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Education of Muslims in India: Progress, gaps and the way forward

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Abstract

This research seeks to uncover the fundamental reasons behind the educational disadvantage faced by Indian Muslims through a thorough examination of historical backgrounds, socio-economic elements, and educational policies. Employing a mixed-method approach, this study integrates both quantitative and qualitative data along with existing literature to explore the educational marginalization and exclusion of Indian Muslims. This paper adds to the ongoing discussions regarding educational fairness in India and advocates for collective actions to guarantee that every segment of society has an equal chance to prosper in the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century.

Keywords: Muslim Education, Educational Disadvantage, Educational Disparity, Transition Rate, School Enrolment, Poverty, Muslim Girls' Education, National Development

Introduction

Muslims held power in India for an extended period, and promoting education among the masses was part of their agenda. The educational activities during the Muslim era primarily took place at religious sites, commonly associated with mosques. Education was offered at no cost and was delivered with precision. Rewards and punishments were commonly used in the educational system. Teachers received generous treatment from the rulers of the time and were granted a high status. Instruction was primarily oral. The curriculum focused on the Quran, and children were encouraged to memorize the holy text. This practice not only preserved the Quran in its original form but also distinguished Muslim education from others. At the elementary level, students mainly memorized the Quran with appropriate pronunciation. Muslim education also emphasized higher learning, where subjects such as history, philosophy, grammar, and law were taught. The primary languages of instruction were Arabic and Persian. The central philosophy of Muslim education is that Islam is a universal religion relevant to both spiritual and practical life. In general, education during the Muslim era in India was predominantly of a religious nature.

Objectives

- To investigate the underlying causes of the educational disadvantage and inequality faced by Indian Muslims by looking into historical, socio-economic, and political elements.
- To evaluate the present educational landscape for Muslims in India, focusing on significant indicators such as enrollment figures and transition rates.
- To analyze the specific obstacles that contribute to the educational marginalization and exclusion of Muslim students, including issues related to financial hardships, access to quality schooling, and the role of religious institutions (Madrasas).
- To provide data to establish the fact about the distinct challenges and constraints encountered by Muslim girls in education, considering the impacts of poverty, cultural traditions, and the accessibility of schools for girls. To propose a comprehensive "Way Forward" by outlining a set of concrete and feasible initiatives (such as the establishment of a National Data and Research Center, reforming Madrasa education, and enhancing financial support).
- To suggest fair educational opportunities and foster the socio-economic upliftment of the Muslim community in India.

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Status of Quality School Education among Muslims in India: Year Book 2023 - Institute of Objective Studies

The Sachar Committee reported in November 2006: Muslims were behind the national average in several educational areas.

- **Primary Education:** Only 59% of Muslim children were enrolled in primary school, much lower than the 70% enrollment rate for the general population.
- **Higher Education:** Additionally, Muslims made up only 4.9% of students enrolled in universities, showing

a significant gap that increases with higher levels of education.

Gender Parity and Total Enrollment Trends among Muslim Schoolchildren in India: A Ten-Year Review (2012-2022) in the below table

Note: In the below image of the newspaper the table highlights "Index value indicates number of girls for every boy."

Gender skew in schoolkids lower among Muslims: Data But A Steady Worsening In Total Enrolment

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There is greater gender parity in the enrolment of Muslim children in school than in total enrolment with more Muslim girls than boys being enrolled in upper primary, secondary and higher secondary levels. While there are fewer Muslim girls than boys enrolled at the primary level, even here the gender parity is better than for all students.

This was revealed in a report titled State of Muslim Education in India based on UDISE (Unified District System of Education) data, which is a system of collecting data from all recognized and unrecognized schools in India developed by the department of school education of the education ministry.

According to the data from 2012-13 to 2021-22, though the gender parity was better among Muslim at the primary level (class I to V), there has been a steady worsening of the skew among Muslims as in the total enrolment. While the report does not explain why, one possible reason could be the worsening sex ratio at birth during the years preceding this period. India's sex ratio at birth was 905 in 2008-10, which would be reflected in the children joining primary education in 2012-13. This ratio kept worsening till a low of 896 in 2015-17 from

where it improved to 910 in 2018-20, according to the sample registration system (SRS) conducted by the census commissioner's office.

Since the children attending primary level in 2021-22 would be those born between 2011 and 2016, a period when the sex ratio at birth was steadily worsening, it is logical that there would be far fewer girls joining primary level than boys over the years. The improvement in sex ratio at birth from 2016 onwards should reflect in greater gender parity in primary enrolment in the coming years. Though Muslims have higher sex ratio than the overall population, it has been going down among Muslims too, which could be why the gender parity index is falling for Muslim enrolment too.

The data highlights that though enrolment at the primary level might be high, Muslim students seem to face greater challenges in transitioning to higher levels of education. Smaller shares of Muslim students, whether girls or boys, transition from one level to the next at all levels, from primary to upper primary, elementary to secondary and then to the higher secondary level, compared to the share of total students transitioning. However, among Muslim students, a higher share of girls makes it to the next level compared to boys, which could explain why there were more girls than boys at all levels except at the primary level.

"Retention rates are vital indicators of an education system's effectiveness in keeping students enrolled and engaged throughout their academic journey. The education system must identify and address the factors leading to these drop-offs to ensure a smoother student transition between different academic stages," said Prof Arun C Mehta, former professor in NUEPA (National University of Educational Planning and Administration), who had done the analysis for the report.

	Muslims		Total	
	2012-13	2021-22	2012-13	2021-22
Primary	0.97	0.95	0.94	0.92
Upper primary	1.06	1.01	0.95	0.94
Secondary	1.04	1.04	0.89	0.92
Higher Secondary	0.99	1.10	0.87	0.94
Total	1.00	0.99	0.93	0.93

Note: Index value indicates number of girls for every boy

The State of Muslim Education in India: A Data Driven Analysis by Prof. Arun C Mehta based on UDISE Plus & AISHE 2023 Gender skew in schoolkids lower among Muslims: Times of India 12th November 2023. In terms of school education, the data indicates an increase in the enrollment of Muslim students, especially girls, at the primary, upper primary, and elementary levels over the last

four years. Nevertheless, a gender disparity still exists that must be addressed to provide equal schooling opportunities for both Muslim boys and girls. Focused efforts are necessary to enhance access to and retention of Muslim girls in schools, taking into account socio-economic factors, cultural beliefs, and various other obstacles.

Data that highlights Muslim Students' Enrolment in school Education

Table 1: Transition rate of Muslim Students' Enrolment in school Education (2021-22)

State / UT	Share of Muslim to Total Population (Census 2011) (%)	Primary to Upper Primary Education (%)	Elementary to Secondary Education (%)
Andhra Pradesh	9.556	90.18	75.96
Karnataka	12.919	97.77	96.09
Kerala	26.562	100.84	100.18
Tamil Nadu	5.862	98.98	99.48
Telangana	9.556*	93.53	90.53
Puducherry	6.054	96.64	98.28
Lakshadweep	96.58	99.38	97.87
Bihar	16.866	86.11	67.32
Uttar Pradesh	19.26	81.61	74.68
Madhya Pradesh	6.574	100.66	73.85
Haryana	7.027	98.47	98.47
Uttarakhand	13.948	86.31	70.21
Rajasthan	9.067	84.29	79.97
Jharkhand	14.532	93.01	75.51
Delhi	12.859	96.93	94.75
Chattisgarh	2.016	88.72	80.63

Share of Muslim to Total Population (Census 2011), Primary to upper Primary Education (%), and Elementary to Secondary Education (%)

The challenges Muslim education faces in India are complex and have been mentioned below

Financial hardship and limited access to quality Education

Muslim students encounter substantial obstacles resulting from inadequate access to quality education and prevalent poverty. Government programs and NGOs strive to enhance Muslim education, inequalities remain, suggesting that these efforts require further enhancement. Importance of Muslim.

Learning for Community and National Progress

Enhancing education within the Muslim community serves both the community itself and aids in the broader social and economic development of India. There exists a disparity in education, highlighting the necessity for action.

Equal Opportunities

Muslim students, especially girls, need to be brought up to the same level as other groups in society in order to fulfill the objective of universal education. Obstacles Encountered by Muslim Girls Poverty, cultural practices, and restricted access to schools persist as challenges to the education of Muslim girls. Government Initiatives Supporting the Education of Muslim Girls Initiatives such as the Maulana Azad National Fellowship, the National Scheme for Incentives to Girls, and scholarships for minorities offer essential assistance.

Muslim Girls' Education

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) contribute by operating educational institutions, providing scholarships, and supporting girls who encounter obstacles in their

education. Ongoing Issues: Facilities and Cultural Attitudes Shortcomings in educational infrastructure and existing cultural beliefs continue to restrict access to education for Muslim children, particularly for girls. Education Deficit

Religious tradition (Madrasa)

Religious conservatism has significantly contributed to the educational and social backwardness of Muslims in India. The emphasis on traditional madrasa education over modern, scientific education has restricted access to essential academic qualifications and skills, hindering socio-economic progress. Many conservative leaders prioritize religious education, often neglecting the significance of quality instruction in science, mathematics, and contemporary languages.

Political Marginalization of Muslims post-independence

Since gaining Independence, Muslims have constituted approximately 4 percent of parliamentary seats, while they make up 15 percent of the total population in India. This significant lack of representation has also contributed to their socio-economic and educational marginalization. In the political landscape, Muslims are increasingly being sidelined and have inadequate representation, which impacts their participation in policy debates and hampers the educational and developmental advancement of the Muslim community

Compared to Other Communities

Muslim youth typically trail the broader community in terms of educational achievement and availability. A diverse and thorough Strategy is essential addressing these obstacles demands a collective and all-encompassing approach to guarantee equitable educational opportunities and achievements for Muslim learners.

Table 2: Way Forward to improve the current situation of Education in Muslim Community in India

Sr. No.	Side Heading	Summary of key Recommendation
1	Create a National Data and Research Center.	Establish an independent National Centre for the Research on Muslims in India aimed at delivering trustworthy data, conducting in-depth analysis, and serving as a strong institutional framework for overseeing and assessing current programs.
2	Integration Among National Universities	Create a National Integration and Minority University in states with a Muslim population exceeding 10%, offering faculties in Medicine, Engineering, Law, and Management, while granting Minority status and a 50% reservation for the Muslim community.
3	Broaden the Influence of Central Universities	Establish Off-Campus Centers of Central Universities in Minority Concentrated Districts (MCDs), inspired by the Aligarh Muslim University model, to enhance access to higher education. Introduce vocational training and job-oriented education within Madrasas, enabling former students to enroll in modern colleges/universities through Bridge Course options (similar to the AMU approach).
4	Update Madarsa Education and Connect It to the Mainstream	Establish Off-Campus Centers of Central Universities in Minority Concentrated Districts (MCDs), inspired by the Aligarh Muslim University model, to enhance access to higher education. Introduce vocational training and job-oriented education within Madrasas, enabling former students to enroll in modern colleges/universities through Bridge Course options (similar to the AMU approach).
5	Improve Access to Schools and Reservation of Seats	Reevaluate the Area Intensive Program and shift the focus from merely creating new institutions in MCDs to reserving seats for Muslims in educational institutions situated in those areas.
6	Create Schools with Minority Status as a Model	Establish Kendriya Vidhyalaya Model Schools in all minority concentrated regions, awarding them Minority status with a 50% reservation for Muslim students.
7	Increase Career Counseling and Job Placement Services	Create a dedicated Minority Career Counseling, Employment, and Placement Cell in every Muslim Concentrated District to assist youth and facilitate job placements through coordinated efforts.
8	Augment Financial Support and Research Scholarships	Expand the funding and number of recipients for both primary/secondary level scholarships and the Maulana Azad National Fellowships for M.Phil. and Ph.D. candidates.
9	Enhance Coaching Programs for Competitive Exams	Ensure the effective execution of current coaching programs, particularly by enhancing the Nai Udaan Scheme with a larger budget and more beneficiaries for Union and State Public Service Exams.
10	Focus on the Education of Muslim Women and Teacher Development	Implement strategies such as establishing separate hostels and schools for girls with female educators, and provide sufficient training for Urdu teachers, along with National Overseas Scholarships (following the Karnataka Model) for advanced professional courses abroad.

Conclusion

- **Root Causes are Multifaceted:** The educational disadvantage experienced by Indian Muslims arises from a combination of historical, socio-economic, and cultural reasons.
- **Poverty and Exclusion Intensified:** The low socio-economic status of Muslim households is a major barrier. It often leads to financial struggles that push children into work, hurting their academic performance and increasing their exclusion from educational opportunities.
- **Urgent Need for Targeted Intervention:** The findings highlight the need for targeted actions and inclusive policies from lawmakers to effectively address the educational gaps identified.
- **Empowerment through Equity and Sensitivity:** Lawmakers can promote the empowerment of Indian Muslims and enhance social unity by focusing on educational equity and being culturally sensitive in all programs.
- **Crucial Role of Non-Governmental Efforts:** Community and NGO efforts, such as providing scholarships, tutoring, and support services, are crucial to complement government actions. This collaboration is important for overcoming financial and cultural barriers and ensuring resources reach those who need them.
- **Success Requires Stakeholder Collaboration:** The potential for significant educational improvement is promising, but it relies on the united efforts of all stakeholders, including the government, community groups, and civil society, working together towards shared goals.
- **Broader National Impact:** Achieving educational empowerment for Indian Muslims is about more than

social justice. It directly relates to meeting broader national goals for economic growth, social progress, and universal literacy.

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