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Educational Status of Muslim Women: A Case Study of Poonch District

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Abstract:

Women have equal rights in Islam to get education. The Quran and the Sunnah both advocate the rights of women and men equally to seek knowledge. Men have no priority over women in relation to the right to get education. But various studies and reports indicate that educational status of Muslim women in India is not at all satisfactory. They are treated with a different set of societal rules and under the patriarchal authority. Women are the most oppressed section of the society, discrimination against them in one form or other still continues. In this paper an attempt was made to examine the educational status of women in general and Muslim women in particular. This paper is based on secondary sources i.e. District Handbook report 2011-12 and population census of India 2001. It revealed that educational status of women in Poonch district is very low as compared to men and the situation of Muslim women even worse. Results have indicated that literacy rate among the Muslim women in Poonch district was 32.01% as against 61.98% among men with a total of 47.65% for both the sexes, as per 2001 census.

Key words: Educational Status, Literacy Rate, Islam, Muslim Women and Poonch

1. Introduction

The education of women has a great impact on the socio-economic and cultural development of the nation. No nation will prosper if it fails to utilize the talent and abilities of women who constitute almost half of the total population of the world. Education of women has a long lasting impact on the status of women in a society. Apart from providing basic knowledge, it prepares them to take part in all aspects of social life, whether it is socio-economic or political.

Educational status of women and especially Muslim women in India is not at all satisfactory. For centuries, women in society were generally subjected to discrimination, oppression, inequality and confined to the four walls of the house. They were treated with a different set of societal rules and under the patriarchal authority. Women are the most oppressed section of the society, discrimination against them in one form or other still continues. In a report which was conducted by U.N in 1980 was reported that fifty percent population of the world constitutes women, do nearly two third of its work hours, get one tenth of the world's income and less than one hundredth of the world's property. Data reveals that women comprise 66% of the world's illiterates and 70% of the world's poor. Though a number of laws have been passed to improve their condition, significant improvement can come in their status only when women become aware of their social, political and economic rights.

2. Women Education in Islam

Women have equal rights in Islam to get education. The Quranic word *IQRA* (to read) is about education. The credit the Quran grants to women's material and spiritual conditions seem to be the same as those granted to men. Prophet Muhammad (saws) termed education is incumbent for every individual both male and female. So it is clear that in Islam there is no discrimination against women regarding education, it is essential for every Muslim male and female to get knowledge.

In the above paragraph one may expect the Muslim women as literate and enlightened section of the society. But, the ground reality is obviously different. Unfortunately to say that for a variety of reasons the Muslims all over the world have been generally found very conservative in their outlook towards their women's education. Engineer Asghar in his work "*The Quran Woman and Modern Society*" mention it as "except for initial period of few decades Muslim woman never enjoyed equality in the Islamic world. Soon, for various reasons, more and more restrictions were imposed on them. Though there was absolutely no place for monarchy in Islam, the institution of monarchy developed in the Muslim world within thirty years of death of Prophet and all feudal customs and traditions associated with monarchy came to be adopted by Muslim monarchs (though continued to be called Caliphs for religious reasons) including severe restrictions on Muslim woman. In other words all feudal practices were imposed on woman in the Muslim world which continues till today" (Engineer, 2005: 207). Today Muslim community is perhaps the most educationally backward communities at present and so far as Muslim women are concerned, it appears that Islamic principles and orders have been totally neglected (Rokaiya, 2002). Siddiqui (1987) argued that socioeconomic condition of the Muslim community positively affects the educational level of Muslim women. Religion no more create problems in the way of Muslim women education. However, the poor economic background of the family is an important cause of women's illiteracy

3. Educational Status of Muslim women

3.1. Review of Literature

Available literature on Muslim women reiterates that educational status of Muslim women in India is inferior as compare to other Indian women. Khan, (1993) in his study "*Education among Muslim*" mentioned that educational status of Muslims community is very poor as compare to others. The major problems to education were poor economic condition and traditional mode of occupation. Most of the respondents was of those who gave economic reason for not to send their children to education. Children from poor economic background had highest percentage of drop out. At all levels of schooling the percentage of girls was very low. Archana chaturvedi, (2004) argued that the educational condition of Muslim women in India is not satisfactory. They are suffering from higher rate of illiteracy and low rate of school enrolment at all level. At present the educationally Muslim community is more backward and so far as Muslim women education is concerned it seems that Quranic order and principles have been completely neglected. Majority of the Indian Muslim girls confined within the four walls of the house and taught to read the Quran. They receive primary education in makhtabs, confined to education of religious matters and neglected the modern education. Hasan,(1993) in his study showed that Muslim were not responding adequately to the expansion of educational facilities in this country and they were educationally very backward. The main reason of their backwardness is weak economic base. This has resulted into a sadistic sphere of illiteracy, poverty, lack of interest in education and conservative attitude. Nasrin (2013) argued that the condition of Muslim women is different today from yesterday in all walks of life. They are coming out of their purdha and are partaking greater tasks in national reconstruction. The literacy status of the Indian Muslim women is very low because of their economic conditions, lack of honest leadership in the community, no availability of schools, and lack of resources in the available schools, more drop outs and lack of interest in education. These entire factors create problems in the way of women education. Qamar Jahan (1998) found out that the socio-economic and educational status of muslim women is very low. Restriction on Muslim women on the pretext of integrity is the main reason to suppress them. Quranic guideline is not completely practiced in the present day society. Muslim women face the problems of social restriction which is imposed on them by the society in all walks of life, including education.

The studies reviewed above clearly indicate that the educational status of Muslim women is very poor.

3.2. Poonch at a Glance

Poonch district is popularly known as mini Kashmir and is one among the most backward and remote districts of Jammu And Kashmir State. It is bounded by the Actual Line of control (ALC) from three sides. The ALC is about 103kms. from Tarkundi in Balakot to Sawjian in Mandi Block. Poonch is situated between 33°25' to 34°01' North latitude and between 73°58' to 74°35' east longitude. It is surrounded by Kashmir valley in the North; district Rajouri in the South and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) in the West.

Poonch has witnessed many historical events and has been ruled by outsiders and locals at different junctures till it became a part of independent India. It consists of 04 Tehsil, namely Mendhar, Haveli, Mandi, Surankot, 06 Blocks, (Poonch, Mandi, Surankot, Buzliaz, Mandhar, Balakot,) 191 Panchayats and 179 villages comprising of 172 inhabited and 07 uninhabited as per 2001 census. The total population of the district as per 2001 census was 3.73 lacs, out of which 1.94 lacs are male and 1.79 lacs are female. The density of population was 223 per Sq Kms. The percentage of population belonging to Muslim Community is 91.93%, Hindu 5.20%, Sikh 2.76%, Buddhist 0.03% and Christian 0.08%. Out of total population 40% population consists of Gujjar and Bakarwal, 52% Pahari while remaining 6% are kashmiris, Dogres and Punjabi. The rural population is 3.49 lacs and 0.24 lacs is urban population. The growth rate was 28.16% during the period 1991-01. Working force consists of 65.855 cultivators, 3.77% agricultural labourers and 2.17% works in household industry and 28.21% are of "others" category. The population of Poonch district is heterogeneous, with people possessing different ethnic backgrounds, possessing diverse religion, language and culture.

3.3. Educational Status of Muslim women in Poonch

Educational status of Muslim women in the district of Poonch is very depressing and quite miserable, like their other districts of the Jammu and Kashmir state. Women in Poonch district were generally subjected to discrimination, exploitation, oppression and inequality. Their role remained confined to household activities and they were also excluded from education. Very little information is available about the educational status of Muslim women in the district of Poonch. There is a lack of inclusive studies based on empirical field data and covering the different aspects of women's life in general and Muslim women in particular.

About half of the population of Poonch is living below poverty line. In rural areas majority of the people is not in a position to give proper education to their children. They are compelled for child labour, such as collecting fire wood, fetching water from far long areas, caring their young siblings, cooking and helping parents in agriculture fields. Main occupation of the people is cultivation they get their day to day requirement from it, so the parents are unable to provide education to their children due to heavy expensive on education.

The education department is providing free education facilities but due to militancy related activities in the last 20- 22 years, the education set up in most of the primary schools in rural areas has been effected because the teaching staff posted there was reluctant to perform their duty regularly due to the thread of militancy. The state government has introduced Reber-e-Taleem (RET) Scheme and posted local staff in rural areas to meet this challenge. However, this scheme has degraded the education standard because these staffs were raw and untrained.

Increase of education in the district has been made immense strides during the past few years of planned development and significant educational facilities are being made available in remote, backward and hilly areas. As per the report of district

Handbook during the years 2011-2012, there were 4 degree college, 104 High and Higher secondary, 529 Middle and 1042 Primary school exist in the Poonch district both government as well as private having the enrolment of 122856 students in which 56986 are female and 7187 teachers are engaged in these institutions.

According to 2001 census, the literacy rate among women in Poonch was 36.00 percent as against 65.00 percent among men with a total of 51.20 percent for both sexes. As for as Muslim literacy rate is concerned, 32.28 percent Muslim female were literate and 61.98 percent of Muslim men with a total of 47.65 percent. There is a wider gap between Muslim men and women literacy rate in Poonch district.

Amongst the various reasons of Muslim women's educational backwardness the major ones included as:

- Lack of parental motivation
- Lack of girls hostels and separate schools for girls.
- Non-congenial school environments
- Early marriage etc.

S. No	Block	Primary School		Middle School		High/HSS		College		Total		Total
		M*	F*	M*	F*	M*	F*	M*	F*	M*	F*	
1	Poonch	3315	3277	4445	4411	6300	4259	1215	551	15275	12498	27773
2	Mandi	2566	1801	4817	4123	1902	1254	O	O	9285	7178	16463
3	Surankot	2638	2772	5377	4929	3607	2476	O	O	11622	10177	21799
4	Bufliaz	2301	2397	2889	2204	1232	2014	O	O	6422	6615	13037
5	Mendhar	6126	5441	5651	5114	6862	5124	412	371	19051	16050	35101
6	Balakote	1158	1320	1702	1626	1355	1522	O	O	4215	4468	8683
	Total	18104	17008	24881	22407	21258	16649	1627	922	65870	56986	122856

Table 1: Block wise enrolment in institutions for (Govt. + Private) Education, 2011-12

Note: - M*=Male, F*=Female

Source: District Handbook, 2011-12

It can be observed from the table-1 given above that the enrolment ratio of women as compared to men is low, total enrolment of women in the primary school is 17008, and men is 18104, in the Middle schools 22407 women are enrolled and 24881 are men and 16649 women and 21407 men are enrolled in the High and Higher secondary schools, at the college level their enrolment ratio is 922 and men have 1627. We can observe from this that the number of girls enrolment start decreasing after high and higher secondary schools and only 922 women reach at the college level. This variation is due to high dropout rate of girls in comparison to boys. The gap between male and female is high in Poonch, Mendhar and Surankot Block. But in some other Block Balakot and Bufliaz women enrolment is high as compared to men.

The analysis clearly shows that the literacy rate is higher in urban areas than the rural areas both in case of male and female. The urban males have taken lead over rural males by 30.08%. Similarly, the literacy rate among the urban females is higher by 47.56% than rural females. The overall literacy rate of Poonch district is 51.02% as per 2001 census. The male and female literacy of total rural/urban population across the three main Tehsil of Poonch district is depicted in the table-2.

S.No	Tehsil/Distt.	Area	2001		
			Persons (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
1	Haveli	Total	53.60	67.00	38.30
		Rural	47.10	61.50	31.20
		Urban	88.00	93.50	80.60
2	Mendhar	Total	54.40	69.50	38.50
		Rural	54.40	69.50	38.50
		Urban	0.00	0.00	0.00
3	Surankot	Total	43.40	56.50	29.20
		Rural	43.40	56.50	29.20
		Urban	0.00	0.00	0.00
4	Poonch District	Total	51.20	65.00	36.00
		Rural	48.40	62.70	33.01
		Urban	88.00	93.50	80.60

Table 2: Literacy Rate by Sex and Area 2001

Source: District Handbook 2011-12

It can be observed from the table-2 that the highest literacy rate is found in Tehsil Mendhar with 54.40% while Tehsil Surankot has the lowest literacy 43.40%. The male and female literacy rates show that Tehsil Mendhar at the top in total male and female literacy rates with 69.50% and 38.50% respectively. The table-2 clearly depicts variations in male and female literacy. In both urban

and rural areas female literacy is found to be low when compared to the male literacy rate of the respective areas. This educational backwardness is even more in case of Muslim women.

It can be observed from table-3 given below that there exists a wider gap between male and female literacy. In general, the literacy among Muslim women in all districts is low when compared to male literacy. As for as literacy rate of district Poonch is concerned, 32.28% Muslim women are literate as against 61.98% among men with a total of 47.65%.for both the sexes.

S. No.	Districts	MUSLIMS		
		Persons (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
1	Kupwara	41.59	53.71	28.56
2	Baramula	44.19	55.59	31.73
3	Srinagar	57.69	66.95	47.45
4	Badgam	41.55	52.18	30.22
5	Pulwama	48.76	59.54	37.04
6	Anantnag	45.85	56.62	34.25
7	Leh	68.74	81.82	52.07
8	Kargil	60.99	76.26	43.65
9	Doda	42.98	57.09	26.49
10	Udhampur	9.89	92.48	79.15
11	Poonch	47.65	61.98	32.28
12	Rajouri	59.05	69.06	32.76
13	Jammu	59.05	69.06	47.11
14	Kathua	41.14	54.58	26.17

Table 3: Sex wise Literacy rates of Muslims population in Jammu and Kashmir 2001

Note: - 0-06 years of population are excluded

Source: Census of India 2001

From the preceding conversation it is depicted that there exist gender disparities in education in the Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir state. The disparity in the educational attainments between male and female has been so wide in spite of the fact that women have equal rights both in Islam and in the constitution.

4. Suggestions

Various policies and programmes made by the Indian government for the enhancement of women's education, in spite of these Muslim women have been ignored. Within the framework of democratic polity, National policies and plans for women's advancement in different spheres, there has been gradual improvement in several areas of women's lives but much need to be done especially in the lives of Muslim women. Remedy to this challenge is grass root initiatives that focus attention on the problems of women education. To make effort to generate educational awareness and attitudinal changes among the masses regarding women education, the role of women's families, community leaders and media deserves special attention here.

5. Conclusion

As we have seen that in Islam women have equal rights as men, in spite of this educational status of Muslim women in the district of Poonch is very depressing and quite miserable where the Muslims are in majority. According to 2001 census, the literacy rate among women in Poonch was 36.00 percent as against 65.00 percent among men with a total of 51.20 percent for both sexes. As for as Muslim literacy rate is concerned, 32.28 percent Muslim female were literate and 61.98 percent of Muslim men with a total of 47.65 percent literacy rate. There is a wider gap between Muslim men and women literacy rate in Poonch district. Women in the district were generally subjected to discrimination, exploitation, oppression and inequality. Their role remained confined to household activities and they were also excluded from education.

The lack of job opportunities for Muslim women is an important issue needing urgent action. An improvement in women education would directly influence Muslim women's status in the society.

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