

Minority School in Delhi: A Study on Muslim Girls

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Introduction

After independence, the women and minorities has received a lot of attention as reflected in the national policies, plans, programmes and schemes resulting in advancement of women in all fields. Besides, special committees and commissions on women have been set up from time to time resulting in policy changes and setting up of institutional structures for implementing programmes and schemes. The State has not only taken protective discrimination/ affirmative action for removing the cumulative disadvantage of women but also has played a very pro-active role in organizing women for action. There is a vast array of welfare measures aimed at the poor, the backward, the disadvantaged to include minorities, SC, ST, OBC, BPL families, among others.

The Indian women appear to have come a long way from an obscurantist past and complete subordination to a position where theoretically they are the equals of men and there is a vast array of laws, policies and programmes trying to contend with the cumulative disadvantage of women arising out of the predominant patriarchal family and kinship structures, customs, traditions and beliefs. Yet at the level of reality, the promise of equality and dignity remains an unfinished agenda. There are gains in educational participation and literacy but the gender gaps are substantial.

Women are breaking new grounds. While women and girls have made significant strides during the six decades, entering every field of education, and taking on the challenge of various professions, masses of women still remain restricted by the vicious circles of family expectations, gender-role discrimination, social stereotypes and stigma. At the grass roots level, the elected women's representatives are coming into their own, slowly but surely. However, there are also significant differences in women's status across regions, caste and class, communities and religions. Status of women is a composite of their achievements according to various indices – economic, educational, social and political.

In post-independence India, a large number of constitutional and legislative measures and many forward-looking policies and programmes have been directed at integrating women and minorities in the mainstream of national development. The State guarantees equal opportunities and forbids discrimination in all matters relating to employment and appointment to any public office. Under the protective discrimination clause, the State has passed several social and labour legislation and drawn up special programmes and schemes for the protection, welfare and development of women and children. There are laws to protect women and children from hazardous work; laws providing maternity benefits and child care services, and equal wages for work.

The constitutional provisions

Article 14 confers on men and women equal rights and opportunities in the political, economic and social spheres. Article 15 prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste and sex.

Article 15(3) makes a special provision enabling the State to make affirmative discrimination in favour of women. Article 16 provides for equality of opportunities in matters of public appointment for all. Article 21 provides for protection of life and personal liberty. Article 23 prohibits traffic in human beings and forced labour. Article 24 prohibits employment of children in factories etc. Article 51 e makes it a fundamental duty of all Indian citizens to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional and sectional diversities, to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women. Article 21 A (The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act 2002) makes education is now a fundamental right of all children of the age of 6-14 years. The added a new to direct the state to provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of 6-14 years in such a manner as the state by law determines. A new Fundamental Duty Article 51 A (k) in part 4 makes it a duty of a parent or a guardian to provide opportunities for education to his child or, as case may be, ward between the age of 6 & 14 years.

Specific Safeguards for Religious Minorities

Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion (Article 25); Freedom to manage religious affairs (Article 26); Freedom as to payment of taxes for promotion of any particular religion (Article 27); Freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions (Article 28).

Articles 29 and 30 of the Constitution of India defend the rights of the minorities to conserve the language, script and culture and to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice whether based on religion or language. Articles 29 and 30 have been grouped together under a common head namely, "Cultural and Educational Rights". Together, they confer four distinct rights on minorities. These include the right of - any section of citizens to conserve its own language, script or culture;

- (a) all religious and linguistic minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice;
- (b) an educational institution against discrimination by State in the matter of State aid (on the ground that it is under the management of religious or linguistic minority); and
- (c) The citizen against denial of admission to any State-maintained or State-aided educational institution.

Article 29 provides that –

- any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same, and
- no citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any them.

Article 30 is a minority-specific provision that protects the right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions. It provides that "all minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice". Clause (1-A) of the article 30, which was inserted by the Constitution (Forty-fourth Amendment) Act, 1978 provides that "in making any law providing for the compulsory acquisition of any property of an educational institution established and administered by a minority, referred to in clause (1), the State shall ensure that the amount fixed by or

determined under such law for the acquisition of such property is such as would not restrict or abrogate the right guaranteed under that clause". Article 30 further provides that "the State shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any Educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion and language".

India is a multi-cultural, multi-religious and a polyglot society where the religious minorities constitute almost 20% of the entire population of the country. Spread all over the country, these religious minorities are educationally the worst off. Among the minorities, the Muslim minority constitute 14.2% of the country's population. Islam is the second largest religion in India, with roughly 172 million people identifying as adherents of Islam (2011 census). India's Muslim population is the world's third largest (USCIRF 2016 Annual Report) and the world's largest Muslim-minority population. Officially, India has the third largest Muslim population next to Indonesia and Pakistan. India is home to 10% of the world's Muslim population.

If we look across minorities the educational level of Muslim minority is the lowest. Out of this spectrum, female literacy is an even bigger concern in the Muslim minority. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), 66% of Muslim women are illiterate and, in Haryana, Muslim female illiteracy is universal (98%). According to the Sachar Committee Report, "One-fourth of Muslim children in the age group of 6-14 years have either never attended a school or are drop-outs. For children above the age of 17 years, the educational attainment of Muslims at matriculation is 17%, as against the national average of 26%. Only 50% of Muslims who complete middle school are likely to complete secondary education, compared to 62% at national level." This fact of educational and economic backwardness of the Muslims has been conclusively established in several reports and surveys.

To address the low participation of the minorities, especially Muslims - the largest section of educationally backward minorities - in the national education system, a lot of independent minority institutions, schools and certified minority institutions, and schools along with Madrassas have been established. Through this paper, I have made attempts to document the functioning of an Independent minority school and also tried to assess the quality of education received by the Muslim children studying in that school. I also attempt to look at the infrastructure, staffing, amenities, and the quality of curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities. Minority women in our country are doubly oppressed, their representation in employment sector is very low. Aspirations of Muslim minority will also be studied in this research.

Minority School

In order to understand the meaning of minority school, first of all, we have to look for the meaning of "minority" within the Constitution and rights conferred on a minority school. The Constitution does not define as to what is a minority. However, the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities has defined "minority" (by definition), as-

The term 'minority' includes only those non-document groups in a population which possess and wish to preserve stable ethnic, religious or linguistic traditions or characteristics markedly different from those of the rest of the population;

- (i) such minorities should properly include a number of persons sufficient by themselves to

preserve such traditions or characteristics; and

- (ii) Such minorities must be loyal to the State of which they are nationals.

Education and Muslim

Seeking knowledge has been an integral part of the Islamic tradition. Both forms of knowledge are seen to be complimentary to each other – *deeni and duniyawi* (religious and worldly). Muslims derive their inspiration from the many verses of the Holy Quran as well as the prophetic traditions and sayings which exhort them to seek knowledge as a religious duty and cheerfully bear hardships, if any, in its acquisition. In the first verse of the Holy Quran, revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), primacy of knowledge is affirmed in the words ‘*Iqra Bis-me-rabbekal-lazi khalaq read in the name of the Lord and Cherisher, who created*’. Besides the Holy Quran, there are many Hadith (sayings and practices of Prophet Muhammad) - which also testify to this primacy of knowledge. The Prophet himself has reaffirmed the teaching of Quran by stressing that the acquisition of knowledge is incumbent upon every believer. Muslims were enjoined upon to “Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave” and “Even go as far as China to seek knowledge”. Till date these verses provide a source of inspiration to the community. Since independence, India has achieved significant growth but there are indicators which show that not all religious and linguistic minorities have shared equal benefits of development. Among these, Muslims, largest minority group of the India’s population are seriously lagging behind on most of the human development indicators including education (Sachar Committee Report, 2006). Their literacy rate is below the national average (Muslim - 59.1 per cent and National Average – 65.1 per cent) and much below in comparison to other minorities (Muslims – 74.6 per cent and other minorities – 88.5 percent), Dropout rate is significantly visible, and their transition to the higher education is minimal. According to the Sachar Report twenty-five per cent of the Muslim Children in the 6-14 years age group have either never attended school or have dropped out. The condition is more worrisome in relation to the girl child (Hasan and Menon). This despite the concern shown for development of minorities which can be traced back to the Constitution of India which is committed to the equality of citizens and it is the responsibility of the state to preserve, protect and ensure rights of minorities in matters of language, religion and culture. The articles 29, 30 & 350A of the Indian Constitution enjoin the rights of the minorities to establish and administer educational institutions and schools of their choice as the educational institutions are understood as potential agencies that produce and reproduce the culture and ideology through the instruments of curriculum and pedagogy. It also directs the state to provide facilities to instruct in their mother tongue at primary level. However, the story of the Urdu medium schools is dismal. Erratic supply of books, vacancies of teachers not being filled up for years is some of the issues that ail schooling through the Urdu medium.

The news of communal breakout in different parts of the country is a common sight these days. Every now and then we hear about crimes being perpetrated on the grounds of religion. These reports become all the more meaningful when the religious community being involved is of Muslims. There are no qualms about the fact that the community in question arouses doubts and suspicion in one’s mind. This isn’t the case of only India but a global phenomenon. Recently, the Harsh frisking of Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, Prime minister of Pakistan was doing the rounds in the media. Muslims all over the world are seen with a stereotyped

lens. The politicization of 'Kathua Gangrape' is just another example of the same phenomena.

What makes this perpetual doubt more relevant for India is the division of the country on the grounds of Religion. The violence that accompanied with Partition and the grief of 'losing' a part of the country to the demands of Muslim league remains a live wound in the psyche of the 'Indian mind'. The prejudice is further exacerbated by the vote bank Politics, a tool used by Political parties to garner votes in their favor. The issue of prejudice against the mentioned community is not a thing of the past or a theoretical propositions but as tangible a reality as the existence of sun. We can't see it directly (unless with special eye gear) but feel its blaze. The present study looks at the working of a Muslim minority school and aspirations of Muslim girls studying in it.

Anglo Arabic School

Delhi's 300-year old "Anglo Arabic School" that began in 1696 as "Madrasa Ghaziuddin Khan". As an institution of learning, "Anglo Arabic School" has survived over three centuries. Opened by Ghaziuddin Khan, an influential courtier and brave general of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, a leading Deccan commander and the father of Qamar-ud-din Khan, Asaf Jah I, the founder of the Asaf Jahi dynasty of Hyderabad, also known as the first Nizam of Hyderabad, in 1690s, and was originally termed Madrasa Ghaziuddin Khan after him. The seminary has been serving the cause of education under the labels of "Madrasa Ghaziuddin Khan", "Anglo Arabic School", "Anglo Arabic College", "Delhi College" and "Zakir Hussain College" for centuries. This school imparts education to the children of the walled city of Delhi. It stood just outside the walled city of Delhi outside the Ajmeri Gate, close to the New Delhi Railway Station. It was originally surrounded by a wall and connected to the walled city fortifications. As an institution of learning, Anglo Arabic School has been a mute witness to the chequered history of the city including the two famous wars of independence of 1758 and 1857. The building remained unscathed and the imposing Kota sandstone structure successfully evolved into a centre of secular as well as theological learning.

The elegant building consists of a large enclosure of arched apartments with a gate on the east and a three-domed mosque on the west with an enclosure of perforated stone screens both on the latter's north as well as south. Domes with octagonal towers against a backdrop of beautiful jharokas (parlours) and engravings. Inside, there are two hujras (corridors) meant to be used as dormitories for the students. In the centre of the entire complex, there is a park with green grass.

Until 1827, this madrasa was a religious seminary but after the interference of the East India Company, it was Sir Charles Trevelyan who also started the education of English, Mathematics and natural sciences. It was reorganized as the 'Anglo Arabic College' by the British East India Company in 1828 to provide, in addition to its original objectives, an language and education in English literature. The object was "to uplift" what the Company saw as the "uneducated and half-barbarous people of India." Behind the move was Charles Trevelyan, the brother-in-law of Thomas Babington Macaulay, the same Macaulay whose famously declared that "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia".

In 1840, the institution was shifted to the Darah Shikoh (Shahjahan's son) Library at Kashmiri Gate. During the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, it remained closed for 7 years and reopened only in 1867. At that time the English christened it as "Anglo Arabic" College" that later turned into "Delhi College". It's just amazing how the same premises gave rise to so many forms of temples of learning of which two are still full-fledged institutions.

The most important literary activity in the history of the school was the formation of the Vernacular Translation Society in 1832. As Urdu was the medium of instruction, the students could not avail of the variety found in English, German, French, Algebra, social and natural sciences etc. These were translated into Urdu. Some of the scholars on the job included literary luminaries of the time like Master Pyarey Lal, Imam Bakhsh Sahbai, Lala Dharam Narain and brother Prem Narain, Maulana Zakauallah, Mr Butros etc. During the 1830s and 40s, the institution had really been at the pinnacle of its pristine glory and was considered to be the centre of Asian "renaissance" as not only the Indians but even some of the English too were its students according to its present Principal.

Factors responsible for Muslim Girls Development

The fundamental beliefs of Muslims are based on the six precepts of Islam: i. e. they believe in Allah (God) as the Deity; all the angels; all the prophets; the four holy books; the day of judgement; and in destiny. As far as their religious behaviour is concerned, it is difficult to say whether they all pray five times a day; fast during the month of Ramadan; give alms to the poor; and perform the pilgrimage at least once during their lifetime. Furthermore, it is hard to establish if they eschew lying, cheating and dishonesty; abstain from gambling, drinking alcohol and eating pork; act like good human beings, help others, behave and dress modestly and earn a living by legitimate means.

All the girls, who participated in the present study, were born to parents both of whom were Muslim. The girls had been brought up as Muslims too, which is the normative practice of Muslim parents who do not perceive it as indoctrination, but rather as their paramount responsibility.

Respondent 1 in interview said:

My own religion! I'm Muslim and I'm proud to be what I am. I like it the way we follow it in my family: not too strict and not too kind-a-free.

When the girls were asked what they thought of religion, the vast majority of them saw it as a guide. And a set of rules to live by, thus equating it with morality:

Respondent 2 in interview said:

Religion is very important, because if you don't have a religion, you just follow anything; you have no morals. It tells you what you can do. It tells you who you are. It's like your name: if you don't have a name, people call you all sorts of things; you don't belong anywhere.

Respondent 2 obviously perceived religion as something that gave her identity and a sense of belonging. The

others saw their faith as a source of comfort too:

Respondent 3 in interview said:

I think religion is very important. It sort of guides you. When you are in trouble, you can always ask God for help. It gives us peace of mind.

However, the religiosity of the girls was not just confined to belief. As far as religious practice was concerned, most of them prayed and read the Quran occasionally, but fasted regularly, since the entire family fasted during the month of Ramadan. A few girls in the sample prayed five times a day and read the Quran daily; some of them also taught their younger siblings to read the Quran. On the other end were the two girls who only prayed or read the Quran when told off; though, in other ways they lived their lives according to the tenets of Islam as the ethos, culture and climate of the home were Islamic. Still, the following statement exemplifies the religious practice of many girls in the sample:

Respondent 4 in interview said:

I read Namaz and the Quran; I fast. We celebrate Eid and respect the rules that the Prophet left for us like keep dupatta on your head, don't talk to boys, behave like a good woman, respect your parents and elders.

Some, however, found it difficult to practise their religion as well as do other things pertaining to their everyday life.

Respondent 5 in interview said:

I am a Muslim, but I am not a good Muslim. You have to pray five times a day and I don't do that because we are at school and at home my dad always says first do your homework. Then I watch some tv and then there is no more time. There is a holy night: that's when I read the Quran. I've tried to keep fasts but couldn't. It is difficult when you are at school and everybody is eating.

A small minority said they were Muslim because of their parents. They felt unable to cope with worship, though they were happy to believe in Islam.

The Muslim girls appear to work well in class and, do their homework. They do this for variety of reasons. They do not go out in the evenings and, though they help with the housework, can have a longer input into school work than those pupils who regularly go out. Most importantly, though, they want to succeed educationally. All these girls, regardless of their ability, want to go into further education.

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