

Literacy Status of Muslim Girls in West Bengal

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Abstract : Muslims are the largest Minority and second largest religious group in West Bengal. Muslim constitutes 26 percent (census 2011) of total population of the state. In terms of education Muslim girls lag behind than their male counterparts and other communities. If Muslims girls continue to lag behind in educational and economic spheres, it will have the effect of pulling down the general growth rate. After independence the government has taken up various extensive welfare schemes for educational advancement for Minority girls. In the basis of census 2001 in West Bengal, Muslim literacy rate stands 57.47 percent. The rate of literacy among Muslim girls is 49.75 percent and male literacy 64.61 percent. According to DISE 2012-13 Flash statistics Muslim girls enrollment in West Bengal is 50.04 percent.

Key Word: Education, Equality and Islam; Literacy status, Backwardness, Problems, Government initiative.

Introduction

Among all the religious communities Muslim Females are in the least educated section of present society. The objective of the paper is to highlight the educational picture of Muslim girls in West Bengal. The backwardness among Muslim girls in comparison with non-Muslim girls has become a matter of concern at present. There are several reasons for backwardness of Muslim girls such as wide spread illiteracy, large family size, lack of link between Madrasah Education and Modern Education, economic poverty, negative attitude towards girls' education etc. Because of these Muslim women and girls tend to lag behind. As we know that education is the only mechanism that enhances the process of social, economic and cultural development. So, steps needs to be taken to improve the literacy status of Muslim girls.

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" Education, Equality and Islam:

Islam was the most revolutionary faith which transformed the lives of women of Arabia who were earlier leading a life of degradation and were victims of female infanticide. The Prophet, Muhammad (sallal-lahu-alaihi-wa-sallam) cleared the way for their development and complete freedom. The Prophet's presence inspired women to play an important role in every field. The Prophet's wife Khadeja (rajiallahtalaanha) was an expert trader while Ayesha (rajiallahtalaanha) was a learned Mufti and commanded an army later in a battle after him. He turned women as the "Queen of the house" and a delicate crystal while the Quran said, "women shall have rights similar to rights against them, according to what is equitable".

There is a general stereotype that the principles of Islam are the responsible for educational backwardness of the Muslim but according to Islam acquisition of knowledge is compulsory for all men and women. The first word revealed of the Quran was 'Iqra' which mean 'Read' and seek knowledge! Educate yourself, be educated. The Prophet said, "to listen to words of the learned and to instill unto others the lessons of science is better than religious exercise". He also states that "seek knowledge even though it is China". So, it is clear that education is the topmost priority in Islam and Islam does not stand against girl's education.

" Literacy status of Muslim Girls in West Bengal:

As per 2001, the total literacy rate of Muslim in India stands close to 59.1% and rate of literacy among Hindu is 65.1%. In West Bengal total Muslim literacy rate is 57.5% and Hindu literacy rate is 72.4% whereas Muslim Female literacy rate is 49.75% and Muslim Male is 64.61%. So, we can see that in West Bengal the gender gap in literacy among Muslim was 14.9%.

Table -1

Rate of literacy and illiteracy among the Muslims in West Bengal:

Place of Residence	Literacy Rate		Illiteracy Rate	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
West Bengal	64.61%	49.75%	35.39%	50.25%
Urban (W.B)	72.04%	59.23%	27.97%	40.77%
Rural(W.B)	62.92%	47.87%	37.08%	52.13%

Source: Government of India Census 2001.

Table-2

Area	% of Muslim Population 2011	% of Muslim Enrollment			% of Muslim Girls Enrollment		
		2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
W.B	25.25	31.67	32.22	32.33	49.89	50.24	50.04
India	13.43	13.04	13.31	14.20	49.06	49.17	49.22

Source: DISE 2012-13: Flash Statistics.

Census report 2001 shows that in West Bengal rate of Muslim Female in urban area was 40.77% and in rural it was 52.13%. But according to DISE 2012-13 Flash Statistics report in the year 2010-11 the percentage of Muslim girls enrollment in West Bengal is 49.89, in India it is 49.06 and in the year 2012-13 in West Bengal the percentage of Muslim Girls is 50.04 and in India it is 49.22. So, the data indicates that Muslim Girls enrollment in West Bengal is steps forward in comparison to the National enrollment rate. In West Bengal the gender gap and illiteracy rate has been reducing and rate of Muslim Female literacy has been increasing every decade but the gap between the genders and other communities exists. A lot of factors are responsible for the low rate of literacy among Muslim girls in West Bengal.

" Problems of Muslim's Education:

Muslims are among most backwards in India as well as in West Bengal. They are not taking care of their educational advancement by the advantage of constitutional provision. There are various reasons for Muslim being educationally backward which are -the anti-Muslim attitude towards Muslims has pushed them in more backwardness, the riots, communal violence and insecurity, absent of vocational education to improve their development through education, negative attitude towards girl's education among Muslims. Madrasah and Maktabas are still running at the traditional pattern. The most important reason is that there is difficulty in finding educated groom if the girls become highly educated. That's why Muslims are far behind in achieving the literacy.

" Government Initiatives:

The government of India has adopted suitable policies and measures for the promotion of girl's education in the country including that of the minorities. These policies are reflected in the provision of the constitution of India. The constitution of India ensures equal opportunities for all sections of citizens without any discrimination on the basis of belief, caste, creed, race, region, or gender. In the light of constitutional provision, girls hailing from any minority community enjoy, at least in principle, equal rights in education, employment and other fruits of the national progress.

To address the low participation of the minorities especially Muslims, the Ministry of Human Resource Development has taken several significant initiatives. Which are as follow:-

- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) - Sarva Siksha Mission
- Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)
- Sakhsar Bharat-this mission provides comprehensive opportunities of Adult education, primarily to women with focus on disadvantaged group.
- Jan Shikshan Sansthan are imparting vocational training in 33 out of 90 minority concentrated districts in the country.
- Scheme for providing Quality Education in Madrasah.
- Right to education act-2009.
- Mahila Samahkya Programme.
- Scholarship scheme for Minority students.
- National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language (NCPUL)
- The scheme of Rastriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)

Conclusion :

The overall situation and status of education of Muslim Female in West Bengal has improved to some extent. However this improvement cannot be called extraordinary. The government, policymakers, educationists and the community leaders need to take

serious notice of this grim situation. Though various scheme and proposals are redressing the obtained conditions of minority women in general and that of the Muslim women in particular, yet none of them proved to be effective. Taking into consideration the above discussion on education, it can be conclude that Muslim Female at the prevailing circumstances should demand for special facilities for them to get education.

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