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Educational System and the Muslim Diaspora in India: Analysis of a Need Based Inclusive and Assimilative Policy for their Growth

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Abstract:

India witnessed massive politico-social upheavals in its history of last one thousand years. This millennium has proved to be a turning point, which brought about massive structural changes that fermented the social fabric, which in turn affected the life style, economy, ideas of the people of this country. With the coming of the Muslim rulers in the medieval period and later the political hegemony of the British in the modern period a process of amalgamation, acculturation have taken place with the intermingling of varied cultures along with the indigenous culture and that process became the progenitor of umpteen socio-political and cultural movements. In this way a number of permutation and combination occurred which resulted in the growth of different affiliations, groups, faiths, sects over centuries. The social picture of India changed which further provided scope to the growth of multiculturalism. In this cultural milieu, the Muslim population is one, which is one of the major communities among the minor communities. Education was given due importance by the Muslim community all over the world. But with the passage of time differences occurred in the approaches towards education in different parts. In India, the Muslims had a long rule in medieval times. And likewise they witnessed changes in the socio-cultural transformations. After the attainment of independence, the Government of India has enunciated a number of policies and enumerated number of articles in the Constitution to enhance the status- both educational and social- of all the sections of the society irrespective of caste, creed, religion and race. But, still India is languishing in some areas like poverty and literacy even after six decades of independence. This article tries to find out the reasons for the backwardness of the Muslims and their isolationist attitude towards participatory development.

Keywords: Education, politico-social upheavals, amalgamation, acculturation, multiculturalism, participatory development.

Education is the keystone of social arch. It is the root of all the branches of development, a society needs. In the annals of history, umpteen civilizations emerged in different parts of the world and those, which left a mark of distinction, had mastered the art of learning. The milestone which the mankind had established in the past and still that process is going on is due to the development in the field of education. Education refines and hones a society and provides to its citizens the very essential means of livelihood. It got much more meaning in today's world of globalization and universalisation. Knowledge has become a tool of sustainable development and it provides the much-needed reinforcements in varied sectors, which the nation needs to maintain the flow of progress. Education raises the level of consciousness by bringing change in the personality and attitude of a person and sensitizing individuals to the larger social needs and issues. Laski says, "The citizens who lacks education is bound to be slave of others... He will go through life a stunted being whose impulses have never been ordered by reason into creative experiment." It is considered as the only way for raising the status and progress of the society.

India witnessed massive politico-social upheavals in its history of last one thousand years. This millennium has proved to be a turning point, which brought about massive structural changes that fermented the social fabric, which in turn affected the life style, economy, ideas of the people of this country. With the coming of the Muslim rulers in the medieval period and later the political hegemony of the British in the modern period a process of amalgamation, acculturation have taken place with the intermingling of varied cultures along with the indigenous culture and that process became the progenitor of umpteen socio-political and cultural movements. In this way a number of permutation and combination occurred which resulted in the growth of different affiliations, groups, faiths, sects over centuries. The social picture of India changed which further provided scope to the growth of multiculturalism. In this cultural milieu the Muslim population is one which is one of the major communities among the minor communities. This community grew since the medieval times and emerged as a powerful segment in the country to be reckoned with. During the freedom struggle the British tried and successfully broken the link between different communities and created cleavages among them on communal lines. They had

craftily sown the seed of doubt among the Muslims and drafted policies accordingly which later led to the division of the society and ultimately the nation. They were made the pawn on the political chessboard whereas no attempt was made for their real development. The large numbers of the Muslims were far away from education and learning the way their brethren in the society utilized the system and in a way remained away from the national mainstream. The sole reason of their backwardness is their economic underdevelopment, which is the result of lack of progress achieved in the field of education. They confined themselves to either *madrasa* education or purely religious oriented education, which could not provide them adequate means of livelihood.

Education has always been regarded highly among the Muslims even in their scriptures. The first declaration of Quran is about education. It is known that the Quran is replete with instances where much importance is given to education. Many verses are devoted to explain the importance of knowledge, which is essential in bringing the human being closer to God. For instance, in one verse in the Quran urges, "Then 'Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Can those who know and those who do not know be deemed equal? But only those who are endowed with insight will keep this in mind?'"ⁱⁱ 'And He has subjected to you [as a gift] from Him, all that is in the heavens and on earth, in that are messages indeed for people who think'.ⁱⁱⁱ

As such taking in to account the importance to education in Quran, Muslim rulers gave considerable support to education and educational institutions. "It was this great liberty which they displayed in educating their people in the schools which was one of the most potent factors in the brilliant and rapid growth of their civilization. Education was so universally diffused that it was said to be difficult to find a Muslim who could not read or write".^{iv}

In world history, instances are there how the Muslims were concerned about education in different countries where they ruled. In Muslim Spain there was not a village where 'the blessings of education' could not be enjoyed by the children of the most indigent peasant, and in Cordoba were eight hundred public schools frequented by Muslims, Christians and Jews alike.^v And in the Muslim University of Cordoba, Jews and Christians attained to acknowledged distinction of professors.^{vi} So high was the place of learning that both teacher and pupil were greatly respected by the mass of the population and large libraries collected by the wealthy landowners and merchants showed that learning- as the Italian Renaissance (six hundred years later) was one of the marks of gentleman.^{vii}

In scarcely any other culture, has the literary life played such a role as in Islam? Learning (*ilm*), by which is meant the whole world of the intellect, engaged the interest of Muslims more than anything... The life that evolved in the mosques spread outward to put its mark upon influential circles everywhere.^{viii} All public institutions, from the mosques and the *madrasas* to the hospitals and observatories were places of learning.^{ix} This universality, thirst and impetus for education not even equaled today^x was a distinguished mark of that period when Islam was at its zenith, both as a religion and as a civilization.

The mosque played a major role in the spread of education in the Muslim world and the association of the mosque with education remained one of its main characteristics throughout history^{xi} and the school became an indispensable appendage to the mosque.^{xii}

Some of the Muslim centres of learning still exists today and are considered to be the oldest Universities in the world. Among them are Al-Qayrawan and Al-Zaytuna in Tunisia, Al-Azhar in Egypt and Al-Qarawiyyin in Fez in Morocco.

Thus, it is clear that education was given due importance by the Muslim community all over the world. But with the passage of time differences occurred in the approaches towards education in different parts. In India the Muslims had a long rule in medieval times. And likewise they also witnessed changes in the socio-cultural transformations. After the attainment of independence, the Government of India has enunciated a number of policies and enumerated number of articles in the Constitution to enhance the status- both educational and social- of all the sections of the society irrespective of caste, creed, religion and race. But, still India is languishing in some areas like poverty and literacy even after six decades of independence. Almost all the citizens of the country are confronting this situation. Taking in to account this procrastination and sluggish attitude of the Government machinery the Supreme Court of India, in the Unnikrishnan Judgment way back in 1993 said, "It is noteworthy that among the several articles in Part IV only Art.45 speak of time limit, not other article does. Has it not significance? Is it a mere pious wish, even after 44 years of the Constitution?"^{xiii} The 93 Constitutional Amendments, 2001, which made free and compulsory education for all children a fundamental right still, did not achieve its goal.

Art. 30(1) of the Constitution says that all minorities shall have the right to establish and administer educational institution of their own. The XIIth Five Year Plan also expressed similar views that gives importance to education as it says- "Education is the single most important instrument for socio-religious transformation. A well educated person adequately equipped with knowledge and skill is not only essential to support economic growth, but is also a precondition for growth to be inclusive since it is the educated and skilled person who can stand to benefit most from the employment opportunities which growth will provide".^{xiv}

To fulfill the Government's commitment, the Prime Minister's New 15 Point Programme, inter-alia, aims to enhance opportunities for education of minorities ensuring an equitable share in economic activities and employment.

After independence initiatives for educational development of minorities were started in India, in late 70s, which received momentum after the National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986, its Programme of Action (PoE), 1992, which emphasized the need "to bring the

educationally backward minorities (which includes Muslims) on par with the rest of the society and to make them participate fully in the national development activities.^{xv}

These are some of the aims, objectives and initiatives of the Government to improvise the status of the citizens including those of minorities. Despite these measures the ground reality is something different, which is reflected in different survey reports, which reflected the shambolic situation. According to the Sachar Committee Report, one-fourth of Muslim children in the age group of 14-16 years either never attended school or are dropouts for children above the age of 17 years, the educational attainment of Muslims at matriculation of Muslims who complete middle school are likely to complete secondary education, compressed to 62% at national level.^{xvi} This is the state affair of the education of the Muslims in India.

Further, if the problems of the Muslims to be taken into account many issue come to the fore such as – after the British assumed the power in India the new pattern of life, value and belief system set by the British education proved to be antagonistic with the Muslim ways of life and overall social pattern. This confrontation led them to become averse to the Government sponsored education system and they tried hard to maintain the Islamic identity in the field of education by society managed *madrassa* education. The poor people cannot afford the cost of modern education^{xvii} and the Government acknowledges that the monthly per capita expenditure of Muslims is much lower than the national average. The Sachar Committee also reflects that the Muslim enrolment is the lowest (80%) compared to other socio-religious categories. Many long term programmes were started for the improvement of the educational status of the minorities like- Prime Minister's 15 Point Programme for the welfare of Minorities (1983), Area Intensive Programme for Educationally Backward Minorities, Modernisation of Madrasas, Maulana Azad Education Foundation Scheme (1989), free supply of books and stationary and Merit Scholarship and Pre-Examination Coaching scheme for the weaker sections.

According to Kamat^{xviii} the reasons for educational backwardness of Muslims could be broadly grouped under some heads- (1) Religious traditionalism and backwardness of those professing Islam; (2) Partition of India and the psychological crisis of identity it created for the Indian Muslims. The secular and non-secular debate still affects in one way or other the policy making attempt of Government. Therefore, it is better to adopt a citizen based and secular rather than community based approach in resolving the problem of educational backwardness of the people belonging to all religious communities in the country. The religious traditionalism and backwardness can further be explained by the attitude of the Muslim community.^{xix} According to studies by Choudhury and Halan^{xx} the Hindu and the Christian and the Sikh communities had set up a network of good educational institutions which provides general and professional education. The Muslim community has failed to set up such institutions in large numbers to provide its youths with modern education.

Several other studies reveal the close relationship of their educational development with their economic activity. Over 70% of the Muslims in India are living in rural areas and are marginal and small farmers or self-employed artisans and of remaining 30% who lives in towns are skilled workers, tailors, retailers, and are involved in professions which do not require them to be literate.^{xxi} Significant percentages of Muslims are self-employed in relatively low income generating occupation, whether this concentration is structural or imposed by real or preserved fears of rejection or discrimination in more secure and better sectors is difficult to say. According to Sachar Committee Report (2006), Muslims hold a tiny 5.7% of government jobs. Low participation in government jobs is partly seen as result of discrimination. The employment situation has deteriorated because of globalization and liberalization processes appear to have affected Muslim occupations (mainly self-employment) more adversely than others have, especially for women. This coupled with low bargaining power of workers (especially for women), results in low incomes. Discrimination in the implementation of government programmes and in infrastructure provision adds to the problems in the economic sphere.^{xxii}

Thus, taking into account some of these a priori analysis about the socio-economic and educational status of the Muslims one thing can be said that while the Government formulates policies about the overall development of the society in general and the minorities in particular, an inclusive approach should be followed and representatives of all the sections of the society should have been consulted to make it more successful at the time of implementation. Therefore, some important aspects should be taken into consideration and given importance such as-

- While visualizing a goal for a well-established education system along with the qualitative aspects like spirituality and independence of thought, quantitative aspects like key ground reality assessment and examination grades should be given prime importance.
- The whole gamut of education system should be so prepared which would create individuals who can fit in and relate them to a multi- faith, multi-cultural society without compromising their own faith.
- Parents should be given the opportunity with broad consensus to determine a new ethos statement for existing schools where there is a majority of students of another cultural or religious group.
- Many Muslim schools are not up to criteria required of them to compete with other schools for which proper and adequate funding is needed for their progress.
- The Government should provide some basic guidelines while leaving the ultimate responsibility for admission policy to each school.
- Financial assistance should be made available to support industries that can satisfy the resource requirements of education on Islamic topics.

Increased efforts must be made to undertake empirical research into the Muslim community itself as far as Muslim participation in education policy is concerned. This would extend to such matters as demographics, post-school achievement, communal aspiration, family background and educational performance. A database of Muslim educationist should be established who can contribute to such research. Simplification of various processes and an increase in the transparency of the system as policy goals, with a particular focus on minority communities is highly desirable. This could include the provision of trained advisers to discuss issues of concern to parents in various communities nationally.

Therefore, participation in nation building is a major question, which should be given utmost importance. In India narrow nationalism, misrepresentation of facts, politicization of all issues, lack of proper and adequate representation, petty and parochial temperament at all levels are the most disturbing and diabolic trends, which marred the process of accommodative development. The Muslims should make a beginning to become a part and parcel of the development process which is possible through education only and they should participate in the process of acquiring education with the consideration that, "education should aim at the balanced growth of total personality of man through the training of man's spirit, intellect, the rational self, feelings and bodily senses."^{xxiii}

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