Exploring Confined Spaces of Women Education in Islam: Interrogating the Religion and State Policies for Educational Marginalization

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Abstract

Gender disparities in education and all other social and demographic indicators reflect the unequal position of girls and women in highly sexist gender discriminatory social order. While historically there has always been a gap between the boys and girls in India, the case of Muslim women has been yawing. The study aimed at giving a brief overview of educational status of Muslim women and to explore the future directions and strategies for integrating and galvanizing women of all walks of life for playing their role in building and sustaining the 21st Century. And more importantly, building an equitable social order and a society that will give its women not only formal equality but a life of dignity.

The study has analyzed the present educational marginalization of Muslim girls with reference to role of state and religion. Both primary as well as secondary sources of data were considered. The present paper examined socio-cultural and educational factors and forces hindering their educational participation. Supported by deductive reasoning, this paper talks about the issues considering Muslim girls marginalization from a universal to specific Indian scene. Steps and suggestions have also been given in the paper to get the desired results for the improvement of the present condition. Through this study I have discussed the backdrop of existing policies, programmes, constitutional safeguards, legal provisions and schemes which are aimed at promoting education among females, Muslim girl have been specifically studied to justify the area of research.

Keywords: *Marginalization, State, religion, education, Muslim girls, policies.*

Introduction

The National Policy on Education (NPE, 2016) in India will be a landmark in the approach to women's education as its draft mentions the importance of women's education as it clearly mentions that The National Education Policy, 2016 envisions a credible education system capable of ensuring inclusive quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all and producing students/graduates equipped with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that are required to lead a productive life, participate in the country's development process, respond to the requirements of the fast-changing, ever-globalising, knowledge-based societies, and developing responsible citizens who respect the Indian tradition of acceptance of diversity of India's heritage, culture anda history and promote social cohesion and religious amity.

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It has attempted for the first time to address itself to the basic issues of women's equality. In India girl's marginalization persist in the enrolment rates between boys and girls at all levels. Marginalization of girls and question of inequality related to acquire education has become a major issue in India in recent years. This paper discusses Muslim girl"s marginalization in the education and I have identified and analysed various factors that cause their marginalization in education. The present paper also deals with the provisions mentioned in the Constitution and law of our country which, not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio -economic, educational and political disadvantages faced by them.

Marginalization is often described as a social process where people are relegated to the fringes or `margins" of the society. It is defined as processes, in which individuals or communities are socially excluded, systematically blocked from, or are denied access to participate in social and political processes which are basic to integrate with the society. Marginalization inhibits a person, a group, a section or a community to enjoy rights, privileges, opportunities and resources that are normally available to members of a society. It may therefore be considered as a discordant relationship between those who marginalize as compared to those who are being marginalized. Then possibly the term `marginalized" may be used synonymously with the term `oppressed" in comparison to an `oppressor" as Paolo Freire used, in his famous "Pedagogy of Oppressed", `proletariat" as used by Karl Marx, `subaltern" used by Gramsci, `powerless" as elaborated by Michel Foucault, or exploited, vulnerable, discriminated, disadvantaged, subjugated, socially excluded, alienated or downtrodden as used elsewhere in the available literature. (Shalu Nigam: 2014)

A World Wide Overview of Educational Marginalization of Women

There is an abstract phenomena that compounds the occupational stratification by sex that most educational fields remain sex typed. Further, sex biased educational practices, differential curricula and text books perpetuate the traditional division of labour between sexes. The restrictive effect of traditional sex roles, socialization in the family has its parallel in educational practices in educational institutions traditionally. This limits not only the range of occupations chosen by women but also lands them in low ranking occupations

corresponding to their assisting roles in the household. Thus traditionally education has contributed to educational and occupational stratification between the sexes by encouraging and preparing girls to pursue an extremely limited number of traditionally feminine roles. High level of sex segregation exists in the work force and women enter a limited number of feminine sex stereotyped occupations, which are also low in status. In UNESCO's Education For All (EFA) report, It is reported that 57 per cent of the estimated 104 million children in the 5-10 years age group who are out of school worldwide are believed to be girls. The enrolment of girls in many countries is only three-fourths that of boys. The report cautions that the deadline for achieving 50 per cent improvement in adult literacy and universal primary education may remain a dream for one-third of the world's population. The 164 national governments that adopted the Dakar Framework of Action at the World Education Forum in Senegal in 2000 committed themselves to putting in place policies to facilitate these goals. The international community also held out the assurance that resources would not be a constraint. But the EFA report notes that aid flows have been disappointingly low in recent years. Paradoxically, this comes at a time when the accent on primary education has been high on the agenda of many developing countries. The gender inequality is indeed prevalent in many developing countries like India.

An Overview of Educational Development of Muslim Girls in India

During ancient times and middle ages, education in the Indian sub continent remained in general the monopoly of higher castes; women‟s education was usually not encouraged. In India, the Turkish Queen Razia Sultana, other Muslim Queens and princesses like Noor Jehan, Mumtaz Mahal and Jahanara wielded political and military power. However, the colonial period and industrial revolution showed a marked downtrend in the status of Muslim women but their status dipped after the Wars. This is because the Muslim community, whose governments had fallen, felt endangered and threatened by the western culture and now wanted to hold on rigidly to their own identity. With breakup of the Muslim empire after the two wars, Muslims wished to preserve their past glory somewhat as they saw at the centre of the Western culture, a misused, overworked and 'undressed' women as its symbol. They reacted in a natural and protective way by restricting their own women from external influences and even curbing their legitimate rights including right to education at times. This trend gradually became a custom and a practice, resulting finally in illiterate, ignorant and

custom bound timid Muslim women. Individual and collective efforts notwithstanding, modernist views regarding education for Muslim women were not without their contradictions. Syed Ahmed Khan urged Muslims to gain a modern secular education. However, his vision of modern education for Muslims did not include women. Mohammed Iqbal, the renowned poet and philosopher, was also quite averse to the idea of female education. The Ulema favoured women"s education but only in sofar as it centered on religion (i.e. the Qur'an), family values and the moral virtue of women. In his classic text *Beheshti Zewar* (Heavenly Ornaments), Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi delineated domestic roles for women in great detail.

The Main Reasons for Educational marginalization of Muslim Girls

Lack of rationality among the Muslim masses is the headlining reason if we do not blame the social structure in India. The fear that the secular State schools which do not impart any religious education, will pollute the minds of Muslim children is heightened by the Muslim clergy who recommend only Islamic education for Muslim children to retain purity of thought and conduct. It is also a fact that majority of teachers and administrators of government schools being primarily Hindu, certain symbols and rituals are observed like hanging pictures /statues of Saraswati (A Hindu goddess) and *Saraswati Vandana* etc. which is seen as violating Islam by the Muslim clergy. A conscious effort needs to be made to allay such misapprehensions by sensitizing teachers, text book writers, school managements and principals on the need to handle minority-majority issues and references with due care to avoid any hurt or slight to any child. Perhaps it is time to think of all educational processes in a gender sensitive multi cultural framework. All religions are humanistic and give messages of peace, harmony, and love on this earth and that all are equal in the eyes of God. These universal messages must reach every child to make Humanism an eternal eclectic faith.

There is a major concept of "Deeni Dunyawi Taleem" for Muslim children in which education of Muslim girls is seen as necessary for making them into Good Muslim wives and mothers who will reproduce Good Muslims by certain sections, prominently by the Muslim Clergy who have a hold on less well off/poor members of Muslim community both in rural and in urban areas. Dini Talim is seen as a must especially for girls who will bring forth/beget Good Muslims. The other school of thought, represented by many erudite modern educated

Muslim scholars/social scientists/activists, does not see religion as an obstacle to girls receiving modern education. According to them Islam does not forbid education of women nor does it limit it to only religious education. In fact, Islam sees illiteracy as a sin and exhorts every Muslim to seek knowledge, even if one has to go to distant lands.

Muslim girls and women lag behind their male counterparts and women of all other communities. Among the Muslims, 17.6% is the dropout rate, higher than the national average of 13.2%. As many as 25% of Muslim children in the age group of 6 to 14 years have either never attended school or have dropped out. Muslims have the highest dropout rate in the country. 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 Committee 2006)

An unsympathetic official attitude, communally surcharged national climate and its own confusion in fixing up priorities made them unable to take the maximum advantage of the opportunity provided by the state. Southern states realized the hard reality first. Besides societies and associations which promoted education among Muslims, there were the same philanthropists that were responsible for giving a fillip to education.

State Policies aimed at Women and Minority Welfare Which encompasses Muslim Girl Education

India has one of the most impressive sets of laws for women and girls and yet little is known about them by women themselves. Laws in India ,by and large, cover the women belonging to each and every religious community. But it is also true that women are not aware towards their constitutional rights. The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. Fundamental Rights, among others, ensure equality before the law and equal protection of law; prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the Constitution are of specific importance in this regard.

The National Council for Women's Education which was set up by the Ministry of Education, following one of the main recommendations of the National Committee on Women's Education, at its thirteenth meeting held in 1974 made important recommendations for the education of women, through formal and non-formal channels.

The Report of the Committee on Status of Women in India (CSWI), Towards Equality was placed before the Parliament in 1975. The Committee examined the constitutional, legal and administrative provisions which had a bearing on the status of women and noted with concern poor female literacy, the declining sex ratio, and declining work participation rates, concentration of women in low paid occupations and that women were deprived of basic needs of health, nutrition, education and employment and were in a situation of total powerlessness with no share in decision making processes.

Education of Girls and Women in the Five -Year Plans-different five year plan observed the need of girl's education and that was mentioned on priority basis in five years plans. Meanwhile it was only in late seventies that backwardness of education of Muslim minority started receiving attention and resulted in some action on the part of the state. The minorities" commission was set up in 1978. It was a non-statutory body until 1992, when parliament enacted the national commission.

For minorities the first statutory commission was set up in 1993, called the National Commission for Minorities (NCM). However, it is only after census 2001 brought out its first Religion report that statistics on several aspects of population by religion (literacy, educational Attainment, sex ratio, work participation) became available in the public domain that has led to public Debate and action. A high power panel appointed by the ministry of home affairs and headed by Dr. Gopal Singh identified Muslims and neo-Buddhists as two educationally backward minorities at the national level and proposed that special efforts have to be made to bring the educationally backward minorities on par with rest of the society. Forty four districts with concentration of Muslim minority were identified for special attention based on 1981 census.

In May 1983, former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi issued a 15-point directive on welfare of Minorities. The 15-point programme for minorities was announced in 1983. The national policy on education, 1986 and revised programme of action 1992Need to take special steps to advance education of Muslims was noted in the national policy of Education

1986 its programme of action (revised in 1992) and led to formulation of the area Intensive educational development as a central government scheme of the MHRD.

In 2005, The Prime Minister's high level committee on social, economic and educational status of Muslim Community (Sachar Committee) in India was set up under the chairmanship of Justice Rajinder Sachar which submitted its report in 2006 .This committee noted with concern the low socio- economic status of Muslim Minority, higher poverty, lower literacy and educational attainments, higher unemployment rates, lower availability of infrastructure and lower participation in decision making, in civil Services including police, judiciary and in elected bodies, and above, all a perceived sense of Insecurity and discrimination.

Above all some of the suggestion have been derived out by on the basis of the above analysis:

1. The outmoded beliefs of Muslim clergy that for Muslim females only Dini Talim is required needs to be countered by systematic dissemination of the actual quotations from the Holy Quaran which grant educational, intellectual and spiritual equality to Muslim women. Education,. Media and Intelligentsia may have a role.

2. There is need to strengthen the large number of NGOs working in the area of education and social development especially those working for empowerment of women and young out of school.

3. It should be ensured that local community and other marginalized group take active part in planning and implementing development schemes.

4. Much emphasis should be given to make the data keeping in terms with gender, region, class, caste; linguistic groups etc. so that all the Muslims are not treated as a monolith.

5. Development schemes by the government should allocate resources in Muslim-dominated localities on a scale proportionate to their population; it should be suitably made and implemented.

6. The Government should collect data on Muslim girl's educational status including dropout rates.

7. It is equally important that there should be awareness among the Muslim community and primarily women about their constitutional and legal rights.

8.   Civil Society or NGOs should take a proactive action in the Muslim dominated areas of Delhi and make their presence felt.

9.   Sensitization of religious ulema to mobilize parents for their girl's education is a need of Muslim Community. So they can help and mobilize public through their lectures and literature.

10. Activists, organizations and policy-makers should make the data available to the general public and for use. Such information would need to be quantitative, qualitative as well as comparative, so that conditions between Muslims and other communities can be compared and policies suitably adjusted to ensure equity.

11. In order to improve the educational status of the Muslim minorities, efforts has to be made to improve their socio-economic status as well.

12. Development schemes must also be culturally sensitive so that they are acceptable to the Muslim community. For instance, enforced co-education after a certain level or Hinduised or anti-Muslim biases in textbooks often act as a major hindrance to Muslim, particularly Muslim girls' education. These issues need to be sensitively addressed and approached.

Conclusion

Muslim girls are the last to be sent to schools and in adversity, the first to be pulled out of schools. This condition essays their vulnerability and no say in decision making. This school going pattern of Muslim girls is largely controlled by the Islamic way of living in which the concept of "Deeni and Dunyawi Taleem" plays an important role. Its restrictive outlook for girl's education needs to widened. This step has to come from the Muslim community only.

It is the clear failure of the policy makers in ensuring equal partnership and participation to change, growth and development of the country. The authors of the "Towards Equality" Report while commenting on the role of state in marginalization of women observed, ""Women" were positioned – marginally and precariously – with the confines of a narrowly conceived social welfare sector. Marginally, because women had to jostle for space and resources within this poorly endowed sector with many other groups of citizens; precariously because the entirety of social context and situation of women, the issues thrown

up and the successes achieved during the social reform and the freedom movement, the unfinished task and an overall follow up – all were missing in the social welfare lens, the cognitive map of policy makers. Even more serious, the social welfare sector did not concern itself with the legal rights and entitlements" (Sharma Kumud and CP Sujaya, 2012).

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