

Educational Opportunities of Muslim Girls and their Social Inclusion

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Abstract—Education plays a vital role in development of any society. One of the characteristic of developing society is to provide an equal education opportunity to all, without any religion, caste or gender discrimination. Post Independence, one of the main goals of the constitution, is the goal of Education that also include, those disadvantaged sections of the society which are backward. Muslim is one such community which is considered to be minority class in India, and is also educationally backward community. Pre Independence, the educational opportunities of Muslim were limited, it continued to decline even after independence. When one discuss about the education of Muslim girls, then the situation seems to be even more worse. Present study imparts light over the educational opportunities of Muslim girls and also critically analyse their social inclusion in the educational institutions. If they are provided with equal educational opportunities and are socially included, then it will definitely be a solid step towards the concept of equitable society, which also is an important goal of Indian constitution.

Keywords: Social Inclusion, Equal education opportunities, disadvantaged sections.

Introduction

In India Muslim community known as Minority. It is evident from the Saccher report (2006) that, the Muslims are backward in the area of education. Due to low levels of Education and low quality of Education they are sufferer from multi fold disadvantage and the condition of Muslim women is even worse. As per the census of India (2011), only 51.9% Muslim women are literate, which is low of national average of female and their dropout rate is maximum after Schedule caste and Scheduled Tribe group. There is need to know, what sort of equal educational opportunities they are getting after implementation of Right to education act(2010) and what type of atmosphere they are getting from the institution which are providing the equal educational opportunities to them and also weather they are getting the same Quality of education as other are getting or not.

This paper analyses the social inclusion process for Muslim girls in school education at elementary level (VI to VIII class). The paper also analyses various steps which are taken for the

education of Muslim girls and also revisit the vision of quality of education. The study also examines the factors that influence the process of social inclusion in terms of equity and quality of education. In this paper the data used is collected by considering a government setting school as case study. This research examines the social inclusion of Muslim girls at school level. Here social inclusion refers to such form of a process that has not only included the access of education for the socially deprived groups but also enabled them, so that they should not get discriminated or excluded on the basis of their identity and get the full acceptance and opportunity to participate in every process of education. The main element of this social inclusion is “equal educational opportunity” complemented with “quality of education”.

This school is situated in posh area of south Delhi, but the students came from neighboring slum areas.(The school is situated adjacent to apartment in Kalkaji area, but none of the students came from that apartment). There are several slum areas around school (around 6-7 km radius). Indira kalyan camp, Sarvodaya camp, Bhoomiheen camp, Navjeevan camp, Nehru camp etc are the slum areas surrounding the school, from where mostly students came. Thus students came mainly from Govind puri, Kalkaji, Okhla Phase –I and II and from Sangam vihar for education. In this school the proportion of Muslim girls is around 30% from the slum areas that surround this school in approximately 6 Km radius. If we talk about the distance between their residing places and the school, then most of the girls use the public transport (Bus, fat-fat seva (a big sharing vehicle)) to reach the school. Some of the girls are who resides in the nearby slums, goes to school by walking. The girls who came by taking public transport to the school, spends 5 to 10 Rs. as the charge for using it. Though there are several Government setting schools in the area of Tehkhand and Sangam Vihar, but because of the better reputation and quality of education of this school, parents prefer to send their child to this school, in spite of long distance. The matter of ‘security’ of these girls’ students is a point of concern. As per the sachher report, “identity, safety, security, plays the vital

role in the education of Muslim girls. 'Distance of school' directly impacts on the 'regularity' of these students. It is quite clear from the study that, the maximum absenteeism and drop-out rate is amongst Muslim girls, and the main reason behind this, is the 'distance from the school'.

Enrollment, absenteeism and drop-out of Muslim girls:

The study (based on the school –record class VI to VIII class within the period of 2012-2017), clearly reveals that, the enrollment of Muslim girls has been increasing, while that of General Community is decreasing. Somewhere, the awareness with respect to education among Muslim girls has been increasing, but still parents are considering Government setting school as their only option due to poverty and prefer sons to send to private schools (Sacchar Report, 2006).

Through observations and teachers interview, it comes out clearly, that, the maximum record for long absenteeism belongs to the Muslim girls. As per the school-record of last 6 years, 9 of the Muslims girls left out the school formally. It is also clear from the interview that, due to Government policies and strict attitude of education department, these students made continue their school even after being long absentee. At the time of examination, either they are called for appearing in the examination or they themselves became present. Thus in elementary level (class VI to VIII), in spite of their short attendance in the school, they got promoted in the next class, but they get deprived of the quality education that persists throughout the year, which results in form of their 'poor-performance' and at the later stage they left the school or their school education does not play any significant role in their future life.

The study reveals several reasons for their non-regularity in the school. Self-illness or the illness of any family members comes out as the one of the major reason for the same. Here, 'poverty', deficiency of nutrition, hygiene and other factors collectively affects their health issues. Girls have a vital role in performing the 'urgent work' or household work and therefore non-completion of home-work also became the reason for their absenteeism. Other reason for their absenteeism is to visit there, ancestral home every year. Most of the parents of these children, turned up to Delhi for the purpose of employment. They went to their home town every year, either due to some festival celebration, or some marriage ceremony or due to death of any of their relative. As most of the parents belongs to either Uttar Pradesh or Bihar, so they went to their ancestral home for a longer time span (one or two months) and due to safety reasons they also take their daughters along with, that also emerges out as one of the reason for their long absenteeism. Similarly in rainy season, due to water logging in the areas of Sangam Vihar, children feels unable to go to the schools and thus it also become the reason for their absenteeism.

Chaunauti: Segregation of Muslims girls into Pratibha, Nishtha and Neo-Nishtha groups.

In 2016, a new program was launched under the name of "Chunauti". In this program all the children of elementary level are segregated in different sections and groups, based on the performance of their previous class and a common written test. Thus based on their learning level they are divided into, "Pratibha", "Nishtha" and "Neo-Nishtha" groups and in IX class categorized in "Vishvas" group. In "Pratibha" group, those students are placed who can read and write, whereas in „Nishtha“, those students are placed who are unable to read or write and Neo Nishtha, those are able to only read,(but in actual, there are no difference of learning levels of Nishtha and Neo-Nishtha groups). Such distribution clearly showed that, majority of SC girls and Muslim girls were mainly classified in "Nishtha" and "Neo-Nishtha" group. Muslim girls are only 22% in class VI, 44% in class VII and 40% in class VIII in Pratibha groups, whereas in "Nishtha" and "Neo-Nishtha" group they are 78 % in class VI, 58% in class VII and 60% in class VIII. Thus this policy whose main agenda was to provide quality of education to every student and to enhance their learning level, merely resulted into their segregation in form of Intelligent section, weak section and very-weak section.(this is termed by teachers in informal language).

Textbooks for all of these sections were made same but their curriculum and examination pattern were different. Whereas in "Nishtha" and "Neo-Nishtha" groups, the main focus was on enhancing their reading and writing ability and their basic mathematics level, while in Pratibha group, the main focus was on the completion of prescribed syllabus. In summative assessment, there are different question papers in the same class, one for Pratibha group and other for "Nishtha" and "Neo-Nishtha" groups. There was also difference in the difficulty level in these papers. The medium of education is also different in these groups, i.e., English is the medium for Pratibha group, while "Nishtha" and "Neo-Nishtha" groups belongs to Hindi medium. Thus there was difference in education under this program. Teachers also realized that, though this program will certainly enhance the learning level of the children, but how the children of "Nishtha" and "Neo-Nishtha" groups, will achieve the minimum demarcated learning level of education was a big challenge. One more challenge was there, and that was not considered by this program. The challenge was the class X examination pattern that is conducted by C.B.S.E. and has the common examination pattern for all students. Certainly the students of "Nishtha" and "Neo-Nishtha" groups will get negatively affected because of their segregation. This program was meant for limiting the negative consequences of "No detention policy", but the segregation and exclusion that enhanced due to this program in classes, emerged out as the challenge for goal of "equal education opportunity" and "quality of education".

Performance of Muslim girls in previous class:

'Output' or 'Learning -achievement' is considered as one of the aspect of 'Quality of education'. In Nayak J. P. (1979) views, 'equity' is also considered as another aspect of 'Quality of education'. Quality of education is defined in terms of 'input' and 'output', system, in which it receives input and delivers output (here output refers to summative assessment of outcome). The present study analyses the summative assessment of Muslim girls belonging to elementary classes (VI to VIII) in the academic session 2016-2017. The study shows that the state of performance is worse for Muslim girls. The study clearly shows that among 78 Muslim girls 82% got C grade or even lower grade than C.

Social inclusion in classroom sitting arrangement:

'Classroom' is an important place where a student spends maximum time in the school life, and where major portion of learning process occurs. Therefore the sitting position of students and their participation in the learning process forms an important part of their social-inclusion. Among Muslim girls only 18% sits in the front rows, 37% sits in the middle rows and 26% in the last rows and the rest Muslims girl do not have any specific sitting pattern. One of the important factor emerge out this study that, Muslim girls prefer to sit with their community girls only and for that they can opt any sitting position either in front row or in the last row as per the availability. Two of the students of class VIII A always sit together in the last bench of last row. When teacher make them sit separately, then after her period they again went to their previous seat. Most of the girls feels comfortable sitting with their religion girls only. Student themselves did the reservation of seats in the 'sitting arrangement', the intelligent and influential girls acquires the front seats while other sits in the middle and last rows. In some classes, teacher makes them to sit roll-number wise or group wise.

Participation of Muslim girls in classroom -learning process:

'Participation-process' of girls in 'classroom-learning process' is studied in several ways. With whom students teacher do conversation regularly? Asks questions? Whether students are asking questions by themselves or not? Or they are actively participating in the classroom process or not? etc. It was found that 66% of the girls belonging to all other categories (except Muslims) take actively participation while only 26% of Muslim girls and 8% of SC girls participated actively, though their role was limited in classroom-learning process. In school 'discipline' meaning, to be silent in the class, to answer specifically pertaining to the question asked by the teachers. During class observations, it was found that, 'Book-reading' activity was going in 19 periods, in which 26 students from all other category (except Muslims), 3 girls from Muslim community and 2 girls from SC category was found participating in the same. Teachers were explaining the concept in between and others were listening.

In 8 periods of different subjects, teachers called students to write on the blackboard. In Mathematics period to solve the problem, in Science and Social science periods, to explain the relevant term, and in Hindi and English periods, to write the word-meaning on the Blackboard. Thus 8 girls from the General category, 4 from the Muslim category, 2 from Sikh community and 1 from OBC category participated in the Black-board activity in the classroom.

Non-Participation of Muslim girls in the classroom learning-process:

There were few girls in the classroom, who neither did any effort by themselves to participate in the classroom learning process, nor did their teacher engage them to participate in the same, and thus they remain passive in the class. 28% from the all other categories (except Muslim) and 41% of Muslim girls remain passive in the entire classroom learning process.

When asked from the teachers, regarding the reasons for their non-participation, then most of the teachers was of the opinion that, these students has no interest in studies, that's why they are not participating in the classroom learning process. Few teachers believe that, their home atmosphere, illiteracy of their parents and other related factors has negative impact on their education. Some teacher was of the view that, these students found no motive behind studies, while some other teachers blamed the 'No Detention policy' 'under which these students get promoted in elementary classes (up to class VIII). Few teachers said that, their long absenteeism make them incapable to cope up with the rest of the students of the class.

Participation in co-curricular activities:

'Co-curricular activities' provides opportunities to the girls for their all-around development. These activities are of different types in school programs. These activities includes academic, cultural (music, dance and art), sports, morning assembly activities, House activities, special day celebration, Annual day celebration and other types of similar activities. Study reveals that only 41% of Muslim girls participated in these activities, whereas 59% of Muslim girls never took part in any of these activities. Muslim girls believes that only 19% of them take the lead role in the assembly program, while for all other community girls, the same was 81% (62% General, 15% OBC, 2% SC and 2% Others). Muslim girls stated several reasons for their non-participation in co-curricular activities. Some of them feel afraid in participating in these activities, while some of them show no interest in these activities. According to few of them, they are not selected by the teachers in these activities, whereas few of them stated that they did not have the proper information regarding these activities and thus results in their non-participation.

Peer relation in classroom and social inclusion:

Classroom plays an important role in social relation of peers. On one side, Children learn together a lot from each other and on the other hand, dignified acceptance of social identity of

one another brings positive changes (progressive) in the personality of the children.

To understand the social relation in the classroom, the social identities of student's friends, their playing group, their lunch group and their home visiting friends have been taken into account as parameter.

1. **Friends:** According to Muslim girl students, 53% of their friends are belongs to Muslim community only, while 39% comes from General Communities of Hindu, 5% from SC, 2% from OBC of Hindu and remaining 1% from other communities like Sikh, Jain etc. thus they prefer making friends from their own community.
2. **Playmate:** Among playmate in the school, they have 60% of the total playmates from the same religion, while 34% are from General communities of Hindu and 7% of the playmates are from SC. Therefore they like to play with friend of their own religion.
3. **Lunch Sharing:** 75% Muslim Girls like to have dinner only with other Muslim Girls.

18 % Muslim Girls share their lunch with General Community of Hindu and 1% Muslim Girls share their lunch with other communities. It has been observed that girls belong to General communities do not prefer sharing lunch with Muslim girls because they consider Muslims are non-vegetarian. According to one girl student of class VII B "these people eat meat, how can we share our lunch with them?"

Thus religion emerged out as an important factor in the social Relationship. Among the Muslim girls, 65% considered friends to those Muslim girls whom home they often visit, whereas this data stands at 28% for General community friends, and 7% from SC friends respectively. Major reason for visiting home are to celebrate birthdays, festivals, to complete homework and to enquire about school work when being absent from school etc.

Role of Teacher in Social inclusion Process:

The role of a teacher is to act as a facilitator to create an inclusive environment in the classroom. Firstly, it is essential that a teacher should be sensitive to disadvantage group. In this study, it was found that the teachers consider socially disadvantage group only to those who are economically and educationally backward. Caste, Class, Gender, early marriage factor, residence in difficult geographical area and weak economic area make this backwardness worse. Among the students classifies as disadvantage group by the teacher in their class, 24% of them were Muslim girls and 22% were SC girls. Therefore, teacher accepted that Muslim girl is a socially disadvantage group. About problems related to pedagogical level, teachers believed that these girls are weak at studies because they (Muslim girls) were not attentive at their studies. Some teachers believe that these girls have no intelligence. Whereas some teachers believe that malnutrition is a cause for

this educational weakness. These girls are not able to get enough nutrition as they require at this age. Due to malnutrition they are sad, depressed, inactive and suffer lack of concentration. One teacher put blames on 'no detention policy'.

Most teachers believe that Muslim girls constitute major part of absentee students. Teachers regularly inform parents of these girls about this absenteeism. Some teachers believe that these girls come to school only to get scholarship given by government.

In the words of a teacher "Inhe regular karne ke liye sab kuch to kar rahen hain, aur kya karna hain? In he Mid-day meal school me milta hai, Uniform shoes, stationary, sab ka paisa school se milta hai, inko fail nahi kar skte, daant nahi sakte, maar nahi sakte hai. Ab to daily copy – Kitab check krte hain aur kya kre. Inke account hum khulvate hain, Aadhar etc. ka jimma hum pe hai, aur school na ane per in he hum lagataar phone krte hain, ki beta school aa jao, naam bhi nhi kat sakte. Long absenteeism walo ka naam kaat bhi de to, unke dubara aajane par fir se formality krni padti hai. Sab kuch to inke according hi chalta hai or kya Karen?"

So, there is an urgent need to sensitize teachers to create more inclusive environment in the classroom.

Festival celebration and other issues related to social inclusion:

Celebrating festivals in the school bring enthusiasm in the students, they feel more attached with the school. It is found that 64% of the Muslim girls believes that neither nobody celebrate their festival in the school nor any information about their festival is given in the school. 78% of the Muslim girls believe that there is a huge difference between their festivals and others festivals.

In the study, it is also found that many a time Muslim girls face discrimination at the school. According to one student, many a time people look at her strangely when she wears *Hizaab*. While according to another girl, other non-Muslim girl bullying her by calling religion specific name like Mullah. Some Muslim girls believe that they got scolded more when become absent from the school.

Conclusion:

Present study reveals that the social –inclusion of Muslim girls is still a challenge. There is need to resolve the issues of 'Identity, Security and Equity' related to them. To increase their regularity in the school, for the improvement in performance and to stop their drop-out number, reforms are utmost required. These reforms should be essential, both for the teacher's perspective and at policy level that can be achieved only by Equity and Quality of education. It suggests that "the policies to deal with the relative deprivation of the Muslims in the country should sharply focus on inclusive

development and 'mainstreaming' of the Community while respecting diversity. The need for equity and inclusion in a pluralistic society can never be overemphasized. But the mechanisms to ensure equity and equality of opportunity to bring about inclusion should be such that diversity is achieved and at the same time the perception of discrimination is eliminated. This is only possible when the importance of Muslims as an intrinsic part of the diverse Indian social mosaic is squarely recognized." (Sachhar report (2006), p.n. 237-238).

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