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Inclusion of Muslim women in higher education: A social and national transformation

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Abstract

According to Brigham Young, “If you educate a man, you educate one person. If you educate a woman, you educate a nation.” This quote gives a clear indication that when we educate a woman we educate an entire nation, and ultimately the nation gets developed. So, the progress of a nation is largely depending upon the progress of a woman. Without women, a nation can’t be developed. This paper gives the impression that the goals of education for girls in general, and Muslim girls in particular are directly connected with the progress of the nation as a whole. Many studies indicate that the educational status of Muslim women is relatively low compared to their male and female counterparts. This paper is an attempt to analyze the factors that are responsible for the educational retardation of Muslim women at the tertiary level. As a result, the present article highlighted a number of causes for Muslim females' low educational standing at higher levels of education as well as offered some recommendations and ideas. The report then offers some of the recommendations suggested by NEP-2020 for promoting the inclusion of girls in the higher level of education in order to advance their socioeconomic and educational status.

Keywords: Muslim women, higher education, and national development

Introduction

The engagement of individuals in the developmental process is seen as significant and crucial since human development is moving into the Centre of the world stage. Even so, a sizable portion of the populace is being kept out of the economic benefits of growth. In terms of developmental opportunities, women, who make up almost half of the population, receive a paltry amount. But, the lack of women’s participation in developmental opportunities is not new. It is as old as human civilization came into the picture. Women were supposed to remain in the four walls of the house, and serve the man. Women are tending to be in the marginalized section for ages and Muslim women are no exception. Various commissions, committees, and conferences cover a lot of ground. But the reality is very different from the speculative truth. Women in general, and Muslim women in particular, do not have equal access to literacy, education, health, employment, or the political and economic decision-making processes, which hinders their progress.

Development of every individual is necessary for the individual, societal, and nation’s development, and education is the only tool that can touch the milestone of the developmental processes. Education is the need of the hour for every citizen. It has no boundary for caste, class, color, religion, region, and gender. It is open to all and for all. In education, there are three systems i.e., primary, secondary, and higher education. The Muslim parents somehow manage to give education to their daughters up to schooling and intermediate. But due to some reasons they don’t and couldn’t afford the cost of higher education for their daughters which hinders the developmental process of their daughters.

History has witnessed that women are not less than anybody in anything. It has witnessed the existence of great Muslim women leaders. Razia Sultana, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Abadi Bano Begum, Bibi Amatus Salam, Hajara Begum, etc. are some of the profound examples. History will always remember Razia Sultana, the daughter of Ilutmish of the Slave dynasty, who ruled Delhi in the 13th century.

The last four women have fought for Indian independence (The Siasat Daily, 2020). This indicates the power of women. They have the capacity to run a family and rule a nation. They can be a mother and a leader. Therefore, in order to fully realise a country's potential for socioeconomic growth, the capacities of its citizens from all societal segments must be properly utilised, and the only way to do so is through education.

A person only continues to grow when s/he gets a complete education. Incomplete education leads to half development. Thus, completion of schooling and intermediate is necessary, but not sufficient condition to develop fully. Here higher education performs a significant role. Higher education is the level of education that can bridge the gap between partial development and complete development. Unfortunately, but truly, most of Muslims are unaware of the importance of higher education, and as a result they end up with incomplete education. One thing can be noted down that completion of schooling doesn't mean completion of education, but completion of one level of education. These things are needed to be realized by Muslim parents and their daughters.

Educational rights of women in Islam

Education is one of the sacred rights of all human beings in Islam. History tells us that Islam is never against female education. The first guidance revealed by almighty Allah in the Quran was "Iqra" which means 'to read'. No doubt Islam is a religion that gives much importance to religious education. But the education of girls in Islam is not confined to religious themes only. The knowledge of practical and general education was also encouraged in this religion. It is meant for both men and women. In the Hadith (a book containing the narrative records of prophet Mohammad and his companions), Ibn Majah number 224, the beloved prophet said "It is obligatory to every Muslim; men and women to acquire knowledge". The prophet especially told the parents to educate their children, especially the daughters. It is the duty of the husband to give education to his wife. There is a hadith (101) in Sahih Bukhari that states that the prophet Mohammad (pbuh) used to especially dedicate time to educating women. He also sends "Sahabas" (the companions of the prophet) specially to educate the women.

If we read the history of Islam, 49 years ago in the days of ignorance, at that time we have examples of several women who are scholars. The best example was Aishah Binte Abu Bakr, the wife of the prophet Mohammad (pbuh), the founder of Islam. She was incredibly gifted and had an amazing memory. She was known for instructing prominent scholars and is credited with telling more than two thousand Hadith. Female education in Islam is characterised by Aishah's example of supporting education, especially the education of women in the laws and teachings of Islam. She was a leader in society, politics, and almost every sphere of knowledge.

Since the beginning of Islam, educated Muslim women have also studied other subjects and made contributions to science and technology. Amat-Al-Wahid Sutaita Al-Mahamli, for instance, who was from Baghdad, was a master in numerous subjects, including Arabic literature, hadith, and law. In the tenth century, Lobana of Cordoba gained fame for her scientific knowledge and proficiency, particularly for her ability to solve challenging Geometrical

and Algebraic problems. The first woman to compose poetry in modern Persian is thought to have been Afghanistan's Rabia Balkhi, who lived in the ninth century and is renowned for her exquisite lyrics.

Higher education status of Muslim women in India

The Muslims are seeming to be educationally more backward than the other communities. Wastage cases of Muslim girls are ample in the higher education stage owing to different reasons. The following table shows the literacy rates of different communities in India with respect to higher education levels according to the Census, 2011.

Table 1: Literacy Rate across Religious Communities in Higher Education Level (Graduation & above) as per the Census, 2011

Communities	Female	Male	Total
Hindus	4.64	7.26	11.9
Muslims	2.07	3.41	5.48
Christians	8.72	8.98	17.7
Sikhs	6.73	6.1	12.83
Jains	23.55	27.7	51.25
Buddhists	4.8	7.51	12.31
Others	1.56	2.75	4.31

The above table reveals the variations in literacy rates across different communities in India. It indicates that illiteracy and ignorance are more prevalent in Muslims in general, and Muslim women in particular. The table indicates that the literacy rate in the tertiary level is highest (51.25%) among Jains, Christians occupy the second position and others are also in a better condition than Muslims. But the participation of Muslim women is limited at the tertiary level. Muslim women occupy the lowest (2.04%) position than their male and female counterparts of the same and different religions. The educational status of Muslims especially female Muslims is unsatisfactory and therefore, begs special attention.

Causes of poor involvement of Muslim education in higher education

Muslim women are found to lag behind men and women of other communities in the field of literacy- the minima of education. There are so many causes that are responsible for Muslim women's educational retardation. These are as follows;

1. Poverty of parents
2. Illiteracy of parents
3. Gender disparity
4. Lack of interest in Muslim girls toward higher education
5. Early marriage of Muslim girls
6. Highly educated girl finds it difficult to get a suitable and equally educated groom, and thus, stop pursuing higher education.
7. Negative attitude of parents towards Co-education
8. Distance of colleges and universities from home
9. Domestic liabilities and responsibilities
10. Unwanted risks
11. Lack of awareness about the importance of higher education

Measures to be taken

Education is the only tool that can raise and upgrade the status of women holistically. Muslim girls should be

encouraged to receive higher education for their personal and national development. If the measures are taken from the grassroots level by the parents and central level by the government then the purpose to mainstream Muslim women into higher education can be possible.

Parental role

Education is the fundamental right of every individual irrespective of differences. No people should be deprived of these rights. And these fundamental rights can only be attained through fundamental duties. In our Indian constitution, there is an article i.e., article 51A (g) of a fundamental duty for the parents to send their children to school with the purpose to receive an education. But the duty is only meant for the school level. If the duty of sending the girl child to higher education institutions becomes a fundamental duty, then most girls can be empowered. However, until it became a fundamental duty, parents can be encouraged to send their daughters to higher education institutes to receive higher education. In addition to that Muslim parents can instill a positive attitude within themselves toward the higher education of their daughters, and can play a significant role in the educational life of their daughters. Muslim parents can perform the following roles.

1. Muslim parents must develop a positive attitude towards the co-education system within themselves.
2. Basic education is the right of every child, and higher education is the need of every single person. Hence, Muslim parents must send their daughters to higher education institutions to pursue their higher education.
3. Doing household chores is the responsibility of every girl. Yet the mothers of Muslim girls shouldn't impose much pressure of the household work on their girl child but should help them in pursuing their higher education.
4. While thinking about providing education to their children Muslim parents shouldn't discriminate between their girl and boy child.

Government role

When Muslim parents are unwilling to send their daughters for receiving higher education for whatever reasons, the Government can perform a major role. Here, the role of the Government becomes significant in bringing Muslim girls into the higher education system. They can take the following proactive measures.

1. Establishment of an adequate number of colleges and universities in rural areas.
2. Organization of an awareness program regarding higher education. It would be better if the Government take the help of educated girls of the Muslim community to spread to awareness of higher education among the non-receivers.
3. Development of curiosity within the girl students regarding higher education.
4. More women's colleges can also be constructed to promote higher education.
5. There must be a reservation of seats for Muslim women in higher education institutions.
6. An adequate number of scholarships must be provided to Muslim girls who continue higher education to help the girl financially, and motivate the other girls of the same community.
7. Government must take some initiative to prevent unwanted risks for the protection of girl students.

Provision under NEP-2020 for Promoting Higher Education among Girl Students

As per the New Education Policy, 2020 all Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) must carry out the following additional measures with the purpose of including women in the higher education system. The following are the most relevant fundamental principles to the inclusion of all children in education suggested by the New Education Policy, 2020.

1. Make admissions processes more inclusive
2. Reduce the admission fees to obtain higher education.
3. Make the curriculum inclusive and wider in scope.
4. An Adequate number of open universities must be constructed.
5. Scholarships must be provided by private or philanthropic universities for disadvantaged and under-served students.
6. Gender-Inclusion Fund (GIF)- States will have recourse to various measures, including the supply of toilets and sanitization, bicycles, conditional financial transfers, etc., to help female children enter education and provide them with an equitable quality education. As a result, states will be able to fund and expand successful community-based initiatives that address constraints unique to the local environment.
7. To address concerns with access to additional SEDGs, Inclusion Fund Schemes will be devised. The goal of the strategy is to remove inequities in children's access to education, regardless of gender or other socioeconomically disadvantaged groups

Discussion, Suggestion, and Conclusion

In a nutshell, we can say that the girl has the power and ability to teach values to mankind, and bring development to the nation. The development of any nation is the result of education, and development can't be attained with the contribution of meager. Development demands the contribution of all individuals across the country. Hence, the educated people of any country can become successful in their mission of bringing development to the country. Therefore, education is necessary for everyone including women. But sadly, and truly, most of the women especially Muslim women stop continuing their education after matriculation and intermediate which becomes a barrier in the developmental process of a nation. Their involvement in higher education level is badly needed as others for their personal and national development.

A girl needs to be highly educated. It is evident from the above descriptions that Islam promotes the education of both boys and girls. But, still, the enrolment of girls is less at the tertiary level. There are so many causes responsible for the poor involvement of Muslim girls in higher education levels. Some Muslim parents are not supporting the of higher education of their daughters. They do so to avoid the unwanted risks which may happen when the girl starts going to colleges and universities. On the flip side, some Muslim parents are also found to be willing to provide higher education to their daughters. But they couldn't send their daughters to receive higher education due to their poverty. In this context, the Government should come forward to ensure Muslim women's full potential and equal participation in higher education.

Although, NEP-2020 has emphasized inculcating an inclusive educational structure and inclusive educational

culture in the education system through infrastructural facilities and by making corresponding changes in the curriculum. Sadly, there is not a single word on Muslim women's education in the "Madrassa" in the 66-page policy document (Syed Tanveer Ahmad, 2020). There are no such proper suggestions mentioned in the document for Muslim women's higher education. It has mentioned the education of minorities and Dalits without giving a proper account of Muslim women's higher education. Muslim women remained unfocused in the document which again hinders their developmental opportunities. The question comes to mind, If women especially Muslims remain unfocused then how come Sustainable Development Goal-4.3 can be achieved?

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