

**Educational Development of Muslim Minority:
With Special Reference to Muslim Concentrated States of India**

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Abstract

In India the National Minority Commission has identified Muslims as minorities along with Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains on the basis of religion. Out of these religious minorities Muslims are the largest ones. In spite of being the largest minority they are lagging behind in education in comparison with other religious minorities. Literacy which is a first step to education is lowest of the Muslim minority and inter-state variation in their literacy rates is also very high. Also, their literacy rate in some of the states is abysmally low. In the light of these contexts, this paper presents a brief discussion of policies and programs implemented for the development of education of the Muslim minority. Thereafter, the paper tries to portray the progress of school education in terms of access, participation, retention of Muslim children in the Muslim concentrated states. The paper suggests that strategies for their educational development should be adopted according to the need of the state/district/area. Finally, the areas of intervention and challenges are discussed and appropriate measures are suggested to improve and promote the education of Muslims in India.

Keywords: Religious minority, India, school education, Muslims, educational development

Introduction

India is a country with diversities inhabiting various ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious groups. The development of education varies among these groups. The Constitution of India aims to bridge these gaps by empowering the society and providing equality of status among all its citizens. These ideas are reflected in different articles of the constitution and to realize these ideas different policies, programmes and schemes have been initiated by the Government of India (GOI). The minority religious groups (Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains) as identified by the National Minority Commission constitute 18 per cent of the total population of the country where Muslims are the largest religious minority and constitute 13.4 per cent of the population as per the Census 2001. Nevertheless, despite being the largest religious minority, Muslim literacy rate is lowest among all the religious minorities.

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Henceforth the educational backwardness of the Muslim minorities has always been a grave concern and attracted the attention of many researchers. The studies conducted so far reveal that the major causes for educational backwardness are socio economic factors, gender issues, shortage of female teachers, teaching learning process in schools, drop out of children, implementation of policies and programmes, etc. (Minault, 1982; Chanana, 1990; Dwarkanath, 2002; Choudhary, 2003; Udin, 2012). The present paper primarily focuses on educational status of the Muslim minorities in the states where size of Muslim population is more in comparison to other states as per the Census 2001. Therefore, the paper tries to find out the educational status of Muslims as well as reasons for variations in their education development among the states and within the state. Further it suggests strategies for educational development of Muslims in the country, particularly in Muslim concentrated areas.

This paper is descriptive in nature and discusses policies and various affirmative actions implemented by the government to improve the educational status of the Muslim minorities. Excepting the final conclusion section, the paper is divided into three major sections. The first section presents a brief discussion of policies and programs implemented by the government for the upliftment of the Muslim minority. The second section discusses macro statistics on the growth and expansion of education of Muslims. The paper tries to portray the progress of school education in terms of participation of Muslim children in schools and the status of their education in the states where Muslim population is highly concentrated. In the third section, the paper tries to explain the educational backwardness of Muslims. While doing so, the paper also discusses educational development of Muslims in the context of economic activities they are engaged in trying to see whether their engagement in primary and tertiary activities affect their educational development. Finally, in the conclusion section, areas of intervention and challenges are highlighted and appropriate measures are suggested to improve and promote the educational status of Muslims. The paper is based on some secondary sources i.e. Census Report 2001, Sachar Committee Report (2006), 64th Round of National Sample Survey Report (2007-08), National Policy on Education 1986 and its revised Programme of Action 1992, etc. and research studies conducted in the area of Muslim education.

Out of the total 29 states and seven Union Territories in the country, four states West Bengal, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar are selected for the study on the basis of the concentration of Muslim population (more than ten million Muslim populations in the states), national literacy rate and national Muslim literacy rate. Among the four selected states, two are the states with higher than national literacy rate and the two lower than national literacy rate. Likewise, among these states only Maharashtra has higher Muslim literacy rate compared to the national Muslim literacy rate. The specific characteristics of the selected study states in terms of population and literacy are as following:

1. The states have more than 10 million Muslim population (West Bengal, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar).
2. National literacy rate of India as per 2001 Census is 65.38 per cent. The literacy rates of the selected states are: Maharashtra 77 per cent, West Bengal 69 per cent, Bihar 48 per cent and Uttar Pradesh 57 per cent. Thus two states have higher literacy rates and two states have lower literacy rates than the national average.
3. The National Muslim literacy rate of India as per 2001 Census is 59.1 per cent. Out of the four states only Maharashtra has higher Muslim literacy rate than the national Muslim literacy rate.

Programs for Muslims' Educational Development

After the independence (1947), initiatives for educational development for minorities were started in India, in late 1970s, which geared up after the National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986 and its Programme of Action (POA), 1992. Both the NPE and POA emphasized the need of special efforts, "to bring the educationally backward minorities (which include Muslims) on par with the rest of the society and to make them participate fully in the national development activities" (GOI, 1992, p. 9). Many long term and short term programmes were started in the form of affirmative actions to improve the educational status of minorities like: Prime Minister's 15 Point Programme for the Welfare of the Minorities (1983), Area Intensive Programme for Educationally Backward Minorities, Modernization of Madrasa, Maulana Azad Education Foundation Scheme (1989), Free Supply of Books and Stationery and Merit Scholarship, and Pre-examination Coaching scheme for the weaker sections.

Various research studies on Muslim minority conducted after the independence revealed their educational backwardness. But the issue came into lime light after 2001. After the independence, religion wise data were published for first time in the Census 2001 and educational backwardness of Muslim community was an eye opener for policy makers and also for implementers. Thereafter many initiatives were taken in favour of the education of the Muslim minority. These include renewal of Prime Minister's 15 point programme in 1983 and setting up of Prime Minister's High level Committee on social, economic, and educational status of the Muslim community. In 2004 the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (NEMEI) was set up by an ordinance to advise the Centre and state governments on any matter regarding the education of the Muslim minority, to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. In 2006, National Monitoring Committee for Minority Education (NMCME) was reconstituted with the aim to attend to issues relating to the education of minorities on an ongoing basis. In 2006, the NEMEI's powers were enhanced by creating an exclusive Ministry of Minority Affairs. In addition, the Ministry plays a pivotal role in planning, coordination and development programmes for the benefit of the minority communities. The Government of India opened residential schools called

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhyalaya for the girls of Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Class (OBC) and minorities in backward districts where female literacy is below the national average and wide gender gap exist. In spite of all these provisions and interventions by the government, desired progress in education has not been occurred especially with regard to the Muslim minority.

Educational Development Status of Muslims in the Selected States

This section presents a discussion of development status of the Muslims in the four selected states using four indicators namely literacy rate, participation rate, completion rate and retention rate.

Comparative Literacy Scenario With Minorities

The literacy rate is considered as the basic ingredients for measuring the educational development. The Census Report 2001 reveals that in spite of the concerted efforts over the last more than 60 years, the spread of education among Muslim minority has not yet reached to the satisfactory level. The literacy rate of the Muslim minority in India is found lower (59.1 per cent) in comparison with national literacy rates (65.4 per cent).

Out of the four selected states, the Census Report 2001 shows Bihar, U.P., and West Bengal have low literacy rates than the national Muslim literacy rate (59.1 per cent). Bihar's and U.P.'s Muslim literacy rate is 42.0 per cent and 47.8 per cent respectively. The situation of West Bengal is unique. Unlike Bihar and U.P., its national literacy rate (68.6 per cent) is above the national average (65.4 per cent). But the state's Muslim literacy rate (57.5 per cent) is slightly below national Muslim average (59.1 per cent). The reason is there are many Muslim concentrated areas, with low literacy rates and with high-population density. In West Bengal, the growth rate of Muslim population is nearly five per cent from the decade 1961 to 2001, which is highest among all the selected states (Sachar Committee Report, 2006). Apart from these three selected states Maharashtra's situation is different. The state's literacy rate (78.1 per cent) as well as Muslim literacy rate (78.1 per cent) are above the national average.

Comparative Literacy Scenario With Other Religions

The comparison of literacy rates with major religious groups found that Muslims have the lowest literacy rates among all. The literacy rates of different religions are as follows: Hindus 65.1 per cent, Muslims 59.1 per cent, Christians 80.3 per cent, Sikhs 69.4 per cent, Buddhists 72.7 per cent, and Jains 94.1 per cent. Also wide gap in rural and urban literacy rates is observed among the religious groups. The rural-urban Differential Index pointed out the differences among all the religious groups. It is interesting to note by the Differential Index that the Hindus (largest religious group) recorded the highest gap between their urban and rural literacy rates and narrowest is found among the Jains (the smallest religious group). In fact, the Muslims displayed the lowest urban as well as rural literacy rates among the major

religious groups and place second between rural-urban Differential Index (Kaur & Kaur, 2012).

Religion-wise Educational Development

According to National Sample Survey 2007-08, 46.2 per cent of the children aged between 6-18 years are attending primary, middle, secondary and higher secondary education in the country (reference) The Report reveals that among all the religions, not enrolled children are more from Muslims in both rural and urban areas. As children move from the primary level to the higher secondary levels of education, Muslim children’s participation declines in comparison to other religions. The Report also reveals that the disparity among religious groups was greater in urban India than in rural India.

Participation of Muslim Children at the Elementary Level

Table 1 reveals that after the independence very few Muslim students in India completed their primary level of education. The affirmative actions by the centre and state governments, though helped in increasing the participation of students at all levels of education, did not sustain at the satisfactory level. Table 1 reveals that after the independence, Muslim students’ enrolment increased more than three times at the primary level. The increase however is not uniform in all the states. The inter-state comparison shows variation in the selected states. Immediately after independence in all the four states percentage of Muslim students who completed primary level of education is less than 20 except in Maharashtra (24.1 per cent). The gap between Maharashtra and other selected study areas states that it continued to increase up to the year 2001. Though these states progressed, they have still remained far behind Maharashtra. Same situation can be observed at the upper primary level.

Table 1

Distribution of Muslim Students Who Completed Primary and Upper Primary Levels of Education

States	Year	Primary	Upper Primary
West Bengal	2001	50.3	26.0
	1948	14.6	7.5
Uttar Pradesh	2001	48.2	29.2
	1948	14.4	7.4
Bihar	2001	40.7	23.7
	1948	17.3	8.6
Maharashtra	2001	80.4	56.8
	1948	24.1	10.0
All India	2001	60.9	40.5
	1948	18.2	8.6

(Sachar Committee Report, 2006)

Gender Parity

It is generally observed that girls are at a disadvantaged situation due to several economic, cultural and social factors. A sizeable number of girls are engaged in carrying out domestic chores. Some of them are prevented from attending schools due to social pressures. The Government of India has launched several initiatives to improve the enrolment as well as attendance rates of girls. Some of those measures as mentioned in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) are scholarships and fee waivers, free education, separate toilets for girls, appointment of female teachers (Nuna, 2003). Indeed the enrolment of girls has improved quite a lot during the last few years. But there still is a clear gender disparity with the type of school (management wise) Muslim boys and girls are attending (Table 2). There is variation in ratio of Muslim girls in comparison to boys in attending government, local body and private aided schools, both at primary and upper primary stage. The ratio of girls to boys is more in case of government, local body and private unaided schools both at primary and upper primary stage and far low in case of private unaided schools. This illustrates the reality that Muslim parents have been discriminating their daughters by sending them to low-cost government, local body and private aided schools and favoring sons by sending them to costly private unaided schools. This is a very good example of continuing societal discrimination against girls in Muslim community (Government of India/Ministry of Human Resource Development [MHRD], 2013).

Table 2

Ratio of Muslim Girls to Muslim Boys in Schools by Management Type

Management	Primary	Upper Primary	Elementary	Total Children
Government	1.02	1.15	1.05	1.02
Local Bodies	1.03	1.09	1.04	1.00
Private Aided	1.01	1.03	1.02	0.94
Private Unaided	0.78	0.78	0.78	0.76
Others	0.97	1.28	1.04	Not Applicable

(Government of India/MHRD, 2013)

Transition Rates of Muslim Children

Transition rate refers to the number of students moving from one level to the next level out of the total pass out students and is expressed in terms of percentage. A smooth transition process demonstrates the quality and competency of the system. All India averages show that transition rates substantially decline as the level of school goes up. That is, fewer students are able to continue to higher levels of schooling. An examination of transition rates in four states shows wide variations (Table 3). In West Bengal which has the highest concentration of the Muslim population, the transition of students from primary to upper primary and from upper primary to secondary stage is lowest. The National Sample Survey Organization Report 2007-2008 revealed that Muslim participation at various levels of school education is not

only low, but as students transit from one level to another, number of students decline sharply (GOI, 2007-2008). Some other studies mentioned the reasons for low transition rate of Muslim Children as erratic enrolment and irregular attendance, seasonal migration of children with parents, ill health, discrimination (GOI, 2011), inadequate provision of schooling infrastructures and facilities (Lipta, 2011), lack of parental demand kept children out of school (Pratham, 2007-2008), and inappropriate school curriculum not supporting the needs of the children (Taylor & Mulhall, 1997).

Table 3

Transition Rates at Various Levels

States	Year	Primary	Upper Primary	Secondary
West Bengal	2001	50.3	26.0	11.9
	1948	14.6	7.5	3.5
Uttar Pradesh	2001	48.2	29.2	17.4
	1948	14.4	7.4	4.4
Bihar	2001	40.7	23.7	16.1
	1948	17.3	8.6	5.6
Maharashtra	2001	80.4	56.8	35.1
	1948	24.1	10.0	7.3
All India	2001	60.9	40.5	23.9
	1948	18.2	8.6	5.4

(Sachar Committee Report, 2006)

Explaining Educational Backwardness of Muslims

The scenario of educational development discussed earlier reveals that considerable efforts are needed to spread education among the Muslim minority. Various initiatives have been initiated for their educational development, but have not been taken to a satisfactory level. Though over the years the number of institutions, enrolment, teachers, physical facilities in the schools has been increased, still the group is lagging behind in all the educational indicators like literacy, enrolment, girls enrolment, retention, completion, performance, etc. The literacy which is a first step to gain education is found lowest among the Muslim minority in comparison with all other minorities. Likewise, the proportion of enrolment is low and out-of-school children are also highest among Muslims. As they move up to higher levels of education ladder i.e. primary level to secondary, and higher secondary, their representation decreases. Analysis of time trend indicates that despite an overall improvement in educational status of the Muslim minority, the rate of progress is very slow. The gender disparity is also observed in terms of attending government, local body and private aided schools, both at the primary and the upper primary stages.

Various research studies have been carried out to explain the reasons for educational backwardness of the Muslim minorities. According to GOI report (2006), lack of adequate number of schools and infrastructural facilities in the Muslim dominated areas was a major

cause of educational backwardness of this community. In spite of more than six decades of constitutional guarantee, there are many settlements where government schools are lacking and required facilities do not exist in schools as discussed in the education policies (Narula, 2012). Ramachandran (2004a, 2004b, 2009), Batra (2005, 2009), Muralidharan and Kremer (2006), Kingdon (2009), Nambissan (2009), Vasavi, Ramachandran, & Naorem (2012), Ramachandran, Patni, and Mehrotra (2009), PROBE reports (1999, 2010), Majumdar and Mooij (2011) pointed out that teaching-learning processes and overall schooling environment (teacher-pupil relationship, pupil-pupil relationship etc.) are the reasons of low participation of Muslim children. The outcome data does not always throw light on why some children drop out or why some children learn so little even though they have been attending school, and even being promoted from one grade to the next (GOI, 2012).

Low participation of girls in schools is another notable problem in the education of Muslims. In schools, physical facilities are not available as per the need of the girls and as per the norms and standards laid by the government. When schools are not available within a walking distance and closer to the place of dwelling, parents are a bit reluctant - due to the feeling of insecurity - to send their girls to a school which is far off. The studies of Jha (2005), Husain (2010), and Abidi and Abbas (2011) have shown that the reasons for educational backwardness of Muslim girls are lack of government commitment in providing adequate infrastructural facilities in terms of building with a boundary wall, basic amenities, libraries, hostels, etc. Likewise, high teacher student ratio as well as absence of lady teachers in schools restricted the girls from pursuing schooling. Jha and Jingaran's (2005) study reveals that Muslim girls are going to Madrasha because government schools are not functioning well, there is inadequate infrastructure, teachers are irregular and disinterested and the schools remain closed very frequently. Therefore parents prefer to send girls to religious institutions. "The enrolment rates of Muslim girls have steeply fallen relative to the all-India average, especially during and after the decades of the 1990s" (Shariff & Razzack, 2006).

The history of educating women was started in pre-colonial period and was a public issue during that time (Ahmad, 1981). However, the formal system of education for women was absent. According to Minault (1982) and Chanana (1990), two parallel formal systems of education were in existence during the pre-colonial India and were organized and managed by the Hindus and Muslims. Religious and Secular education were imparted in these places. Girls were not enrolled in formal secular schools. Muslim girls would go to Kuran or religious schools which were generally located in the mosques. The studies of Nayar (2007), Husain (2009), Hasan and Menon (2004), and Jafri (2010) indicate Muslim women are marked with stark educational backwardness. A number of studies and literature have given perspectives on the various reasons and issues behind the educational backwardness of Muslim girls. For example modern education has yet to become an asset for Muslim girls

because there still is the idea that the proper place for women is the home (Begum, 1998). Ruhela's (1998) observations are also similar. He pointed out that "traditional Islamic injunction restrict girls to go in for education in public places". However, this is true, not only for Muslim girls but for all the communities of girls in India. As majority of the communities have patriarchal society, women have very less rights and education for women is not considered very important in comparison to boys. Contrary to this view, the Sachar Committee report (2006) reveals that interactions with the Muslim community are adequate to dispel misconceptions and stereotypes with respect to education of Muslims. According to the report, Muslim parents are not averse to modern or mainstream education and the general perception that Muslim parents are against educating their girls is also not true. Rather problems lie in unavailability of schools within easy reach for girls at the lower level of education, absence of girl's hostels, absence of female teachers and availability of scholarships as they move up the education ladder. It is also found that education of girls has not made much progress, especially when they transit from one level to another.

During the decade of 1990s renewed efforts were introduced to bridge the gender and social gaps in elementary education. These interventions were for universal access, retention, making the system responsive, and for reaching out to special focus groups. However, Muslims are not responding to these educational development programmes and schemes (Kaur & Kaur, 2012). The reasons may be the programmes differ from state to state in terms of coverage, quality and number of beneficiaries. The programmes are largely governed by political commitment and financial constraints. The states which are committed get resources and try to help weaker sections. In addition, there are historical reasons for development of education in the state. The difference can be seen in the progress of education as is reflected in the present paper. In educational development, Maharashtra has been ahead of other states in literacy rates, completion and transition of all the grades from the primary to the secondary levels. However, West Bengal has also made progress. Its total literacy rate is above the national average.

It was reported by the Standing Committee of National Monitoring Committee (2007-08) for Minorities that Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) should be brought directly under the control of Central Government instead of the State Governments, which are not taking much interest in SSA and funds are very conveniently being diverted to other schemes. Such cases need immediate attention and enquiry. The schemes and programmes launched by the Government remained untouched. Even if it is utilized there is a delivery shortcoming in terms of delays which needs to be taken into account. According to Udin (2012),

As far as the Prime Minister's 15 point programme is concerned, there is no mandatory power. It is only advisory in nature. Further it needs to have clear cut policy directions for its effective implementation which should have a strong political will among the states.

This is essential because state minority commission have no statutory powers to address religious minority issues. (pp. 395-402)

Nuna (2003) while evaluating Area Intensive Scheme found that the scheme was not properly and effectively implemented by the state governments and was unsuccessful in achieving its goals towards education of the Muslim girls. The Sachar Committee report (GOI, 2006) reiterates the need for region/location specific strategies that will enable the Muslim children, especially girls, to access formal elementary education.

The problems and issues of education of Muslims differ from state to state and region to region. Muslims in Uttar Pradesh do not face the same barriers as they face in Bihar. The situation in West Bengal is altogether different and may need an entirely different strategy. Therefore it is very essential to recognize that parameters for Muslims vary with region and state and accordingly they have to make strategies and plans to educate Muslims. The GOI's flagship programmes Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan are consistently working on improving access to elementary and secondary education. These efforts at Central and State levels include opening of schools, improved provisioning for textbooks, supplementary teaching learning materials and uniforms, hiring female teachers, bridge courses and special schemes and programmes. However, sub-Group on 'Elementary Education and Literacy' for the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-2017) states that:

The strategies and activities to address girls' education have largely assumed that they are homogenous category, whose disadvantage can be addressed through a common basket of interventions.... While schemes like Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Stage (NPEGEL) have been successful, their reach is limited in numbers.... Looking at the literacy rate of Muslim girls and gap between male and female, more KGBVs need to be located close to the Muslim habitations to retain the girls in the schooling system. The NPEGEL programme works in this area but suffered from fragmented approach. (pp. 29-33)

According to Kamat (1981), the reasons for educational backwardness of Muslims could be broadly grouped under three main heads: (i) religious traditionalism and backwardness of those professing Islam, (ii) partition of India and the psychological crisis of identity it created for the Indian Muslims, and (iii) the deliberate neglect and discrimination against the Muslims by the majority (Hindu) society which professed to be secular but was, in fact, discriminatory whether in education or in employment. India faces dilemma of secularism regarding education of the minorities in general and Muslims in particular. The reason is at the time of independence, India was divided on the basis of religion - with a large section of Muslims forming separate country (Pakistan). The division was not done peacefully. This has created anti-Muslim feeling among some of the Hindus. Even after more than sixty years of independence, the feeling has not gone. Therefore in India development policies are made on

the basis of social deprivation, not on the basis of religion. It is rightly mentioned by Choudhary (2003) that it is better to adopt a citizen based and secular rather than community based approach in resolving the problem of educational backwardness of the people belonging to all religious communities in the country. The religious traditionalism and backwardness can further be explained by the attitude of the Muslim community. According to the studies by Choudhary (2003) and Halan (2007), the Hindu, the Christian and the Sikh communities had set up a network of good educational institutions which provides general and professional education. The Muslim community has failed to set up such institutions in large numbers to provide its youth with modern education. However, Tamil Nadu and Kerala have been quite encouraging both from the viewpoint of increasing the educational preparedness of average Muslims and enlarging the size of the educated Muslims.

Other studies in this direction show that educational development of Muslims is closely related with the economic activity. As per Saxena (1983), over 70 per cent of the Muslims in India are living in rural areas and are marginal and small farmers or self-employed artisans and remaining 30 per cent who are living in towns. Among all the Muslim people, roughly 80 to 85 per cent are skilled workers, tailors, retailers and are involved in professions which do not require them to be literate. This could be explained from the viewpoint that Muslim population residing in rural areas is marginal and that most of the Muslim people are small farmers or self-employed artisans, tailors, retailers, etc. It depends on the need of education for a particular occupation. Imtiaz (2003) states that significant percentages of Muslims are self-employed in relatively low income generating occupations, whether this concentration is structural or imposed by real or preserved fears of rejection or discrimination in more secure and better sectors is difficult to say" (p. 191). Ali (2007) also points out the same observation. According to him, Muslims are from low castes and follow caste-based professions like weaver, dyers, bangle making, grave diggers, carders, dhobis and so on and are mostly self employed. To a large extent this is true. Children learn these occupations through experience. Any specialized training or education is not required. Because of this reason, their representation is very less in the government and high profile jobs. Udin (2012) states that 25 to 45 per cent Muslims are generally self-employed compared to 28 per cent of Dalits and 40 per cent of Hindus. Only 18 per cent are in regular employment (Hindus 25 per cent). According to Sachar Committee report (2006), Muslims hold a tiny 5.7 per cent of government jobs. In states with high Muslim population (West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh) this ratio is lesser than a third of their population share. In Maharashtra, it is less than one fifth. This shows under-representation of Muslims in the employment sector. According to Imtiaz (2003), this may be because of their preference for occupations and thus Muslims are either predominantly self-employed or employed in small establishments where education is not valued.

Conclusion

The discussion suggests that in spite of the affirmative actions by the Government of India, educational development of the Muslim minority is not uniform in all the selected states. All the states are not benefitted uniformly from the provisions, schemes and facilities provided through these affirmative actions. The paper revealed that over the years the number of institutions, enrolment, teachers, physical facilities have increased; still educational progress of Muslims is not satisfactory in terms of literacy rates, enrolment, and retention and in completion of grades. Therefore due attention is needed for increasing their enrolment, improving physical facilities in the schools, maintaining teacher pupil ratio, addressing adverse socio-cultural and economic realities as these are the keys in removing educational backwardness of Muslims.

The paper also highlighted inter-state variation in educational development of Muslim minority. It revealed that Maharashtra, in comparison with Bihar, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, is far ahead in educational development of the Muslim minority. However, West Bengal is also higher than the national average. In any case, Muslim community has remained slow in taking advantage of government's educational policies and programmes. This is largely because of their cultural ethos resulting slow progress in educational field in comparison with other minorities. This makes it clear that the problems of weak educational development of Muslims need to be understood and treated as per the need and in an area specific manner. That is, strategies for Muslims' educational development should not follow the uniform and blanket approach under one umbrella.

The paper also revealed gender disparity as one of the reasons of educational backwardness of the Muslim minority. The negative attitude and low aspirations of parents towards girls' education, early marriages and cultural preference for a domestic role for women delimits women's role in participation of formal education. These issues need critical examination. Though the parental attitude towards girls' education has been changing in a positive manner, women's domesticated role is still true to a large extent. Continuing parental discrimination to their daughters is revealed by the fact that more girls are sent to government, local bodies, and private aided schools while boys are sent to better perceived private unaided schools. The issue needs to be reviewed.

Bringing and retaining children in schools, especially girls, demands additional investment in terms of more physical facilities, more women teachers, separate schools for girls, transport and scholarships, etc. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has made provision for all these facilities. However, there is an urgent need for proper monitoring and implementation of the programme. When schools are present in the Muslim concentrated areas, they need to be well resourced and functional, in terms of regularity and timings for creating meaningful learning experiences for the Muslim in general and Muslim girls in particular. Finally, it is

equally necessary for the government to create conducive and safe environment for removing the feeling of discrimination, along with education as factors for development of religious communities, particularly of Muslims, in India.

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