



## EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF MUSLIMS IN INDIA

*Musarrath Banu K.\**

Education is considered as a mobility multiplier, a humanizing agent, an instrument of social change and an agent that has the potential of creating equitable distribution of income. The educational system in a society is responsible for accelerating the process of transforming the society's traditional ways and means of living into those of the modern ones. Population of a country can be an asset rather than a liability if its potential is tapped properly by ensuring education for all. Hence education is the key word for human resource development. "Destiny of a nation is built in its class rooms", said the great teacher and visionary Dr. S. Radhakrishnan.

The census recorded that the literacy rate of Indian population was 65.35% (75.85 for male and 54.16% for female). This implies that 35% of the nation's population is still illiterate. 35% in terms of numbers involves around 35 crores, which is quite a big number. This indicates India has a huge population that is yet to become literate. Illiteracy is a stumbling block in the society's progress. The Kothari Commission pointed out that "the price which the individual as well as the nation has to pay for illiteracy is very high. The illiterate is condemned to lead an inferior existence. The illiterate has little prospects of improving his income, standard of decent living and participation in the nation's economic, political and social development. Hence, the illiterate is not a free citizen."

The issue of literacy is a complex one in India's context, as it is a multi-group society. In India there is a high disparity in the levels of literacy attained by

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\* Faculty, Dept. of Sociology, Al Ameen College, Bangalore

different groups. For overall progress of the nation, one should keep in mind the different religious, cultural, ethnic and linguistic groups that have been living together since centuries. Hence, it is in the interest of the nation to bring some of these groups that are lagging behind on par with the mainstream society, to promote an egalitarian and integrated society.

Indian Muslims account 13.4% of the Indian population and they are 138.2 millions in terms of absolute numbers. This make them the second largest religious group after Hindus and the first major minority in the whole country. This largest minority in India that is next only to the Muslim population in Indonesia is underprivileged, non-dominant and weaker section of country, in many respects falling behind even the scheduled castes.

The socio-economic and educational backwardness of Muslim community in India has been established by a number of reports, such as Gopal Singh Patel report, the report of the 43<sup>rd</sup> and 55<sup>th</sup> Round of the National Sample Survey and the Programme of action under the New Educational Policy (1986). The benefits of various Government schemes aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of the weaker sections of society have not accrued to Muslims in any significant measure. Since Muslims constitute a major chunk of India's population, they play a significant role in constituting a complete picture of Indian culture and civilization.

In India, cultural life of Muslims is influenced by local and regional culture. Hence, Muslims in India are not a homogenous community. Unfortunately most academic and Muslim leaders like to treat them as homogenous mass. Even in matters like literacy, family planning and economic development there are regional and caste differences. If we have to understand the reality as a whole we have to keep this in mind.

There is for example higher rate of literacy among the Kerala Muslims than Muslims in other regions. Even the rate of family planning among Kerala Muslims is higher than the Muslims in U.P. or Maharashtra. Similarly, Ansari Muslims in Eastern U.P. are better off economically than other Muslims in the region. In the same manner the Bohras, Khojas and Memons of Gujarat being trading communities are much better off than Muslims in general. Thus, it is seen that regional and even sectarian and caste differences must be taken into account while trying to understand the situation of the Muslims.

But, it does not mean that we cannot talk about Muslim backwardness in general, because the large mass of the Muslims on the whole is quite poor and illiterate. Muslim women are particularly behind. For example among the Muslim women

on all India level, according to Family Health Survey (NSHS) 66% are illiterate and in Haryana Muslim female illiteracy is universal (98%). In Assam the female illiteracy among the Muslims is 74%. In West Bengal, Karnataka, Delhi and M.P. 60-65% and in States like Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat 50-55% of Muslim women are illiterate.

A large number of Muslims live in urban areas i.e. almost 30% and large number of urban Muslims are artisans who come from the lower castes. It is these lower castes that are upwardly mobile compared to the so-called upper caste Muslims. It is because a large number of artisans are becoming small-scale entrepreneurs. However, it is to be noted that their skills are by and large traditional skills and artisans lack marketing skills. In today's globalized world, people with traditional skills cannot survive. Maqbool Ahmed Siraj, the editor of *Islamic voice* a monthly newsletter highlights this aspect of Muslim artisans' present condition. According to the author the I.T. revolutions and the policies of liberalization has affected the Muslim way of earning livelihood for example - garment factory has rendered the Muslim male tailors jobless in thousands. Embroidery and Zari work have been traditional occupations with Muslims. Now computer aided embroidery machines do much work with higher degree of fineness and within a short space of time. An embroidery unit in Bangalore, which previously employed two hundred zari workers, has now only twenty of them. It invested in computerized machines and churns out a much larger output with less input cost on administrative work. Similarly Muslim silk reelers and twistors in towns like Ramanagaram, Sidlaghatta and Kolar are rendered un-employed, because of the lifting of the trade barriers under W.T.O. regime which has brought in a deluge of cheaper and finer variety of Chinese silk into Indian markets. Hence, there is a great need for the Muslim artisans to upgrade their skills. But due to lack of primary literacy among them, there is no question of upgrading one's skills. The real problem among the Muslims today is not so much the lack of the awareness about importance of education as of scarcity of economic resources. The educational backwardness results economic backwardness and perpetuates educational backwardness. Thus it has become a vicious circle.

Many scholars have pointed out to the socio-economic and educational backwardness of Muslims in India. According Sheikh Rahim Mondel, Indian communities like Parsis, Christians and Hindus had earlier start in educational field, while the Muslims entered into this field at a much later stage. The relative backwardness of Muslims was reflected quite early in the census 1911. The census of 1911 stated that rate of literacy of Muslims was only about 5%. According to 1921 census the Muslims had 11 educated males i.e. 9% and one educated female figure among the Muslim per 1,000 persons were only 64.6%.

The practice of maintaining community-wise figures has discontinued, other sources such as National Sample Survey, surveys by some institutions and research studies by individuals reveal educational status of Indian Muslims in contemporary period, which is quite dismal. The literacy rate of Muslims in India at present is only 34%. According to socio-economic and educational survey of religious minorities in Karnataka 1994, conducted by Karnataka State Minority Commission, 76% of Muslims in age group of 14-16 years were not attending schools.

It is also reported that the drop out rate of the Muslims from the schools is quite high. A sample survey on the educational status of Muslims reveals the fact that the enrolment of Muslim students at school level is about 12.3% and the drop out rate is about 64.82%. Female literacy is pointed out to be 19% and this is explained as one of the reasons of perpetuating ignorance and illiteracy in Muslim community. In a similar study conducted recently in Delhi, it was revealed that only 16 out of 100 Muslim girls finished school compared to 56 of their counterparts in other communities.

Several scholars have studied lower literacy level of Muslim girls compared to Muslim boys. Hyder stated that, majority of the Muslim girls were taught the rudiments of religion. They were also taught to read the Quran. After that they are mostly confined to the four walls of the house. Menon pointed out that in spite of free schooling provided by the Government, Muslim girls attending school are very small in number in Kerala. Mondel observed that in West Bengal there was steady increase in number of boys in school but the proportion of girls attending school was less in number. According to Peer, Muslims think that bestowing education on girls was a waste as their activities are confined within the house. Among the various reasons of the Muslim women's educational backwardness, the major ones include poor economic conditions and socio-cultural pattern of the family, the pardha system, negative attitude towards the girl's education, overall backwardness of the Muslim society.

The overall picture of Muslim community is dismal. For instance the contribution of Muslim scholars even in the Islamic studies is negligible as only four PhDs were awarded during 1982-83 and 1983-84 by Aligarh Muslim University, whose major purpose is to focus on Muslims and Islamic contribution to the Indian culture and society.

According to the Socio-economic and Educational Survey 1994 of the Karnataka Minority Commission, there are only 1.12% Muslim graduates, 0.03% MBBS, 0.15% BDS, 0.23% BE/B.Tech, 0.01% ME/M.Tech, and 0.005% PhDs, among the Muslims. The survey further highlights the dismal scenario of Muslims by looking in to the other areas of backwardness. The Muslim representation in

Government service is 1.26%, in Defence service it is 0.07% and households below poverty line, i.e. income below Rs. 6,000 per annum is 55%.

Hence, the Indian Muslim seems to have failed to reap the benefits of modernization. The modernization of a community requires formation of a middle class. The middle class started taking shape in India after the establishing of British rule, which went on increasing with greater development and industrialization. A very small Muslim middle class had emerged in feudal class. But unfortunately a major chunk of Muslim middle class migrated to Pakistan after the partition of the country. According to Asghar Ali Engineer a new middle class is emerging at present.

The industrial revolution that demanded a change of technical skills seems to have bypassed the Muslim community. The concern is even I.T. Revolution should not march ahead leaving behind the Muslim community to languish in poverty, illiteracy and ignorance. It is disheartening to note that there very few sociological and anthropological research studies conducted on educational situation of the Muslims in India. Madan (1976) states "there is growing realization that one of the glaring gaps in sociology of South Asia there has been scant attention which Sociologists and Social Anthropologists have paid to the study of Muslim communities..." But such studies are needed for academic and practical purposes.

According to the Ishtiyaque Danish, when compared to other communities, the Indian Muslims have lagged behind in modern education ever since it started in India. The overall picture is still dismal. The 55<sup>th</sup> Round of National Sample Survey 1999-2000 has recorded that Christians have the highest rate of literacy 79.3%, followed by the Hindus 63.5% and the Muslims 60.6%.

Similarly the enrolment to school at primary level for boys is 66.2% and girls 56.6%. Rate of discontinuation in the age group of 6-14 is 6.4% for boys and 7.7% for girls. According to this source a large number of Muslim students drop out while doing their high school or intermediate i.e. in the age group of 15-19. A community with a small number of graduates and professionals has little chance of being upwardly mobile. The educational status is indicative of the intellectual richness and economic poverty of a community.

According to a survey carried out by Darsghah-e-Islami Society in five mohallas of the town, which served as capital of Awadh principality before independence, out of the total 2088 Muslims only 76 have secured graduation degree, while 80 studied up to 10<sup>th</sup> Standard and 50 have acquired Pre-University Education certificate. The survey covered 297 families, that had 616 male adults, 487 female adults, and 985 children. Out of the children of 5-11 age group 194 were found not attending school.

This is an age that every child is supposed to attend a school to acquire the three Rs. Those who drop out of the school between 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Standard were the highest.

Masroor Hashmi gives data with regard to Muslim teachers in different Universities and centers of higher learning in the year 1994-95. In the All India Institute of Medical Sciences there are only 3 Muslim Professors and 2 Readers, in Bangalore University 1 Muslim Professor, 1 Reader and 4 Muslim Lecturers, in Bombay University 1 Muslim Professor, 1 Reader and only 4 Muslim Lecturers and in JNU, there are 11 Muslim Professors, 18 Readers and no Muslim Lecturers. If we exclude the university Teachers of Aligarh Muslim University, Jamia Millia, the total number of Muslim Teachers in other Universities comes around 700, which is only 3%.

Economist Dr. Abu Saleh Sheriff in his paper on "Relative economic and social deprivation of India" presented in a seminar organized by Islamic Studies and Universities research, pointed out that Muslims were among the most marginalized community in the country and that the position of the Muslim women was pathetic. He made the distressing revelation that over the past few years, the enrolment rate in elementary school among Muslim females in India is actually been witnessing a considerable decline.

Dr. Romala Baxammsa of the Research Centre of Women's studies, SNDT women's University Pune, based on official data, showed that Muslim women are in economic and educational terms, one of the most backward groups in entire state. Thus in rural Maharashtra 40% of Muslim households is without any land and 42% had holdings of between .01 to 1.0 hectares only. Some 25% rural Maharashtra Muslim women were literate and dropout rate among them is particularly high.

Dr. Malika Mistry, a Pune based demographer points out the economic and educational backwardness of Muslims in India, particularly Muslim women. She noted that while the 34.7% of Hindu women are illiterate, the figure for Muslim women was 52.1 %. While only 2.7% of Muslim women had studied beyond high school, the corresponding figures for Hindu, Christian, Sikh and Jain women were 11.7%, 16%, 16.6% and 30.5% respectively.

In the study of 39 districts in 1981 where the population of Muslims ranged from 20% to 95% (which could be considered a fairly representative sample of Muslims in India). The literacy rate of Muslim women was found to be 21.91%, which was lower than the average of 24.82% for the whole country, Muslims in public employment in all India and central services is less than 3%.

According to one estimate based on some survey more than 70% of the Muslims live below poverty line. It is noted that more than 90% of Muslims are small and marginal farmers, artisans and workers. The educational backwardness of the Muslims and their lack of modern skills, do not allow them to enter into high income occupations, except for rare instances. In the year 1981, among the I.A.S. officers, only 3% were Muslims, in the same year only 2.9% of all the I.P.S. officers were Muslims. About 3.1% of Income Tax Officers recruited during the period 1971-80 were Muslims. For the same period of officers recruited to Railways, Traffic and Account services only 2.7% were Muslims. In Banks the Muslim Officers formed only 2.2% (Saxena 1983), (Mondol).

A sample survey of educational status of Muslim minority of some selected regions of India reveal the fact that the enrolment of Muslim students at school level is about 12.39% and the dropout rate is about 64.8%.

According to a study conducted by Peer in Bangalore one half of the Muslim boys and girls enrolled in class I do not reach class IV. Another 25% of the pupils leave the school before the completion of the VII standard.

The study conducted by Sekh Rahim Mondol reveals that 47.17% of the Muslim boys dropped out and 56.47% of Muslim girls dropped out at Primary school level. It has been pointed out by Sikh Rahim Mondol, that drop out rate is quite high at Primary school itself and that there are more girls dropping out than boys.

Engineer (1978) has studied the role of Muslim leaders in social development of the Muslims. In his study he noted the poor economic conditions of the Muslims and their relative backwardness in the field of literacy and education. According to him the leaders in the Muslim community have very insignificant role in mobilizing its masses for removing their economic and educational backwardness. In his opinion lack of proper leadership in Muslim society made its members more tradition bound.

Peer (1991) has a very significant contribution in the field of study of Muslim education in India. In this study he examined the Muslim education in India before and after Independence. It deals with the attitude of Muslims towards education, the problems of dropouts, educational status of Muslim women, the role of Urdu language and the system of traditional learning in Muslim society. Through this study he also recommended some remedial measures to improve the educational status of Muslims in India.

Rahamathullah (1989) examined the poor academic performance of Muslim students of the Akber Peerbhoy College of Mumbai in a socio-economic and

environmental context. He has pointed out that the academic performance of Muslim students at college and University examinations is distressingly poor. On the basis of his study, he noted the various reasons for such a poor performance of the Muslim students. Accordingly to him the most important factors, which are responsible for educational backwardness of Muslims, are poor inputs, poor family background in social, economic and educational fields, poor and inadequate knowledge of English language, unfavorable academic environment of family and neighborhood, inconvenient location and unacademic environment of educational institutions and psychological inhibitions of students.

According to Abu Saleh Shariff and Zakir Hussain, in West Bengal, the literacy level is 69% and never enrolled only 15%. But close to 30% (twice the state average) of Muslim children have never enrolled in schools. A recent in-depth study reveals that 18% of all girls in the age group of 7-18 Shikata and 26% in rural Burdwan had never been enrolled. The study further found that the 20% of the enrolled girls did not complete their studies, with dropouts mainly occurring in the first grade.

A comprehensive socio-economic and educational survey of the religious minorities in Karnataka was conducted by the Karnataka State Minorities Commission in the year 1994. Since the tradition of conducting community-wise census stopped after independence, the survey is very useful in comprehending the socio-economic and educational status of minorities in Karnataka. According to the statistics provided by this survey, the literacy among the Muslims in Karnataka is 53% and 47% of Muslims are illiterate. A point to be noted here is that the literates without formal education are highest among Muslims, when compared to other minorities, due to the fact that Muslim families give great importance to the learning of Quran and religious education. There is steep fall in the educational level among Muslims after 7<sup>th</sup> standard.

76% of the Muslims in the age group of 14-16 were not attending schools. In Bangalore urban education up to 7<sup>th</sup> was 12.83%, education of the Muslims up to graduation was 1.12%, and Ph.Ds 0.005%.

As for the representations of Muslims in different services, there are 0.4 Engineers per 1000 population, 0.5 Doctors per 1000 people and in defence services Muslim representation is a mere 0.07%.

The percentage of Muslims with less than Rs. 6000 p.a. was highest among minorities in Bidar district. Another highlighter of the Muslims' deplorable condition was that the number of Muslim households in the slums were 18.28%, highest



among all the Minorities consisting of Christians, Muslims, Jains, Sikhs, Parsees and Buddhists (who include largely SC converts).

According to A.S. Seetharamu in his book 'Education in Slums' the most common cause of school dropouts revealed by a large number of studies are: poverty and indifference of parents, need for them to do paid work and supplement family income, irrelevant education, want of instructional material etc. The causes vary from region to region and their relative importance varies from study to study.

In the light of the above reviewed literature from various sources, we can understand the situation of Muslims in India. However it needs to be noted that such surveys and research studies on Muslim situation in India are very meager. Hence there is an urgent need to look into the scenario both in academic and practical purposes.

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