socio-economic problems in today's age, which has to be understood in terms of their educational background.

The most influential reasons for educational backwardness in Indian society as summarised by the backward class commission are as follows:-

- 1- Traditional apathy for education on account of social environmental condition or occupational handicaps.
- 2- Poverty and lack of means among the communities to educate their children.
- 3- Lack of sufficient numbers of educational institutions in rural areas.
- 4- Living in inaccessible areas and lack of proper communications.
- 5- Lack of adequate educational aid in the form of scholarship, monetary grants for the purchase of books, clothing and hostel facility(Ram Krishna Arya Report,1986).

In general, women are the most vulnerable section of our Indian society due to its patriarchal nature. Muslim women suffer more because of the patriarchal nature of Islam and are not given enough freedom and hardly have access to higher education, though even the primary level education is not easily accessible to them. They have more emphasis on Quranic education which is given at home to the girls and thus they are discouraged to go outside the home in the name of education.

Match fixing within the kinship creates distraction among young girls and they loose the zeal to achieve something through education and thus they themselves do not have academic interest. If at all they are fortunate enough to go to a good school, they are often discouraged to go for higher education, especially overseas. The most important reason is that there is difficulty in finding educated groom if the girl becomes highly educated. The problem is even more severe if the girl has studied overseas, therefore. There is often misconception regarding the "purity" of girls if they have studied in Universities, or have travelled abroad.

Women are conditioned to such an exploitative situation in their lives and accept the laws passed by religious leaders. The only solution to liberate them from the shackles of ignorance, illiteracy, exploitation is through education.

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