

Higher Education and Social Mobility among Muslims and Dalits in India : A Comparative Perspective in the Globalised Times

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This paper is an attempt to see how globalization has impacted the higher education of Muslims and Dalits in India in a comparative and historic perspective. Based on the different secondary data sets, it tries to show how Dalit community across India has utilised the process of globalization and achieved educational and social mobility higher than Muslims. Muslims as a homogeneous group didn't take part in the educational development, especially in the higher educational arena where the Scheduled Castes have acquired the benefits with the historical interventions that are taking place in the pre-globalization era. The growth process of attaining higher education by the community was slower than any other socio-religious community. It also try to see and understand the double burden and deprivation imposed by the Globalization on the Indian Muslims because of lack of overall educational development among the community and alienation from the whole process.

The definition of the word globalization would depend on who is defining it and what is the purpose. When it is used in economic context, it refers to the reduction and removal of barriers between national borders in order to facilitate the flow of goods, capital, services and labour. Globalization is not a new phenomenon. It began towards the end of the nineteenth century but it slowed down in between and rose again rapidly during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Globalization is a flow which is very strong, if one is capable enough to Stand. It will sustain, if one is not it will be washed out, Now what is the capability or capacity ? This capacity is of economic, social, political and cultural. When we take Indian society historically, who is capable to stand against the flow, the upper cast urban Indian elite.

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This is the section of India that has made tremendous gain from the economic process called liberalization. The indigenous communities, Dalits, Tribals and Muslims were the worst affected groups by this process in India and elsewhere. This varies regionally to specific community. India started the process of economic globalization in early 1978 by taking small steps and during the 1991, the major policy changes were adopted and India opened up for liberalization and privatization. Liberal economic and trade policy, opening up of Indian market for the foreign trade and investment, huge privatization of public sector, and highlighted rapid economic growth were the main characteristics of this process. In the shadow of this, there were claims by the government of India that per capita income has increased considerably and huge decrease in the number of people who live below the poverty line. But this was later understood as the play with numbers by the Planning Commission of India. This huge process has impacted directly and indirectly the millions living in India. This was reflected in the all sectors - agriculture, industry, health education and even culture and lot more in the day today life of every Indian. The process has brought shining economic growth with two digits of GDP, but it created more structural inequalities in the Indian society where already huge inequality existed and still persisting. Education, especially higher education is one of the sectors that have undergone tremendous changes in the last two decades. Private universities, market based and new generation courses, decreasing public spending, public-private partnership, internationalization of education and curricula, setting up the campuses of foreign universities, huge private investment in education sector especially in higher education make characteristics of the changes that have happened in the higher educational sector. How far these have impacted a section of society that does have access to higher education historically would unfold educational and economic inequality within the Indian society.

Higher Education and Globalization

After independence, there was tremendous increase in terms of the number of higher educational institutions in India. Teachers and students thereafter also witnessed big increase. But how far this jump was distributed among all the communities and groups in India has to be examined to understand how unequal the development that took place in the arena of higher education was. The National Higher Education policy adopted in 1986 has emphasized on three basic elements, Access, equal access (or equity), Quality and Excellence. But the process of development in this sector was exclusionary for the sections like Scheduled Tribes,

Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Classes and minorities especially Muslims, which was a persistent process for a long period after independence that still continues today. India spends a scandalously small proportion of its education budget on schools and remarkably large portion on higher education budget. The poor provision of free schooling means that a disproportionate number of undeserved places at a highly subsidized university's are won by those who have received a private education (Smith-2003). This spending on higher education has had fluctuations over a period of time but it was never less than what was spent for the school education. After 1991, the higher education sector began to change like anything. Emergences of private universities, new self financing institutions and courses, substantial increase in the tuition fee, setting up of educational regulatory authorities in the state and centre, market and industry oriented courses and curricula are new trends. Privatization made it industry giving rise to the boom of private higher educational institutions shaping the destiny of the higher education where market decides everything. This has restricted access to a small minority which can 'buy' higher education which is obviously the urban upper caste Indian elite and other economically and socially affluent classes.

Higher educational attainment and Muslims

To attain higher education, one has to go through a long process which starts from the primary school enrolment. Within this process, only a minority reaches the higher education and the rest get eliminated, indeed it is accepted that, the higher education is one of the important means of social mobility and human development. The development of a community depends upon the educational attainment, which start from the literacy level to higher educational attainment. There is a scarcity of studies of the higher educational attainment separately for Muslims but Sachar Commission has made an assertion which is more or less the reality. Muslims in India perform very weak in all the human development indices. Compared to their other counterparts, they rank considerably lower than national averages and in higher education indices they are even below the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. 59 per cent of Muslims are literate when 65 per cent is the national average, and just above the Scheduled Casts and Scheduled Tribes. But there is a trend of decline in the literacy growth of the Indian Muslims after 2004. The literacy rate among the Muslims is 5.3 when this is 8.7 per cent for the Scheduled Castes. When it comes to elementary and secondary enrolments the story is not different. That is why the higher educational attainment of the Muslims is very less.

Performance in the higher education is calculated through the Enrolment Ratio which is calculated from Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) and Enrolment of Eligible Ratio (EER) and the Graduate Enrolment Ratio (GER). The following data has been provided by University Grants Commission on the gross enrolment ratio for different socio-religious and caste groups across the country.

Caste Groups by Religious Background in Higher Education

Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER%) in age group of 18-23 years as on 2000

Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER%) in Age Group 18-23 years, 2000						
Socio-Religious Group	Total					
	Total Graduates			Total Higher		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
ST Hindu	5.77	5.05	5.40	6.79	5.57	6.16
SC Hindu	5.21	2.39	3.83	6.53	3.16	4.88
OBC Hindu	7.32	3.76	5.56	9.35	4.70	7.06
General Hindu	16.69	13.27	15.05	22.63	16.52	19.71
Hindu Total	9.71	6.48	8.13	22.75	8.05	10.44
ST Muslim	3.41	1.54	2.60	6.58	1.54	4.41
SC Muslim	3.92	0.00	1.83	3.92	0.00	1.83
OBC Muslim	3.57	2.59	3.10	4.80	3.01	3.94
General Muslim	5.70	3.06	4.40	7.61	4.17	5.91
Muslim Total	5.09			6.80	3.85	5.81
SC Christian	6.50	5.85	6.17	7.04	7.69	7.37
OBC Christian	6.68	6.84	6.76	8.97	10.11	9.57
General Christian	18.89	21.37	20.19	24.64	30.14	27.52
Christian Total	13.14	14.50	13.84	16.65	20.32	18.56
ST Sikhs	1.74	1.13	1.46	2.16	2.53	2.33
SC Sikhs	11.07	10.92	11.01	14.36	16.22	15.21

OBC Sikhs	12.63	11.10	11.89	16.17	15.70	15.94
Sikhs Total	8.69	7.81	8.29	11.13	11.46	11.28
Total	9.22	6.30	3.79	12.15	7.94	10.08

(Source: Gender Differentials in Access to Higher Education- UGC)

The data above provide a picture as to what extent Indian Muslims are behind their other counterparts in terms of higher educational gross enrolment ratio. Here, what is interesting is the division of Muslims in higher educational enrolment rate is less than half of the Hindu enrolment ratio. When it comes to the ST/SC/OBC Muslims this is really worse, for the Christians it is 13.84 which is much above than even Hindus. At same time, Sikhs have a ratio of 8.29 which is also higher than that of Muslims. This picture emerges when one considers all the religious groups as a homogeneous community. Now take the categories within the religion like SC, ST and OBC of all the religious groups among the Hindus, Christians and Sikhs. The ST and SC Hindu ratio is 5.40 and 3.83, for Christian ST and SC the ratio is 6.17 and 6.76. Subsequently, when it comes to the Sikhs also the ratio is well above the Muslim ST and SCs. so it is clear that the higher educational attainment of the categories within the Muslim community is far below the same categories of all other religious groups. Now let's look at the condition of Muslim OBCs which constitute about forty per cent of the Indian Muslims. The tables give clear evidence that the Muslim OBCs are far behind all the other religious groups even if it is for the Christians and Shikhs, both are categorised as minority communities same as Muslims. This data from 1999-2000 make this relevant that the changes have happened in India post globalisation era in the market driven economy and market oriented higher education where Muslims as homogeneous group could not participate or take benefits as their counter parts in India.

Socio-religious communities	Number (in Lakhs)		Percentage of 20 years plus population		Distribution across the SRCs	
	Graduates	Diploma and certificates	Graduates	Diploma and certificates	Graduates	Diploma and certificates
Total	376.7	40.5	6.7	0.7	100	100
Muslims	23.9	2.7	3.6	0.4	6.3	6.8
SCs/STs	30.8	4.1	2.4	0.3	8.2	10.2
All others	322	33.7	8.8	0.9	85.5	83

(Source: Sachar commission Report, according to the census 2001)

According to 2001 census data seven percent of the population aged twenty years and above hold a diploma. This proportion is less than 4 per cent among the Muslims. Apart from this, the proportion of the population having technical education at the age of eighteen and above are lowest among the Muslims which is merely one per cent, which shows the terrible backwardness of the Indian Muslims in higher education. This is also highlighted by the Sachar Commission appointed by Government of India, so it is clearly evident that Indian Muslims are more educationally backward than any other socio- religious community. Now let us examine their backwardness in comparison to the Scheduled Castes in India taking them as a homogeneous social group.

Dalits and Higher Educational Attainment

Historically Dalits or the scheduled castes are one of the most marginalized groups in India, in all walks of life, that still persist in many sectors even today. But there is some remarkable mobility that Daliths in India have achieved as a homogeneous community and some specific mobility in terms of community specific and regional specific. In all indicators, the historical intervention of reservation policy has had made big changes; the SC elite to utilize this and attain the socio-economic and political mobility. The story of scheduled castes in India is unlike the Muslims, There were mobilized efforts among the scheduled castes for the approval and social recognition. This has expressed through the Dalit mobilization in several forms which has also helped Dalits. Despite all these SCs remain as the single homogeneous group which is least developed in social and economic terms composed to scheduled tribes and other backward classes.

When one consider Dalits as a homogeneous community and assesses their higher educational attainment during post independence to the post liberalisation period, the event that is to be mentioned is the historic reservation policy and the subsequent changes among the scheduled castes in India, even if it helped the elite or middle class among them more. The literacy rate of Scheduled Castes for all India was 54.69 per cent according to the 2001 census data which is far below the national average but according to the Human Development Report of India 2011, the growth of SC literacy rate is 8.7 when this is 5.3 among the Muslims according to the same reports. So, there has been an increase in the growth of the SC literacy rate as compared to Muslims attention of both state and community to work on the higher educational development of the Muslims. A comparison between Muslims and SCs/STs in terms of Graduate Attainment Ratio also reveals interesting results. Initially, Muslims had a

marginally higher Graduation Attainment Rate (GAR) than SCs/STs. In the initial phases of planning, the SCs/STs had performed more slowly and this had led to a slight widening of the gap between them and the Muslims. In the 1970s, however, the GARs for SCs/STs grew at a faster rate than for Muslims. This led to convergence in the GAR of Muslims and SCs/STs. In fact, among urban males, the convergence process had begun in the 1950s itself, and had resulted in SCs/STs overtaking Muslim males after the 1970s; it also resulted in the current significantly higher levels (Sachar-2006) which openly reveal the reflections of the reservation policy in the enrolment of the higher educational institutions and colleges adopted by the government of India. Here it is also important to look at which are the sectors that have made so called boom during the post liberalisation period which will give a picture of the need for higher education, especially the industry based higher education. IT and allied sectors, telecom, private health care, education, communication and technology, Infrastructure etc. which are privately managed has shown the growth. All these all sectors need highly qualified professionals as their work force where the highly educated urban upper and middle class work.

Concluding Remarks

Higher educational sector in India has changed in the shadow of the liberalisation policy after 1991. The post globalised world need only industry based market oriented higher educated manpower, the traditionally disadvantaged groups like, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward classes and Muslims are far behind the advanced groups in not only attaining the higher education, but the traditional deprivation and lack of education, skill and knowledge in the globalised context which make them dually marginalized. The government policy of reservations in education and employment spheres has played a remarkable role for Dalits and Adivasis. Even though there were criticisms on implementation side, the reservation facilities have given certain economic means of livelihood to over 1.5 million Dalits, for instance. Besides, over 50,000 Dalits could enter the field of government authority so far which Muslims couldn't avail. In this article what is attempted to see is, how far Muslims in India as a homogeneous community is behind all other communities in higher educational attainment, and how scheduled castes in India have made progress in the higher educational attainment, higher than Muslims in the context of globalisation and their social mobility through the higher educational mobility in the post-globalised India with the help of protective discrimination policy.

Notes

1. According to the 2001 Census data.
2. There studies from the states of Maharastra and other states claiming this.

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(Courtesy : Countercurrents)

