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## **Education among Muslims in the Post-Independence India: An Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

*Education in India has always been a matter of concern. However, the post-independence period manifests the establishment of a very large number of educational institutions through government as well as private undertakings and marked a significant growth in literacy rate and educational attainment of its people. But this growth is not appreciable in some social-religious groups whose educational status is still low, particularly Muslims. The Sachar Committee report explores the marginalization of Muslim community and compares it with other religious communities and reveal the plights of the Muslims who are underdeveloped even after six decades of independence. They are at a double disadvantage with low levels of education combined with low-quality education, their deprivation increases manifold as the level of education increases. In this backdrop, the paper is an attempt to look into the educational status and its progress among Muslims in the post-independence period. The paper is based on secondary sources.*

***Key Words: Muslims, Education, Post-Independence, Sachar, Backwardness.***

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**Introduction:** Education is the most inimitable instrument in the development of the civilisation and a pre-requisite for the socio-economic development of a country. It plays a vital role in the development of society in general and the individual in particular. Through education, humankind has covered a vast journey to reach the present state. It is the guideline for every individual to make themselves a meaningful identity. Education is open for everyone and “Everyone has the Right to Education” (1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). But some groups and communities worldwide are deprived of getting education including other rights and basic needs. In India too there exist some educationally underprivileged social groups for a long time. Minorities in India especially Muslims are socio-economically and educationally lagging behind the other communities.

India is a multicultural, multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country. People belonging to many religions with their faith such as Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Christianity live in this country since time immemorial. Apart from these

major religious faith, people having tribal faith and other indigenous beliefs also reside there and contribute to make India a religiously plural society. Around 80 per cent population of the country professes Hindu religion. At the national level, Muslims are the largest minority with 14.20 per cent share in the total population. Other minorities are much smaller in size. Next to the Muslims are the Christians (2.30 per cent), Sikhs (1.72 per cent), Buddhists (0.7 per cent) and Jains (0.4 per cent); while all the other religious groups are still smaller (Census, 2011).

**Muslims in India:** Muslims are dispersed in almost every corner of the country. The partition of the country in 1947 left a substantial Muslims population in India. Before independence, Muslims constitute twenty-four per cent of the population, but partition gave all the Muslim majority areas except Jammu and Kashmir to Pakistan (Khalidi, 1995). India has second largest Muslims population in the world, it stands second to Indonesia. Muslims in the country constitute 14.23 per cent of the total population of the country and there are six states where the Muslim population is above the national average of 14.2 per cent. These are Assam (34.2 per cent), West Bengal (27.0 per cent), Kerala (26.6 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (19.3 per cent), Bihar (16.9 per cent), and Jharkhand (14.5 per cent) (Census, 2011). Around half of the Muslim Population lives in three large states Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Bihar. Presently India has 675 districts, of the 675 districts of India which are divided for administrative purposes, only nine districts (six in Assam, two in West Bengal, and one in Kerala) have Muslims population More than fifty per cent (excluding Jammu and Kashmir). In other sixty-seven districts, Muslims constitute more than twenty per cent of the total population. Despite being the largest second population in the country; they are lagging behind socially, economically, educationally, and politically. Various independent researchers, government reports, and other sources from time to time reveal their backwardness.

**Educational status of Muslims in India:** It could be early observed that the educational status of Muslims in India is very low. The relative backwardness of Muslims in literacy and formal education was reflected quite early in the census of 1911. The literacy rate among Muslims was only about 5.0 per cent in the census of 1911, after twenty years in the census of 1931 this figure reached at 6.4 per cent; gender-wise it was 10.7 per cent for male and 1.5 per cent for female (Mondal, 1997, p. 22). In 1980 a high power panel under the chairmanship of Gopal Singh constituted by the government of India to inquire about the condition of SCs, STs, and Minorities. The panel found that Muslims along with Neo-Buddhists were educationally most backwards. After twenty-three years of Gopal Singh committee reports, the government of India constituted another high power panel popularly known as Sachar Committee to prepare the Report on the Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India. The committee submitted its report in November 2006. They are at double disadvantages with a low quality of education and discriminated at the same time (GoI, 2006). Many researchers, academicians and other bodies that work on the condition of Muslims in India, have stressed on their social structure, socio-economic, educational and political state and validate the claim that Muslims are lagging behind to

other socio-religious communities on all important indicators of development and socio-economically are backward (Shah, 2007; Shariff, 2004). Muslims are educationally more backward than other communities in India (Robinson, 2008; Siddiqui, 2004; Mistry, 2005). Backwardness is circular in nature, educational backwardness leads to economic backwardness and economic backwardness leads social backwardness (Ahmad, 2015). The poverty, small peasants, and artisans among Muslims, discriminatory practices of the states are the main reason for the backwardness of Muslims (Salamatullah, 1994). In India, Muslims are more economically and educationally backwards. It is presumed that a greater percentage of Muslims are poor and engaged in marginal economic activities. The educational status of Indian Muslims is highly miserable and disheartening. Muslims are tradition-bound and conservative (Mondal, 1997, p. 21).

**Education among Muslims in India: After Independence:** Kamat (1985), when prepared a profile on literacy, education and employment of Muslims in post-independence India, felt the scarcity of data on education among Muslims at National and State level. The census books after independence did not give this information, they only record the broad count by religion, but did not sub-classify by literacy, education or occupation. Social scientist whether Muslim or others could have contributed a lot to this sensitive area by undertaking systematic large scale empirical studies, but have chosen to bypass it. Consequently, most of the writings on this subject in the post-independence period are not only insufficient but are also, by and large, polemical and one-sided (Kamat, 1985). Some researcher-made efforts in this direction such as Mujeeb (1965) made a significant contribution to the study of the relation between formal education and traditional values. He opines that due to certain values and attitudes attached to their traditional social system Muslims are educationally backwards. Sharma, (1975) found that educationally Muslim community was far behind in comparison to the others. At primary to higher secondary levels of education their backwardness increases. The community felt the scarcity of Urdu medium books, scanty provision of Urdu medium schools and non-availability of religious education. The schools were overcrowded, understaffed and ill-equipped buildings and lacking in library facilities attended by Muslim children (Sharma, 1975). Ahmad (1981) examined the socio-cultural constraints faced by the Muslims in the context of education and found that the appeal of education is not universal to all social strata in the Muslim community (Ahmad, 1981). The heavy concentration of Muslim households in less remunerative occupation has a relatively low level of income which could not influence them for education. (Ansari, 1992).

The post-independence period marked the establishment of a very large number of educational institutions through government as well as private undertakings. But unfortunately, there were no significant efforts on the part of Muslims in this direction. Government of India in 1980 constituted a high power panel under the chairmanship of Dr Gopal Singh to study the condition of minorities and other backward sections of the society. The panel found that Muslims along with Neo-Buddhist were the educationally most backwards.

**Table 1 presents the enrolment of Muslims during the 1980-81 found by the Panel.**

**Table 1: Enrolment of Muslims: 1980-81**

Level of Education	No. of Districts/ States concerned	Percentage of Muslims in the total population of Districts/States	Percentage of Muslim enrolment to total enrolment
Elementary	45 Districts/ 12 States	17.32	12.39
Secondary	38 Districts/ 11 States	18.56	10.70
Graduation	11 States	10.73	6.21

Source: Siddiqui, 2004

Table 1 shows that in 1980-81 Muslims enrolment at the elementary stage of education was 12.39 per cent against their population share of 17.32 per cent in 12 states. At secondary level, their enrolment was 10.70 per cent while their share in population was 18.56 per cent in 12 states. At graduation level, Muslims enrolment was 6.21 per cent while their population share was 10.73 per cent in 11 states. Table 2 present the education level of rural India in the 1980s

**Table 2: Education levels in Rural India, 1980s**

Educational Level	Hindus		Muslims		Christians		Others	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Illiterate	55.3	75.0	58.2	76.1	33.7	43.1	45.3	61.4
Below Primary	19.0	11.8	18.6	13.1	20.5	17.8	17.9	15.7
Pre-Middle	22.7	11.2	19.1	9.9	35.4	29.2	25.5	19.4
Secondary	5.7	1.7	3.4	0.8	9.3	8.1	9.0	3.1
Graduate and above	1.2	0.2	0.6	-	1.8	1.5	2.3	0.3

Sources: NSS 43<sup>rd</sup> Round, 1987; Shariff 1995

Table 2 shows that the literacy rate among Muslims in rural India during 1980s for male and female was 41.8 per cent and 23.9 per cent respectively and educational level was least among all communities i.e. Hindus, Muslims, Christians and others. Muslims both males and females were more backward at pre-middle and above level of education. At pre-middle, level of education of Muslim males and females was 19.1 per cent, and 9.9 per cent respectively while for 'others' the figure was 25.5 and 19.4 for males and females respectively. At secondary level, Muslim males and females were 3.4 per cent and 0.8 per cent respectively while for 'others' the figure was 9.0 per cent and 3.1 per cent for male and female respectively. At the graduate and above level of education, Muslim males were 0.6 while for 'others' the figure was 2.3 per cent. The educational status of Muslims in urban India was also least among all religions. Table 3 presents the educational level of person in urban India during the 1980s.

**Table 3: Education Levels in Urban India, 1980s**

Educational Level	Hindus		Muslims		Christians		Others	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Illiterate	25.3	42.2	42.4	59.5	18.8	22.7	18.0	31.2
Below Primary	18.8	17.2	20.9	18.5	16.0	17.5	15.6	14.7
Pre-Middle	30.5	25.3	26.3	16.8	36.7	33.4	30.0	8.5
Secondary	17.2	10.7	8.0	4.3	20.1	20.8	23.6	17.5
Graduate and above	7.9	4.2	2.3	0.8	8.1	5.5	11.7	7.9

Sources: NSS 43<sup>rd</sup> Round, 1987; Shariff, 1995

Table 3 shows that the literacy rate among Muslims in rural India during the 1980s for male and female was 57.6 per cent and 40.5 per cent respectively and educational level was least among all communities i.e. Hindus, Muslims, Christians and others. Muslims both males and females were more backward at pre-middle and above level of education. At pre-middle, level of education of Muslim males and females were 26.3 per cent, and 16.8 per cent respectively while for ‘others’ the figure was 30.0 per cent and 8.5 per cent for male and female respectively. At secondary level, Muslim males and females were 8.0 per cent and 4.3 per cent respectively while for ‘others’ the figure was 23.6 per cent and 17.5 per cent for males and females respectively. At the graduate and above level of education, Muslim males and females were 2.3 per cent and 0.8 per cent respectively while for ‘others’ the figure was 11.7 per cent and 7.9 per cent for males and females respectively. Table 4.5 and table 4.6 reveals the Muslims contribute most in the illiterate population in both rural and urban areas of the country while they were registered least in every level of education compared to other religions. Among all religions, Christians were the most educated in both rural and urban areas.

After the findings by Gopal Singh Committee report, the new education policy, 1986 also declared that the Muslims along with the Neo-Buddhists are educationally backward at the national level. Several other studies and surveys done by the academics, educational institutions confirm these findings. The National Policy on Education- 1986 states the following regarding the education of minorities:

*“Some minority groups are educationally deprived or backward. Greater attention will be paid to the education of these groups in the interest of equality and social justice. This will naturally include the Constitutional guarantees given to them to establish and administer their own educational institutions and protection to their language and culture. Simultaneously, objectivity will be reflected in the preparation of the textbooks and in all school activities, and all possible measures will be taken to promote an integration based on appreciation of common national goals and ideals, in conformity with the core curriculum”* (GoI, 1986, p. 10).

The statement of National Policy on Education, 1986 can be viewed in this regard- If Muslims, neo-Buddhists and other groups continue to lag behind in educational and

economic domains, it will have the effect of pulling down the overall growth rate and increase in social tension (Ansari, 1992).

Studies on Muslims shows that the majority of Muslims belong to the lower economic background. Since independence, there has been a tremendous expansion of the middle classes but among Muslims, middle classes have not expanded with the same rate of expansion as the national average (Khalidi, 1995). Most of the Muslims in India comprise of working classes, the landless agricultural labourers in rural areas, the artisans, craftsman and other daily wage earners in urban areas, for several reasons the appeal of education to this stratum of society is very limited. Most importantly education requires a significant investment of time, energy and resources. Even when education is provided by the state through local government schools without charge, the working classes are still unwilling to take it. Long term investment in education is of little attraction to people seeking immediately pay-off (Ahmad, 1981; Khalidi, 1995). The lack of interest in education is also true for the Muslims artisan class, as it feels that formal education leads to nothing more than a clerical career (Khalidi, 1995). The employment among Muslims are largely self-employed activities centric, they are mostly found in production-related activities and transport equipment operation. Table 3.7 presents the pattern of employment by religion (1980s).

**Table 4: Pattern of Employment by Religion (1980s)**

Occupation	Hindus	Muslims	Christians	Others
Self-Employed	35.9	53.4	21.4	44.6
Regular wage/salaried	46.7	28.9	56.1	38.3
Casual labour	12.1	13.4	12.3	10.5
Others	5.4	4.3	10.2	6.6

Source: NSS 43<sup>rd</sup> Round, 1987-88

Table 4 shows that 53.4 per cent of Muslim workers were engaged in self-employment activities. 28.9 per cent engaged in regular wage/salaried activities while 13.4 per cent were engaged as Casual labour. The figure for Hindus, Christians and other minorities in regular wage/ salaried activities were 46.7 per cent, 56.1 per cent and 38.3 per cent it shows that they were engaged more in regular wage/salaried in comparison to Muslims while less in self-employment activities in comparison to Muslims. The Hindus, Christians and other minorities were 35.9 per cent, 21.4 per cent and 44.6 per cent in self-employment activities.

**Sachar Committee:** Government of India in 2005 constituted a High-Level Committee for preparation of Report on the Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India under the chairmanship of Justice Rajender Sachar. The Committee is well known as Sachar Committee (2006). The findings of the report reveal the plights of the Muslim community. The Committee found that Muslims are at a double disadvantage with low levels of education combined with low-quality education, their deprivation increases manifold as the level of education increases (GoI, 2006). In table 5 the level of education among Muslims and other religious communities in India are revealed.

**Table 5: Education Level by Religion in India (2001)**

Educational Level	All	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikh	Buddhist
Literate	64.8	65.1	59.1	80.3	69.4	72.7
Below Primary	25.8	25.3	31.8	19.9	18.8	27.4
Primary	26.2	25.9	28.9	22.5	26.0	24.7
Upper Primary/ Middle	16.1	16.1	15.1	17.1	16.9	17.5
Secondary	14.1	14.2	10.9	17.4	20.9	14.1
Higher Secondary	6.7	6.9	4.5	8.7	7.5	7.6
Graduate and above	6.7	7.0	3.6	8.7	6.9	5.7

Source: Census of India, 2001

Table 5 shows that the literacy rate of Muslims was 59.1 while the national literacy rate was 64.8. Muslims at below primary level and primary level are more in comparison to other religious group but as the level of education increases their share decreases; at upper primary/ middle, secondary, higher secondary, and graduate and above they are the lowest among all religious groups. At secondary, higher secondary and graduation & above Muslims were 10.9 per cent, 4.5 per cent and 3.6 per cent respectively while the figure at national was 14.1 per cent, 6.7 per cent and 6.7 per cent for secondary, higher secondary and graduation & above level respectively. It shows that Muslims' deprivation increases as the level of education increases.

**Pattern of Employment:** The Sachar Committee found that Muslims engaged in sales-related work are more highly represented than others. Their presence is relatively lower in technical, professional, clerical and managerial work, particularly in urban areas. Participation of Muslims in regular salaried jobs both in the government and private sector enterprises is lower than the workers of other socio-religious groups. Further, it has been found that they are likely to be more insecure and vulnerable in terms of environments of work (Robinson, 2007; GoI, 2006). Table 6 presents the employment pattern by religion.

**Table 6: Pattern of Employment by Religion (2004-05)**

Occupation	Hindus	Muslims	Other minorities	All
Self-Employed	55.3	61.0	55.5	55.9
Regular wage/salaried	14.7	13.0	19.2	14.8
Casual labour in public and other works	30.0	26.0	25.3	29.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Sources: (GoI, 2006, p. 111)

Table 6 shows that 61.0 per cent Muslims are engaged in self-employment activities while Hindus and other minorities are 55.3 per cent and 55.5 per cent respectively engaged in self-employment activities. Muslims are less engaged in regular wage/ salaried activities; 13.0 per cent while Hindus and other minorities are 14.7 and 19.2 per cent respectively engaged in regular wage/ salaried activities.

**Table 7 shows the religious wise education level (2011)****Table 7: Education Level by Religion in India (2011)**

Educational Level	All	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikh	Buddhist
Literate	72.98	73.27	68.53	84.53	75.39	81.28
Below Primary	14.03	18.60	17.12	16.07	11.90	19.94
Primary	24.11	23.75	28.07	19.70	23.19	20.01
Upper Primary/ Middle	17.53	17.71	16.98	16.61	16.57	18.15
Secondary	13.87	14.14	11.04	13.55	21.88	15.21
Higher Secondary	10.20	10.40	7.74	13.87	12.22	11.98
Graduate and above	8.94	9.39	4.81	11.90	9.4	8.59

Source: Compiled from Census, 2011

Table 7 shows that the literacy rate of Muslims was 68.53 per cent while the national literacy rate was 72.98 per cent. Muslims at below primary level and primary level are more in comparison to other religious group but as the level of education increases their share decreases; at, secondary, higher secondary, and graduate and above they are the lowest among all religious groups. At secondary, higher secondary and graduation & above Muslims were 11.04 per cent, 7.74 per cent and 4.81 per cent respectively while the figure at national was 13.87 per cent, 10.20 per cent and 8.94 per cent for secondary, higher secondary and graduation & above level respectively. It shows that Muslims' deprivation increases as the level of education increases.

**Reasons for Educational Backwardness among Muslims:** Generally, three explanations have been presented for the educational backwardness of Muslims in India. The first explanation emphasises over their rigidity with traditional religious values. According to this belief, Muslims were failed to demarcate the line between the secular and religious sphere of life that they developed the cultural ethos antithetical towards modern education. Subsequently, The second explanation blames state and larger Indian society for educational backwardness of Muslims in India. Many scholars argue that the educational backwardness among Muslims is the consequence of a policy of deliberate neglect of the community by the state. The third explanation worried the biased textbooks and the cultural environment of the schools which is largely inculcating Hindu culture in the schools and misrepresentation of Islam and historical figures resultantly Muslims children feel alienated in the school's environment and in extreme cases withdrawn from the schools (Khalidi, 1995).

Apart from the above-discussed explanation regarding educational backwardness among Muslims, one more prevalent explanation rests on the notion of loss of role models. After partition, a large number of educated middle class and leaders migrated to Pakistan and most migration took place from the state of UP, Bihar, Central India and West Bengal. In these state, Muslims are most educationally backward as the effects of loss of role models i.e. they migrated to the Pakistan (Khalidi, 1995).

**Economic Reasons:** Poverty and education have a well-established correlation and being poor, Muslims are further burdened: they suffer from problems faced by the generally- poor assets, poor capabilities and active discrimination by state and social forces (Hassan, 2013). *Further*, without a sound economy, no community can take part in developmental activities whether be it socially, educationally or politically. Muslims in India are educationally as well as economically backward for a long time.

**Conclusion:** Undeniably Muslims Community in India, socially-economically and educationally is lagging behind the others socio-religious community. Since independence, the trend of their backwardness could be seen through various reports including census data. Nevertheless in the last few years, notably after Sachar committee reports, the Muslim community has been sensitized towards education subsequently, educational attainment among Muslims has been increased especially among girls, but this progress is not corresponding with the pace of time. More efforts need to be laid forth from both i.e., institutional and community level so that educational backwardness among Muslims can be secluded.

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