

Madrasa Education and Social Inclusion

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ABSTRACT

Madrasa education is a site of Muslim social inclusion. This is more obvious in the case of madrasas accommodating secondary level school education in their curriculum. Globalization and privatization of education are among the multiple sites of social exclusion of Muslims such as religion, neighborhood, caste and gender. Most of the post-Sachar reports and empirical researches tend to compare and bracket Muslim disadvantage with that of the already recognized disadvantaged groups (the SCs and STs) and find all other religious minorities to be showing strong educational indices. The largest differences between other disadvantaged groups like Dalits and Adivasis, and Muslims lie primarily in school entrance and before completing upper primary or before completion of secondary level school education. The differences decline on progression to the next level of higher secondary education. This paper proposes to discuss education and particularly the madrasa education and social inclusion and critically examine and assess the post-Sachar progress of the community on lines of policy instruments such as the Right to Education (RTE), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the Scheme to Provide Quality Education in Madrasas (SPQEM).

INTRODUCTION

A number of official and privately sponsored reports, including the Sachar Committee, the Rangnath Mishra Commission and the UGC's Thorat Committee reports, have documented that among the religious minorities or Socio-Religious Communities (SRCs), it is only the Muslim minority which is educationally disadvantaged and excluded. All other religious minorities display strong educational indices. Most of these reports and empirical researches tend to compare and bracket Muslim disadvantage with the already recognized disadvantaged groups (the SCs and STs) of India. The GER for Muslim students in higher education is half that of the total (national) GER. The percentage of participation in higher education in India in the age group of 17-29 in 2004-05, was 6 %. Thanks to the government policies, it has risen to 11% for Muslims in 2009-10 while the increase for non-Muslims in the same period is 18%. According to latest government reports, however, the participation of Muslims in higher education has undergone a further decline of 1.5% during this period. Abusaleh Sharif in his report: 'Six Years After Sachar' finds that Muslim OBCs are much behind the Hindu OBCs, SCs and STs. Among the religious minorities, the Muslim women seem to be facing the most difficult circumstances. The GER among Muslim females was 5.8 per cent compared to 9.32 per cent for Hindu females, 12.7 per cent for Sikh females, and 16 per cent for Christian females.¹

The largest differences between other disadvantaged groups like Dalits and Adivasis, and Muslims lie primarily in school entrance and before completing upper primary or before completion of secondary level school education. Most minority students who have been able to pass the early hurdles and have developed skills often have motivation far exceeding their more privileged peers, which increases their chances of success and reduces the inequalities in educational attainments. The exclusion of Muslim children from school may even be worse than that of the children of SCs and STs. Social and historical backwardness seems to be a major source of disadvantage in the case of Muslim children, a majority of whom are doubly disadvantaged by their religion, gender and caste location. Healthcare functionaries like ASHA, Anganwadi workers, practice 'untouchability' and do not 'touch' Dalit Muslim women and children so as to avoid being 'impure'. This hampers institutional deliveries and immunization of children. The lives of girls and women continue to be controlled by the patriarchal belief systems and structures which use prescriptions and proscriptions to keep women in their place. Group-specific needs and requirements of Muslim women who constitute the overwhelming majority of the Muslim community, have not yet been explored adequately.²

Caste-based differences in education, income and other aspects of wellbeing have long been documented. In recent studies, Muslims are also found to be vulnerable when compared with other religious minorities such as Jains, Sikhs and Parsis etc.³

However, little attention is given to the caste-based disadvantages of the Muslim children. Globalization and privatization of education are other sites of exclusion in the case of the children coming from socially and historically backward Muslim communities. Given the substantial presence of these Muslim communities in the traditional occupational groups, issues related to the exclusion of Muslim children from school due to the traditional occupations in which the whole family, including children, is involved, or the adverse impact of economic liberalization and globalization on these occupations (e.g., unemployment or displacement from traditional occupations) need to be adequately discussed and addressed.⁴

Official policies continue to focus on reservations in higher education without paying attention to the educational stage at which these inequalities emerge. A stage-wise examination of dropouts shows that the largest differences between other disadvantaged groups like Dalits and Adivasis, and Muslims appear to lie primarily in school entrance and before completion of secondary level school education. The differences decline on progression to the next level on completion of Secondary level.

An analysis of the change at matriculation level of education during the five-year period between 2004–05 and 2009–10 suggests that the improvements are the least amongst both categories of Muslims (almost uniform levels) and considerably lower than those amongst SCs and STs. For example, while both rural and urban levels for STs and SCs are higher than Muslims, the improvements have also been as much as 13 percent and 11 percent, respectively in urban and 10 percent and 9 percent, respectively in rural areas, compared with only about 5 percent to 7 percent improvements in rural and urban areas for both types of Muslim communities.⁵ The disadvantages of Muslims are particularly noteworthy since their economic status is often at par with the OBCs,⁶ but when it comes to education, they are far behind OBCs and closer to Dalits and Adivasis.⁷

Impact of the Government Interventions: RTE and SSA

In 1993, the Supreme Court recognised the right to education as an inherent part of the right to life. The central government initiated the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2000. Taking cognisance of the Supreme Court interpretation of the right to life, the Constitution was amended in 2002 to provide for elementary education as a right of every child in the age group of 6–14 years. The fundamental right to education was followed by the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, which came into effect from 1 April 2010. The SSA norms were changed to align with the RTE Act, and SSA was made the primary implementation vehicle.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is the most prominent centrally-sponsored scheme aimed towards enrolment of all children in school, bringing out-of-school children to school, retention of children at upper-primary level, and enhancement in learning achievement of students. The SSA has turned out to be a striking success story of the Indian educational system in improving school entry. The all India figures show that only 10 per cent of children fall in the never-enrolled category, about 5 per cent enrolled but dropped out, and 85 per cent were in school by 2009. Among recent cohorts, 90 per cent of children enter school. This is a far cry from the 30 per cent of men and 60 per cent of women from cohorts aged 40–59 who never enrolled.⁸

Although gaps in literacy and school enrolment between different social groups have been declining over time, substantial gaps in educational attainment still remain between men and women, and between children from Dalit, Adivasi, Muslim communities, and other social groups. Social group differences in enrolment are striking. Dalit, Adivasi, and Muslim children are far less likely to enroll in school and are more likely to drop out than others. Consequently, while 94 per cent of children from the forward caste and 96 per cent of other religious groups were enrolled by 2009, the figures were 83 per cent for Dalit children, 77 per cent for Adivasi children, and 76 per cent for Muslim children.⁹

A report based on field visits by researchers studying the impact of post-Sachar government response brings to light the fact that SSA has had limited impact on actual enrolment, retention, academic achievement and learning levels of Muslim children. Compared to other disadvantaged groups, Muslims have much lower enrolment rates, higher drop-out rates, and higher incidences of out-of-school children.¹⁰

While school enrolment has grown rapidly and forms a cause for jubilation, the poor quality of schooling remains a major cause for concern. Short reading and arithmetic tests designed by Pratham were administered to children aged 8 to 11 years. Among upper caste Hindus and some other religious groups, more than 70 per cent of children were able to read a short paragraph. This figure was only 44–46 per cent for Dalit, Adivasi, and Muslim children. Among forward castes this number was 71 per cent (for reading) and 63 per cent (for subtraction), while for Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims it was about 44 per cent each. Even when controlling for the type of school attended, children from Dalit, Adivasi and Muslim backgrounds show a lower ability to read and subtract. Even when controlling for income, parental education and family size, caste and religious differences in learning outcomes remain large.¹¹

Bridging gender and social category gaps in elementary education is one of the four goals of SSA. Consequently, SSA attempts to reach out to girls and children belonging to SC, ST and Muslim Minority communities. While the Dalit and Adivasi students have been reached by the SSA programme has also focused attention on deprived children in urban areas, children affected by periodic migration, and children living in remote and scattered habitations, we also find that Muslim students remain deprived in spite of the fact that a greater proportion of Muslims live in urban areas.¹²

Social background is also associated with economic background and parental education, which exert an independent effect on education, but we find human development in India that not all of the effects of social background can be reduced to poverty or low parental education. Since Dalits and Adivasis, and to a lesser extent Muslims and OBCs, are poorer than the forward castes and other minority groups, it is assumed that the need for children to work in order to support the family income instead of going to school, and inability to bear additional school costs such as for transportation or purchase of books may lead to lack of school attendance.

Hence, the policy focus, such as the emphasis in the RTE Act, has been on increasing school attendance. Ensuring attendance is necessary but it is equally important to recognise the inequalities in learning outcomes. Children from Dalit, Adivasi, and Muslim families, and to a lesser extent those from OBCs, face unique disadvantages. Many disadvantages begin as early as primary school. Social background, lack of attendance, medium of instruction, first-generation learning and late enrolment are some of the disadvantages Muslim children have to suffer along with their peers from the SC/ST communities. For example, several researches point to teacher indifference (towards) or outright discrimination (against children from minority groups) as well as school policies, such as the medium of instruction being the state language rather than tribal languages or Urdu.¹³

Even when children from disadvantaged backgrounds attend school, their skill development seems to lag behind their peers. This difference could lie between first-generation parents (Dalits, Muslims, Adivasis) with high income and education levels and, say, high-caste Hindu parents, with a tradition of good quality education going back many generations in their families. With the growing importance of homework in the Indian educational system, children who are first-generation learners are often left without adequate support systems at home because parents themselves are not sufficiently educated to be able to help them. Since a vast proportion of first-generation learners are Dalit, Adivasi and Muslim children, excessive reliance on homework perpetuates this historic generational disadvantage. When coupled with the fact that children who start school late are often from Dalit, Adivasi or Muslim backgrounds, this may lead to lower skill growth among those who start out later than their classmates.¹⁴

NEP 2020: Inclusivity and Minorities

The NEP recognizes that large disparities still remain - especially at the secondary level, particularly for socio-economically disadvantaged groups that have been historically underrepresented in education. It includes minorities among the Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) along with categories based on gender identities and socio-cultural identities (such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and OBCs). While overall enrolments in schools decline steadily from Grade 1 to Grade 12, this decline in enrolments is significantly more pronounced for many of these SEDGs, with even greater declines for female students within each of these SEDGs and often even steeper in higher education. Minorities are also relatively underrepresented in school and higher education. The NEP acknowledges the importance of interventions to promote education of children belonging to all minority communities, and particularly those communities that are educationally underrepresented¹⁵.

Scheme For Providing Quality Education In Madrasa (SPQEM)

Contrary to the skepticism that was generated when the Madrasas Modernisation Scheme was initiated in 1992, the post-Sachar SPQEM seems to be universally acclaimed as having infused a new vigour in not only the age old institution of Madrasas but also the Muslim community about the importance of modern education. There is absolute unanimity among the various stake-holders that the project is beneficial in the educational advancement of Muslims. It has recognized the role of Madrasa education in Mainstreaming Muslims into Educational System on lines recommended by the Rangnath Mishra Commission (2007).

It provides Madrasas with Teaching and Learning Material (TLM) in modern subjects and also provides for the training of Madrasa teachers with the help of central organizations such as National Institute of Open Schooling, NCERT and DIET etc. Madrasas are getting an opportunity to teach subjects such as Science, Maths, English, etc without any financial burden. Though the funds under SPQEM are limited, the scheme itself has triggered an interest among Madrasas functionaries to pool their own resources in upgrading facilities such as computers and audio visual equipment. With this scheme in place, opportunity has opened up in a big way for Madrasa students to shift to the study of modern subjects. In states such as Madhya Pradesh, it has helped in registering a higher rate of enrolment in formal schools, after obtaining

primary education in the Madrasas.¹⁶ However, there is much scope for improvement in its design and in its implementation. The scheme stipulates that financial assistance through the State Government for in-service teacher training programmes for upgrading Madrasa teachers' pedagogical skills. Training of teachers by DIETs has been perceived as a welcome step by the parents, management and the teachers themselves. However, teachers in Madhya Pradesh complained that they were not being exposed to training in modern subjects with the seriousness that it deserves. Teachers from Uttar Pradesh complained that the trainees were themselves under qualified to train the teachers in modern subjects. The training that was provided to some teachers was done for Hindi only or in some cases for Urdu, whereas, teachers were eager to get training in subjects such as Mathematics, Science and English.

Issues in policy implementation

An evaluative report (2011) based on empirical findings of researchers of the Centre for Study of Equity Studies, New Delhi in three Muslim-concentrated districts of Darbhanga (Bihar), 24 Parganas (West Bengal) and Mewat (Haryana) lists several issues in the government initiatives. The most obvious issue is the lack of effective targeting. Although Census, National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) and the Sachar Committee data point to Muslims, among all minorities, suffering the most deprivations, both 15 Point Programme and Multi Sectoral Development Programme have little specifically for them. This diffidence at policy level to clearly focus on Muslims and their deprivations translates into active reluctance by implementing agencies on the ground, to target Muslims and the drivers of their deprivations, even in districts with high Muslim concentrations. Equity demands tailor-made targeted interventions for those left behind by the development process – as has been the case, for many decades, with SCs and STs, and, later, OBCs. Clearly, while the policy effort was to address Muslim disadvantage, the schemes were open to all minorities. In practice, these programmes have been further reduced to an area-scheme that misses minorities, let alone its original target group, the Muslim minority.

There is no scope for innovation or creative schemes tailored to Muslim needs. As a consequence, most funds are diverted to infrastructure development (classrooms and Anganwadi building), rather than to tackle barriers to education, skill development and livelihood opportunities, that are central challenges faced by poor Muslims. Multi-Sectoral Development Programme has been touted as the magic policy bullet for Muslim uplift, post-Sachar recommendations. Field visits and examination of the Multi-sectoral Development Programme projects revealed that schools and hostels and common rooms, were built in areas with few minority habitations, and with very little enrolment of Muslim children in them.

In the post-Sachar government interventions, schemes like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the residential Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs) were tasked to target Muslim children with an equal emphasis. For example, Muslim girls in the District Darbhanga of Bihar appeared to benefit less from targeted interventions such as KGBV, than SC and ST girls. In 2009-10, total enrolment in KGBV in the district was 1370, of which SCs made up 602 (44 %), while the representation of STs was 404 (29 %). Muslim girls (their number being 364) made up only 27 % of the total enrolment.

Under SSA in FY 2009-10, 66 new primary schools were opened, meant for enhancing access to children from minority backgrounds. Curiously, only 7 of those were in minority concentration areas. Under the SSA and the Multi-sectoral Development Programme, attention is given more to building new primary schools and additional classrooms as the catch-all solution, ignoring other issues of importance.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Awareness and community engagement at the local level is a serious weakness of minority programmes. There is complete disconnect between minority welfare infrastructure and Muslim civil society, and efforts by government for creating awareness of schemes and reaching out to beneficiary groups. Poor official engagement with stakeholders and beneficiary groups results in the official failure to take planning of projects in Muslim concentration pockets to the village level, limiting this at best to districts or blocks. Since the Madrasas are fulfilling the mandate of the Right to Education (RTE), the government should consider treating them at par with government aided schools and provide all necessary aid and financial assistance.

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NOTES

¹ Annexures to the Report of the National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities Vol. 2: 52; Lok Sabha Secretariat 2013: Minority Education 10, 13-14; UGC 2008: 8

² IDFC India Infrastructure Report: 2012; The Sachar Committee Report: 2006; Panda, Ranjan: 2016; Annexures to the Report of the National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities Vol. 1: 42; Ansari, M. Hamid 2015

³ IIR 2013: 44

⁴ Basant, Rakesh: 2012

⁵ Shariff 2013: 22

⁶ Desai et al. 2010

⁷ IDFC India Infrastructure Report 2013: 47

⁸ Desai et al. 2010: 75

⁹ Desai et al. 2010: 78



¹⁰ Mander, Harsh 2011

¹¹ IIR 2013: 47-8

¹² Department of School Education and Literacy 2011

¹³ IIR 2013: 49

¹⁴ IIR 2013: 50

¹⁵ National Educational Policy 2020: Ministry of Human Resource Development Government of India

¹⁶ Dr. K. R. Narayanan Centre for Dalit and Minorities Studies (2013): 24