Higher Education for Muslim Women Empowerment in India

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ABSTRACT

India is a democratic country and Indian constitution mandated equal rights for every citizen. The Rights to Education Act 2009 mandated Education for All for Children belonging to age group 6-14 which got success in increasing the gross enrolment ratio (GER) in primary and upper primary education. But still the gross enrolment ratio in higher education remain far behind. The rate of enrolment in case of women is poorer than their counter part. But if we analyze the gross enrolment of Muslim women in higher education we can see the condition is even more detrimental than women from different communities in India. This paper tried to discuss the status of Muslim women in higher education, their problems in access to higher education, governmental policies and schemes for spreading higher education to them and ended with some suggestions which may be useful for increasing the access of Muslim women to higher education to some extent.

Keywords: Educational backwardness, higher education, Muslim women empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Education is an instrument of social change and executes two functions—the conservative and the creative. The conservative function of education helps us in transmission of traditional culture, values and socially approved behaviour patterns to the younger generation and the creative function of education brings social change by innovating new ideas, values and culture thereby modernizing the society. At present, education is regarded as one of the most essential instrument for the advancement of society. Desai stated that, the significance of education in modern societies cannot be overestimated. The literate and educated people are prerequisite both for maintenance and advancement of developing societies. The crucial need of education for the people in various spheres of modern social life—economic, political, social, ethical and others has been unanimously recognized. (Desai 1978, p.65). Education is a tool for overall development.

It is very discouraging that over the last two centuries or so the Muslims are lagging behind in the field of education as compared to other communities in India. Traditional outlook of the Muslims is, no doubt, one of the major reasons for their educational backwardness. The orthodox section of the community creates hindrance in women’s entry into educational institutions. Besides, the Purdah system, practice of early marriage, low level of aspiration and above all poverty hinder the growth of female education. Higher education makes avenue for socio-cultural and economic development as well as community empowerment. The Muslim community cannot be socially, economically and culturally developed and empowered if their female counterparts lag behind.
PRESENT STATUS OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Though Constitution mandated the right to education at primary level (I-VIII) to all children belonging to age group 6-14, still, over six decades have passed after independence, less than 50% Muslim women are literate in India while the rate is higher among the women from other minority communities- 76% literacy among Christians, 64% among Sikhs, 62% among Buddhists and 90% among Jain women. The representation of Muslim women in higher education is more discouraging. The proportion of Muslim women in higher education is a mere 3.56%, lower than even that of the Scheduled Castes (4.25%) [1]. The following table shows differences in gross enrolment ratio across different religious communities:

Table 1: Gross enrolment ratio by religious (2004-2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Groups</th>
<th>Higher Education</th>
<th>Graduation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>15.19</td>
<td>10.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>9.09</td>
<td>6.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>19.72</td>
<td>19.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td>10.77</td>
<td>14.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14.42</td>
<td>10.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UGC (2009)

The status of enrolment of Muslim women to the country’s medical colleges engineering colleges is also lower than any other communities. The attainment level is generally lower than the gross enrolment ratio as there is some amount of wastage in the course of completion of education by the enrolled persons.

The route to higher education for Indian Muslim women is hindered by the factors like basic education, transportation, societal and parental pressure and religious issues [2].

PROBLEM FACED BY MUSLIM WOMEN IN ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Muslim women are the worst victims of the patriarchal Islamic society and are not given enough freedom and hardly have access to higher education. Even they cannot access the primary education easily.

Madrassas teach mostly Islamic faith and do not provide secular education [7]. They emphasize more on Quranic education given at home to the girls and to allow them to go outside the home in the name of education.

The system of match fixation within kinship is also responsible for distracting the young girls and to loose interest in achieving something through education.
The parents are not interested in having their girls highly educated as it is very difficult to find educated groom. If their girls are highly educated, the orthodox attitude of the Muslim community creates some misconceptions regarding the purity of girls if they have studied in universities or have travelled abroad. Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) in India pointed out, the most tragic thing is that Muslim women have accepted this happily, internalizing the kinds of roles their men want them to live with. They are told that this is what they are created for and that for this they should be happy [3].
Moreover, lack of infrastructure and facilities, transportation problem, distance from home and non-availability of hostels and above all poverty also hinder the growth in participation of Muslim women in higher education.

GOVERNMENTAL POLICIES AND SCHEMES FOR SPREAD OF EDUCATION AMONG MINORITIES

On the findings of the report of the Justice Sacher Committee Ministry of Human Resource Development has taken significant initiatives for spreading education in Muslims during XIth Five Year Plan and the momentum of which are being continued/accelerated during the XIIth Five Year Plan.

Scheme for providing Quality Education in Madrassas (SPQEM).
Scheme for Infrastructure Development of Private/Unaided Minority Institutions (IDMI).
Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).
Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVS).
Extension of Mid Day Meals (MDM) scheme to Madrassas and Maqtabs.
Saakshar Bharat.
Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS).
Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA).
Strengthening of the National council for promotion of Urdu language (NCPUL).
Establishment of the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (NCMEI).
List of Minority Concentration Districts.
Sub-Mission on Polytechniques under the coordinated action for skill development.
Girls hostel scheme.
Setting up model schools [4].
Moreover, Ministry of Human Resource Development have introduced many scholarship schemes, Free Coaching and Allied Scheme, Maulana Ajad National Fellowship for Minority Students Scheme, Grant in Aid Scheme to State Channelizing Agencies of National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation, Research/ Studies, Monitoring and Evaluation of Development Scheme including publicity; “Nai Roshni”- The Scheme of leadership of Minority Women Scheme, “Seekho aur Kamao (Learn and Earn)”- The Scheme of Skill Development of Minorities. “Padho Pardesh”- Scheme of Interest Subsidy on Educational Loans for Overseas Studies for the Students Belonging to Minority; “Nai Manzil”- An Integrated Education and Livelihood Initiative for the Minority Communities.
These policies and schemes are doing a lot for the empowerment of Muslim women. Still the freedom and access to higher education has shown effect only in urban areas with upper class Muslim families. The women belonging to rural, poor families remain out of touch with the welfare schemes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are lot to be done to increase the growth in participation of Muslim women in higher education:
Islam emphasizes and encourages seekers of knowledge and does not discriminate between men and women. The prophet stated that “whosoever follows a path to seek knowledge shall walk the path of paradise.” Despite such importance to education given by the religion many families restrict women from studying, ironically citing religious prohibitions clearly showing their lack of knowledge about their own faith [5]. Therefore, religious leaders should take active role to create proper awareness and convince the Muslim population for spreading female education.

The educated, employed and empowered Muslim women should come forward and establish NGOs in order to guide and create awareness among the deprived Muslim women about the opportunities available. They should take initiative in forming self help groups by Muslim women and encourage self employment and savings [6].

CONCLUSIONS

Mahatma Gandhi once said, “educate one man you educate one person ; educate a woman you educate a whole nation” which means empowering a woman is empowering a whole nation. So it is not only the duty of the government and the NGOs to play active role in imparting education to the Muslim women but the whole community should cooperate in this matter. Moreover, the female themselves should have the urge of improving their situation through participation in higher education.

REFERENCES

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