
EDUCATIONAL DISPARITIES AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION AMONG INDIAN MUSLIMS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Indian Muslims are chained to various challenges as deprivation of education worsens an already socio-economically backward community. This deprivation in quality education results in the perpetuation of the poverty-unemployment-social exclusion cycle. The boundaries of socio-economic disadvantages are enlarged by limited education. Indian Muslims suffer from vast unemployment and prevail in poverty, deprived of acquiring proper education which brings a narrow opportunity for jobs. Underprivileged higher education restricts entry for Indian Muslims in the job market as well as abolishes the chain of poverty. Even more critical are the social and cultural ramifications of educational deprivation. Social exclusion is mainly the result of inferior educational standards, curtailing the participation of Indian Muslims in the economic, political, and social framework of the country. Furthermore, such an education-exclusion severely deprives them of a competent engagement with their cultural heritage. There is concern among the public about making one vulnerable to radicalization and extremist ideologies, as education deprivation provides more chances of exposure to such influences. Even though there are constitutional provisions and several laws supporting educational upliftment of the minority community, but they do not seem enough to serve the purpose. These laws are mainly focused on providing elementary education, while the real issues emerge at higher education level which require strong financial background for quality education. The status of women in the Muslim community needs special attention. The Madrasa education system also needs reformation by adding modern education to the syllabi along with religious education. The major recommendations of the Sachar committee regarding education among Muslims need proper implementation for the upliftment of the community. This paper will analyze all the educational angles within Islam and the correlation differences in the educational status of Indian Muslims. Lack of education is the key reason behind Muslim marginalization. By providing better educational opportunities, Muslims can return to the mainstream.

INTRODUCTION

The world is changing, and education has become the most potent tool of change in the world, arousing in young minds the light of hope for an inspired tomorrow. As the world passes through changes, education of quality remains a prime force, providing the youth with knowledge, values, and the courage to foresee a bright future. Education holds a prominent place not only as a human right but also as the prime instrument of empowerment and development for individuals and societies in their fight for survival. Education and development are inextricably linked; societal progress and transformation hinge on investing in the education of its citizens, with elementary education laying the foundational groundwork.¹ For Indian Muslims, it holds a significance that transcends mere academic achievement. In the Islamic tradition, the pursuit of knowledge is encouraged and regarded as a moral and religious obligation. The Qur'an and Hadith lay great stress on education as a means of spiritual, intellectual, and social upliftment, emphasizing that the pursuit of knowledge is obligatory for Muslim men and women alike. However, unfortunately, even in such an abiding principle, the situation today reflects a complete travesty of this ideal, showing alarming trends of underdevelopment, inequality, and exclusion with regard to education among Muslims in India.² The community's historical and continued struggles with poverty, illiteracy, and social exclusion have resulted in a glaring educational disparity. Historically, Indian Muslims, being the largest religious minority of the country, have been subjected to these systemic constraints with respect to quality education. They are not a product of cultural neglect but rather embody the historical processes narrating socio-political marginalization, economic deprivation, institutional bias, and neglectful policies.³ Indian Muslims, as a consequence, rank low on various human developmental indicators such as literacy level, educational attainment, and economic participation.⁴

The Sachar Committee Report (2006), instituted by the Government of India to survey the socio-economic and educational conditions of Muslims, unveiled, in the crassest terms, the degree to which the Muslims stand marginalized regarding education. They are not only

¹ chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://ijariie.com/AdminUploadPdf/Madrassa_Education_and_Employment_Status_of_Muslims_in_Indian_ijariie12807.pdf

² Sachar Committee Report, "Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India" (2006), p. 123

³ National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions, "Report on the Educational Status of Muslims in India" (2006), p. 45.

⁴ Ministry of Human Resource Development, "Annual Report 2012-13" (2013), p. 120.

lagging behind in education but also found wanting in accessing public employment, infrastructure, and financial institutions. It said that Indian Muslims are "trapped in a vicious circle" of poverty, illiteracy, and discrimination, and recommended several affirmative measures in that regard. Education thus remains an important instrument for bridging the gap and unlocking the development potential of the community. By acquiring quality education, Indian Muslims may enhance their employment opportunities and raise their socio-economic status, besides developing skills and knowledge that allow them to participate meaningfully in the democratic processes of the country.⁵ Also, educated Muslim women can turn around the lives of many others within the community who are either illiterate or unempowered and become agents of change themselves. Muslim women, who are among the most vulnerable within the community, suffer both from gender disadvantage and religious disadvantage. Early marriages, patriarchal structures, absence of female role models, restricted mobility, and the lack of a Muslim friendly atmosphere in schools are impediments in the way of the educational participation of these women. As a result, if they enter school, they tend to drop out very often, and even if they successfully complete school, very few are admitted into colleges or universities, especially in the conservatively rural setups. Thus, Muslim women remain one of the most educationally deprived groups in India.⁶ Understanding the notion of social exclusion—that is, a state of affairs precluding individuals or groups from complete participation in social, economic, and political life is the key to the analysis of the educational backwardness of Indian Muslims. Ghettoization in the residential status; curricula biased against their interest; institutional alienation; and discrimination in schools and colleges are leading them to an abyss of disillusionment and invisibility. Such exclusionary dynamics become hurdles not only in their performance but also in nurturing their confidence and aspirations. Finally, education among Indian Muslims holds relevance because of its potential for promoting inclusive growth, social cohesion, and assisting the community to break the grave inequalities that have inhibited its growth for too long.⁷ The paper attempts to examine the contextual link between educational disparity and social exclusion faced by Indian Muslims, especially from the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy, the Sachar Committee Report, and the experience of Muslim women. In doing so, an attempt will be made to critically assess the systemic barriers to

⁵ Sachar Committee Report, "Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India" (2006), p. 145.

⁶ National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions, "Report on the Educational Status of Muslims in India" (2006), p. 67.

⁷ Ministry of Minority Affairs, "Annual Report 2012-13" (2013), p. 150.

community development and suggest ways towards inclusive and just educational development.

I. CONCEPT OF EDUCATION IN ISLAM

"Read, in the name of thy Lord, and Cherisher, And thy Lord is Most Bountiful. He who taught the use of pen taught man that which he knew not." -Al Quran (96:1-5)

The first revelation to Prophet Muhammad from Allah emphasized the importance of education, as stated in the Quran. This verse, along with numerous others, urges humans to pursue knowledge, utilize the pen, and strive for understanding. By following the Quran's guidance, Prophet Muhammad encouraged his followers to seek knowledge with sincerity and dedication. It emphasizes the most impressive importance of education within Islam, standing as the most important way through which Muslims would understand Allah's creation and divine will.⁸

Education holds a prime place in Islamic values and practices. The Quran and Hadith narrate the significance of education and enlightenment through questioning, as these would describe the foundations of an individual's personal growth, spiritual development, and progress in the community. According to Islam, education is a capacity through which an individual develops intellectually, spiritually, and morally. The Quran states, *"Are those who know equal to those who know not?"*⁹ This verse has importance in the matter of knowledge and education, with the reality that it places great importance on personal growth and development in a spiritual sense.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) declared the value of education, saying, *"It is mandatory for every Muslim, both male and female, to pursue knowledge."*¹⁰ This statement is a good example of how all genders have educational needs; clearly, learning is one of the main fronts of Islamic practice.

This does not mean that education in Islam is confined to formal schooling or classroom learning. Rather, this includes many different kinds of experiences and activities, such as the

⁸ Qazi Nusrat Sultana, "Philosophy of Education an Islamic Perspective", p. 9. Philosophy and Progress: Vols. LI-LII, January-June, July-December, 2012, ISSN 1607-2278 (Print), DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3329/pp.v5i11-2.17676>

⁹ Quran 39:9, translated by Yusuf Ali (Islamic Publications, 1938), p. 1051.

¹⁰ Ibn Majah, Hadith 224, translated by Abdul Hamid Siddiqui (Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1975), p. 234.

following:

1. Spiritual education (*Tarbiyah*): This component of education includes the systematized study of religious knowledge, in which the learner analyzes the holy texts, doctrines, and traditions that distinguish belief in God and the universe. It focuses on jurisprudence, giving individuals the necessary legislative frameworks for ethical behavior that govern the need for personal responsibility based on religious standards. This spiritual education also roots itself in the different modes of spirituality from meditation, prayer, and communal worship, which are geared towards creating a profound self and divinity consciousness. It motivates learners to indulge in self-reflection, acquire internal peace, and purposefully relate their lives to a bigger existential narrative. Discussions are usually part of spiritual education, addressing the ethical aspects of faith in contemporary society to provoke the students to apply their knowledge to real-world situations. *Tarbiyah* (تربية) is the soul of the Islamic education system, producing individuals who combine deep faith with righteous character and responsible citizenship.¹¹

2. Moral education (*Tarbiyah Khuluqiyyah*): *Tarbiyah Khuluqiyyah* (تربية خلقية) refers to the moral and ethical upbringing or character education in the Islamic system. The term is composed of:

- *Tarbiyah* (تربية) – nurturing, education, or development, often in a comprehensive and continuous manner.
- *Khuluqiyyah* (خلقية) – derived from *khuluq* (خلق), meaning character, morals, or ethics.

Hence, *Tarbiyah Khuluqiyyah* means the systematic nurturing of good moral character and behavior in individuals, based on the ethical teachings of Islam. It focuses on the internalization and practice of virtues such as truthfulness (ṣidq), patience (ṣabr), modesty (ḥayā'), justice (ʿadl), respect (iḥtirām), and trustworthiness (amānah).

Core Principles of *Tarbiyah Khuluqiyyah*:

- i. Qur'anic Foundation: The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes the importance of good character. For example, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is praised in Surah Al-Qalam (68:4):

¹¹ Al-Ghazali, "The Book of Knowledge", translated by Kenneth Honerkamp (Islamic Texts Society, 1993), p. 123.

“And indeed, you are of a great moral character.”

- ii. Prophetic Model (Uswah Hasanah): The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is considered the ideal model of khuluq. His life is the blueprint for Islamic moral training.
- iii. Integration with Iman (faith): Good character is seen as a manifestation of true faith. The Prophet ﷺ said, *“The best among you are those who have the best manners and character.”* (Bukhari)
- iv. Practical Application: Tarbiyah Khuluqiyyah is not just theoretical; it is expressed in actions, relationships, and everyday interactions.

Importance in Islamic Education:

In the Islamic educational system, Tarbiyah Khuluqiyyah is considered as essential as intellectual development. It aims to produce not just knowledgeable individuals, but ethically responsible Muslims who contribute positively to society and uphold the values of justice, compassion, and honesty. This form of education complements Tarbiyah ‘Ilmiyah (intellectual education), ensuring a balanced development of mind, soul, and conduct in accordance with divine guidance.¹²

3. Intellectual education (*Tarbiyah ‘Ilmiyyah*): Tarbiyah ‘Ilmiyah (تربية علمية) in the Islamic education system refers to the holistic intellectual and moral development of an individual based on Islamic knowledge (‘ilm) and values. The term combines two key Arabic concepts:

- Tarbiyah (تربية): generally means nurturing, upbringing, or education. It encompasses the comprehensive development of the human personality, including moral, spiritual, intellectual, physical, and emotional dimensions.
- ‘Ilmiyah (علمية): pertains to knowledge, especially formal, intellectual, or academic knowledge in line with Islamic epistemology.

Together, Tarbiyah ‘Ilmiyah emphasizes a balanced educational approach that cultivates not just academic excellence, but also moral integrity, piety (taqwa), discipline, and social

¹² Ibn Taymiyyah, "The Status of Women in Islam", translated by Muhammad Abdul-Haq (Islamic Research Institute, 1985), p. 156.

responsibility, rooted in Qur'anic guidance and Prophetic traditions (Sunnah). It promotes the idea that true education is not only about learning facts, but also about forming character, nurturing faith, and applying knowledge for the betterment of the individual and society in accordance with Islamic principles. In practice, Tarbiyah 'Ilmiyah in Islamic educational institutions involves:

- Teaching both religious ('ulum al-diniyyah) and worldly ('ulum al-dunyawiyyah) sciences.
- Encouraging critical thinking and ethical application of knowledge.
- Instilling adab (manners) and akhlaq (morality).
- Developing a God-conscious worldview (tawhidic paradigm).¹³

Islamic education utilizes a number of methods, such as memorization and recitation (*hifz*) of the Quran and other Islamic texts,¹⁴ critical thinking and analysis (*tafakkur*) of Islamic texts and concepts,¹⁵ practical application (*tatbiq*) of Islamic knowledge and values in daily life.¹⁶

Education, according to Islam, possesses a broad value: it develops one's intellectual, spiritual, and moral capabilities;¹⁷ personal growth and spiritual advancement are promoted;¹⁸ and, most importantly, development in the community or society undergoes all of the above processes.¹⁹

Allah has gifted humans with discourses of effectiveness to use within the context of communication. In the Quran, he also states: "*created man and taught him speech.*" Verbal communication would become the mastery of navigation through worldly and spiritual affairs. In an ideal world, one has to develop one's linguistic skills through intensive reading and practice of speaking in recitation, public speaking, and debates. However, ideally, these have to take place in one's native tongue as indicated in the Quran that messengers were sent to their

¹³ Ibn Sina, "The Book of Healing", translated by Fazlur Rahman (Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1975), p. 234.

¹⁴ Quran 41:10, translated by Yusuf Ali (Islamic Publications, 1938), p. 1123.

¹⁵ Al-Ghazali, "The Book of Knowledge", translated by Kenneth Honerkamp (Islamic Texts Society, 1993), p. 150.

¹⁶ Ibn Taymiyyah, "The Status of Women in Islam", translated by Muhammad Abdul-Haq (Islamic Research Institute, 1985), p. 180.

¹⁷ Quran 96:1-5, translated by Yusuf Ali (Islamic Publications, 1938), p. 1743.

¹⁸ Al-Ghazali, "The Book of Knowledge", translated by Kenneth Honerkamp (Islamic Texts Society, 1993), p. 200.

¹⁹ Ibn Sina, "The Book of Healing", translated by Fazlur Rahman (Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1975), p. 300.

people in their language to convey the message. From an Islamic perspective, effective communication comes with being proficient in one's mother tongue which is, indeed, a primary obligation as well as the basis for effective communication.²⁰

II. CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK IN INDIA

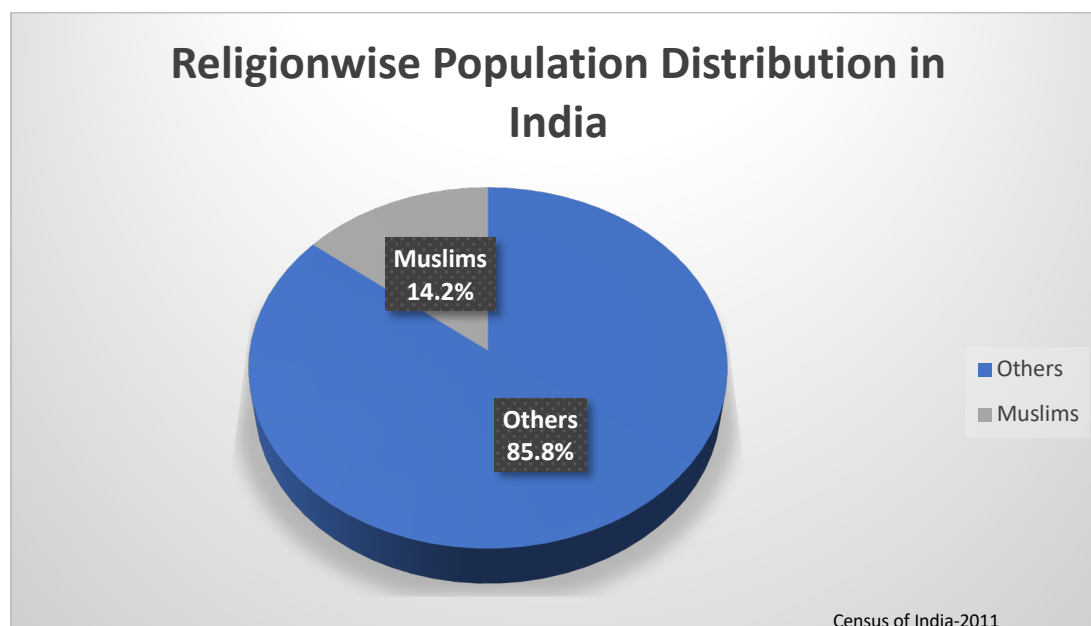
Constitutionally recognized as a fundamental right, education under Article 21A of the Constitution of India is followed by free and compulsory education for children within 6 to 14 years. The Constitutional provisions for minorities, including Muslims, include Article 29 and Article 30. Article 29 safeguards interest for the minorities through preserving a right to conservation if any section of the citizens has a separate language, script, or culture, while Article 30(1) provides all religious minorities and linguistic minorities the right to establish and administer institutions of their favor. Such provisions empower minorities like Muslims in terms of educational and cultural identity preservation. Furthermore, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act) operationalizes Article 21A and strives to improve quality education delivery to the disadvantaged or marginalized communities in which Muslims reside. The National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions Act, 2004 is also an established legal mechanism through which rights of minorities including their education are protected and promoted by acknowledgment of their institutions and resolving disputes. There have been various landmark judgments reinforcing the constitutional guarantees. For example, the Supreme Court of India held in the case of *T.M.A.Pai Foundation v. State of Karnataka (2002)*, that the minorities have freedom to establish and administer educational institutions, meaning that admissions and staffing would be under the discretion of such institutions. Further enlarging minority rights, the Court states that the State cannot impose reservations in minority-run unaided institutions in the case of *P.A.Inamdar v. State of Maharashtra (2005)*. Also, the Supreme Court validated that the minority institutions had rights to admit students on criteria framed by them without compromising the quality standards in the case of *St.Stephen's College v. University of Delhi (1992)*. These provisions and judgments form what cumulatively provides constitutional and legal grounds from which educational justice should be delivered and protected with the rights of Muslims and other minorities in India.

²⁰ Qazi Nusrat Sultana, "Philosophy of Education an Islamic Perspective", p. 21. Philosophy and Progress: Vols. LI-LII, January-June, July-December, 2012, ISSN 1607-2278 (Print), DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3329/pp.v51i1-2.17676>

Unfortunately, the current educational status of Indian Muslims require much more than what is provided by the Indian constitution and the government of India. The Muslim community require special attention in terms of safe environment, inclusive education, breaking stereotypes, security in terms of religious identity, social exclusion, hate crimes, financial support for higher education, reservation in government jobs, etc. Such kind of issues can only be addressed by framing additional legal provisions in order to safeguard better education and employment opportunities for Muslim community ultimately resulting in their upliftment.

III. EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF INDIAN MUSLIMS

The educational situation of Indian Muslims is a very difficult, complex, and multifaceted challenge requiring in-depth study. As per 2011 census figures, Muslims make up about 14.2% of the total population of India, and within that, there are vast demographic differences from one state to another. This means that the issues faced by the community could be regionally context-specific. With all their numbers, Indian Muslims continue to struggle with considerable problems in attaining quality educational opportunities that affect individual growth as well as the socio-economic development of the community at large.



Literacy rates provide a good indication of education being imparted. According to the 2011 census data, literacy among Muslims is at 68.5%, which is considerably lower compared with national literacy, which averages at 74%.²¹ This figure emphasizes a continuing educational

²¹ Census of India, 2011, "Religion" (Government of India, 2011), p. 123.

divide. Not only this, Muslims in India have 17.3% enrolment Rate, which is lower than the national average of 24.5%. The rate of Muslim students who drop out every year is very high at 17.6% , than the national average of 13.2% comprising the students from other communities.²² Looking at the education attainment of Muslim community, only 11.6% of Muslims have completed higher education, this is lower than the national average of 14.8% . An all-encompassing study done by the Sachar Committee reveals that only 59% of Muslim children are attending primary school as opposed to about 70% of the general population attending.²³ This could be attributed to a number of interrelated factors that affect their educational engagement.

Educational Status	Muslims (India)	Indian National Average
Literacy rate	68.5%	74%
Enrolment rate	17.3%	24.5%
Dropout rate	17.6%	13.2%
Higher education attainment	11.6%	14.8%
Primary education attendee	59%	70%

Census of India-2011

Sachar Committee-2006

The obstacles to quality education for Indian Muslims are both innumerable and ancient. A significant number of Muslim families live below the poverty line and cannot afford to meet even basic educational expenses, such as the payment of school fees, the purchase of uniforms,

²² National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions, "Report on the Educational Status of Muslims in India" (Government of India, 2006), p. 56.

²³ Sachar Committee Report, "Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India" (Government of India, 2006), p. 123.

and textbooks. These economic restraints often compel children to work at an early age and distract them from pursuing education.²⁴

Many areas with a Muslim majority find themselves lacking in quality educational facilities. Conditions in public schools in these areas are often terrible, poor infrastructure, a dip in the number of competent learning facilitators, and a lack of crucial amenities that devalue learning experience.²⁵

Systematic discrimination may occur in subtle ways that interfere with Muslim students and their access to education and employment opportunities. Case studies exist in which Muslim students have faced discrimination in the admission procedure, or have experienced environments not conducive to their academic success.²⁶ The Indian government operates various schemes to ameliorate the situation. Some of the notable schemes include:

Maulana Azad Education Foundation: The foundation was established to offer scholarships and financial assistance to economically backward Muslim students, but recently this scheme has been scrapped by the Indian government on the report of the financial condition of the foundation as of November 30, 2023.²⁷

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan: It aims to provide free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14 years, especially attending to marginalized communities, including Muslim populations, to ensure that they are able to go to school.²⁸

National Education Policy (2020): The policy earmarks promoting inclusive and equitable education across different demographic groups, with special provisions for minority communities, which would help to ensure their educational needs are satisfied.²⁹

²⁴ National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions, "Report on the Educational Status of Muslims in India" (Government of India, 2006), p. 67.

²⁵ Sachar Committee Report, "Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India" (Government of India, 2006), p. 156.

²⁶ Human Rights Watch, "India: Chronic Neglect of Education in Muslim Communities" (Human Rights Watch, 2007), p.23.

²⁷ Maulana Azad Education Foundation, "Annual Report 2020-21" (Maulana Azad Education Foundation, 2021), p. 12.

²⁸ Ministry of Human Resource Development, "Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan: A Programme for Universal Elementary Education" (Government of India, 2001), p. 3.

²⁹ Ministry of Human Resource Development, "National Education Policy 2020" (Government of India, 2020), p. 15

These welcome solutions notwithstanding, some difficult problems persist that hinder the equity of Muslim communities in educational attainment. The educational status of Indian Muslims is, thus, an urgent topic requiring immediate and concentrated attention. Working on the myriad challenges this community faces will call for sustained and multifaceted interventions involving not merely governmental policy initiatives but also engagement of the community and focused initiatives. Investing in the education of Indian Muslims is an investment in the societal fabric of India, which will promote far-reaching socio-economic development and harmony.

IV. STATUS OF WOMEN AMONG INDIAN MUSLIMS

The status of Muslim women in India is a very complex and multifaceted scenario that has deep roots in history, socio-economic, and cultural context. Though the Constitution of India is supposed to be a strong guarantee of equality and justice to all citizens, Muslim women still confront enormous problems and inequalities with regard to almost every aspect of their lives. Education is one of the greatest concerns. Research shows educational achievement among Muslim women falls far behind their counterparts among other religions and in the broader population. The Census of India 2011, provides convincing evidence of the fact that there is a vast educational gap between Muslim women and other groups: around 74 percent was the overall literacy rate for India, whereas the literacy rate for Muslim women was drastically lower at 53.4% whereas the national average literacy rate of females in India constitutes 65.5%.³⁰ The National Sample Survey Organization 2014 provides valuable insights in the enrolment rate of Muslim women in India (12.1%) which is much lower than the national average enrolment rate of females in India (18.3%). The dropout rate of Indian Muslim women is much higher (22.1%) than the national average dropout rate of females in India (17.3%). A variety of factors impact this large gap, including socio-economic conditions, cultural norms favoring male education, early marriages, and limited access to quality educational institutions, particularly in rural areas.

³⁰ Census of India, 2011, "Literacy Rate" (Government of India, 2011), p. 123.

Educational status	Muslim (female) (India)	Indian National average (female)
Literacy rate	53.4%	65.5%
Enrolment rate	12.1%	18.3%
Dropout rate	22.1%	17.3%
School attendee	39%	54%
Participation in workforce	14.1%	25.6%

Census of India -2011

National Sample Survey organization-2014

Sachar Committee-2006

In addition, access to employment opportunities, healthcare, and rights is another set of challenges Muslim women in India face along their path to attaining equality and empowerment. Understanding these issues and addressing them is necessary for the creation of an equitable society, in which Muslim women can thrive together with others.

The disparity in access to education is further aggravated by the limited provision of quality education in areas largely populated by Muslims. According to a comprehensive study conducted by the Sachar Committee, merely 39% of Muslim girls are in school. This stands in stark contrast with 54% of admission into school for girls of other communities, thus portraying a gloomy picture of educational opportunities for Muslim communities.³¹ Thus, urgent action has to be taken to direct their educational access of Muslim girls in such a manner that they would receive an education of the same quality as that of others from dissimilar backgrounds.

³¹ Sachar Committee Report, "Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India" (Government of India, 2006), p. 145.

Those affected are not only important for the future of these individuals but also socially and economically for the development of these communities.

Another glaring problem concerning Muslim women is that of economic empowerment. In a study done by the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions, it emerges that many Muslim women are encumbered with huge hurdles to join the active labor force. These are often a product of socio-cultural factors, inequities in education, and discrimination concerning the job itself. Consequently, a large number of Muslim women are relegated to precarious informal jobs with little pay, no job security, and opportunities for growth and advancement. Economic marginalization restricts their financial independence and is detrimental to their ability to contribute to the growth and development of their families and communities. Hence, the necessity for targeted policies and programs to elevate the economic status of Muslim women has grown exponentially in the recent past.³²

The issue of personal law is another concern posing a challenge for Muslim women. The Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act of 1937 governs the personal lives of Muslims with respect to marriage, divorce, and inheritance. However, this law is riddled with all injustices yet another classic patriarchal paradigm.³³

Lately, there have been attempts to reform the Muslim Personal Law and propagate the rights of Muslim women. The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, which was enacted in 2019, for example, forbids the practice of instant triple talaq and upholds the rights of Muslim women.³⁴

Interference of the judiciary constitutes a considerable impediment for the Indian Muslim woman, especially with respect to the freedom of expression in terms of clothing. The recent hijab verdict mandating that they adorn themselves with what is said to be 'proper' can be construed as a blatant infringement on the fundamental freedom to choose any form of representation. This judgment raises deep-seated questions about autonomy in enforcing dress codes that do not coincide with an individual's beliefs and practices.

³² National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions, "Report on the Educational Status of Muslims in India" (Government of India, 2006), p. 67.

³³ Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937 (Government of India, 1937), p. 1.

³⁴ Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019 (Government of India, 2019), p. 1.

Also, in matters of religious significance, one must recognize that these matters should be resolved with guidance from a *mustahib*, who would qualify as a knowledgeable authority on Islamic jurisprudence. Any verdict in such a deeply personal and cultural context must be grounded in the Quran and Hadith, with the perspectives and rights of the people affected being prioritised and respected. Legal decisions in matters of faith should reflect the various interpretations and practices that exist in the Muslim community, accepting and accommodating them instead of restricting them.

V. SOCIAL EXCLUSION OF INDIAN MUSLIMS

At present, the social exclusion of Indian Muslims is getting more and more common. However, such exclusion is deeply entrenched in the social and economic-political structures of the country. One of the primary causes leading to the social exclusion of Indian Muslims is the lack of education. The Sachar Committee Report, which came out in 2006, emphasized among other things the very dismal educational condition of Indian Muslims. Comparison with other communities in India brought out the above findings that were outlined in the report, according to which Muslims had lower literacy, enrolment, and higher dropout rates.³⁵ It was indicated in that report that the literacy of Muslims stood at 59%, which is less than the national average of 65%.³⁶

The consequences of illiteracy among Indian Muslims are extremely far-reaching: limitations on jobs, low income, and less social mobility. The National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) study revealed that Muslim employment was below that of other communities in India; with regard to income, the Muslims seemed to lag behind other communities of India.³⁷ Informal and unorganized sectors are those in which Muslims are predominantly concentrated for employment, being sectors with little job security and fringe benefits.³⁸

Exclusion of Indian Muslims is social and is embedded in discriminatory practices and biases. As per Sachar committee report 2006, 52% Muslims are forced to live in segregated neighbourhoods. A study conducted by the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies corroborated that

³⁵ Sachar Committee Report, "Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India" (2006), p. 123.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 145.

³⁷ National Sample Survey Organization, "Employment and Unemployment Situation among Muslims in India" (2006), p. 12.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 20.

66% Muslims faced grave discrimination in the labor market, including lower hiring rates and lower pay.³⁹ The study also found an increased likelihood for Muslims to experience harassment and violence at the workplace.⁴⁰

The above will require the setting up of policies and programs that target education and employment possibilities for Muslims. The government ought to step up funding for educational schemes in Muslim-dominated areas and come up with initiatives geared towards improving the quality of education.⁴¹ Furthermore, the government has to come up with policies fostering employment opportunities for Muslims through affirmative action and job training initiatives.⁴²

VI. SACHAR COMMITTEE REPORT AND ITS RECOMMENDATIONS

The Sachar Committee Report formally titled "Report on the Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community in India" was submitted in November 2006 to the Government of India by Justice Rajindar Sachar, a retired Chief Justice, who headed this concerned committee. The report pertains to the growing concern about the socio-economic conditions of Muslims in India.

Among many, one of the major tasks of the committee was to investigate social, economic, and educational issues with regard to Muslims. With a well-laid plan of research, data collection, and stakeholder consultations, the committee identified major gaps between Muslims as a community compared to others in the country. The findings were that Muslims are deficient in education and employment opportunities which leads them into cycles of poverty and marginalization. The report also offered an array of recommendations directed towards the improvement of the socio-economic status of Muslims through affirmative action, targeted developmental programs, and better access to education and jobs.

The Sachar Committee findings are now widely debated and discussed in public as a part of the conceptualization of policies for minority empowerment in India and will have far-reaching

³⁹ Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, "Discrimination and Exclusion of Muslims in India" (2013), p. 15.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 25.

⁴¹ Ministry of Minority Affairs, "Annual Report 2012-13" (2013), p. 30.

⁴² Ministry of Human Resource Development, "Annual Report 2012-13" (2013), p. 40.

consequences for the way in which the government approaches the needs of the Muslim community.⁴³

A. Key Findings of the Sachar Committee Report:

The major findings of the Sachar Committee Report on the Condition of Muslims in India include:

1. Poverty and Employment:

Muslims, as per the Sachar Committee, form one of the most impoverished segments in India. They have a poverty rate much higher than that of all other communities. There is a stark employment difference between Muslims engaged in lower-paid jobs that are mostly part of the informal sector.⁴⁴ Muslims face differences in economic realities in terms of lower incomes and lack of access to credit and other financial services.⁴⁵

2. Economic Participation:

Economic participation is much lower among Muslims in comparison to other religions, especially in entrepreneurship and professional employment.⁴⁶ There is less presence of Muslims in government employment, which also includes posts in the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and Indian Police Service (IPS).⁴⁷

3. Educational Attainment:

Compared to other communities in India, Muslims have lower levels of literacy and educational attainment. In rural areas in particular, where access to education is limited for Muslims, they face significant challenges to achieving quality education.⁴⁸ The report indicated that there was a significant education gap. The literacy level among Muslims is on the rise, but it still remains behind that of other communities. It is also observed that comparatively fewer Muslim students

⁴³ Sachar Committee Report, "Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India" (2006), p. 200

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.200

⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 10-15.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 167

⁴⁷ Ibid, pp. 20-25.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 156.

go for schooling and higher studies.⁴⁹

4. Dropout Rates:

One of the factors is high dropout rates focusing especially on girls with socio-economic factors, lack of incentive for education, and cultural constraints driving these indicators.⁵⁰

5. Political Representation:

The committee noted the underrepresentation of Muslims in political affairs, which made it difficult to air their issues and pursue them at the policymaking level.⁵¹

6. Discrimination and Social Exclusion:

Reports chronicled how Muslims discriminate against each other among various sectors, thus pushing themselves to the periphery of social and economic values.⁵² Other factors include communal riots and discriminatory practices in law enforcement affecting the socio-economic condition of Muslims.⁵³

B. Recommendations proposed by the Sachar Committee Report:

The Sachar Committee made a comprehensive and elaborate set of recommendations that would overcome the socio-economic and educational disadvantages faced by Indian Muslims and ultimately improve their conditions. Some of the more notable recommendations include:

1. The report suggested special measures to improve socio-economic conditions of Muslims including reservations in educational institutions and in government jobs based on socio-economic status rather than religion only.⁵⁴
2. Encourage attainment in education by increasing scholarships and financial assistance primarily for Muslim higher education students.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 145.

⁵⁰ Ibid, pp. 30-35.

⁵¹ Ibid, pp. 40-45.

⁵² Ibid, pp. 50-55.

⁵³ Ibid, pp. 60-65.

⁵⁴ Ibid, Recommendations, Section 1.1, pp. 80-85.

⁵⁵ Ibid, Section 2.2, pp. 90-95.

3. Establish more educational institutions where there are high populations of Muslims to promote accessibility.⁵⁶
4. The report emphasized that there should be skill development and vocational training programs strictly for the Muslim community to supplement employability.⁵⁷
5. Affirmative action measures should be implemented that guarantee increased representation of Muslims in government jobs.⁵⁸
6. Most important for economic upliftment was access to credit by financial institutions and promotion of entrepreneurship among Muslims.⁵⁹
7. Establish a National Data Bank that records the status of Muslims, social, economic, and educational in India.⁶⁰
8. The committee recommended further the efficacious implementation of existing welfare government schemes such that these have their benefits duly enjoyed by the Muslims.⁶¹
9. Formulating a National Commission for the Welfare of Muslims to be in charge of the implementation of recommendations and oversee the progress of the communities of Muslims.⁶²
10. Create a monitoring mechanism to ensure effective implementation of the recommendations, with regular reviews to evaluate progress and hold accountable those authorities concerned.⁶³

The Sachar Committee Report itself will be important for the purposes of advocacy among policymakers, researchers, and activists in ameliorating the situation of marginalized Indian groups. While the report could apply to all, it was intended for specific responses. This, however, would affect some communities, especially Muslims in India. Its recommendations are important for implementing an equitable society where all communities can thrive and

⁵⁶ Ibid, Section 2.3, pp. 96-100.

⁵⁷ Ibid, Section 3.1, pp. 110-115.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 230.

⁵⁹ Ibid, Section 3.2, pp. 116-120.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 200.

⁶¹ Ibid, Section 4.1, pp. 130-135.

⁶² Ibid, p. 210.

⁶³ Ibid, Section 5.1, pp. 140-145.

contribute toward national development. The document remains a reference point for infusing policy, research, and activism to improve the condition of marginalized groups in India.

C. Implementations of the Sachar Committee Report:

The Sachar Committee Report was notably appreciated by the Government of India, which in turn pledged to implement its recommendations.⁶⁴ In 2006, the government constituted a High-Level Committee (HLC) to render assistance to the government in implementing the recommendations of the report.⁶⁵ The HLC was to monitor implementation as well as come out with advice for all the ministries and departments of the government involved in the exercise.

Among the recommendations was that of granting reservations in educational institutions and government jobs to take care of the socio-economically backward classes. Though some states had reached this leap of faith towards reservations, the extent and effectiveness varied tremendously. The central government also tried its level best to unveil schemes that would indirectly work in favor of Muslims in regard to socio-economic terms.

Several other institutions were also devised by the government for the accomplishment of the social, economic, and educational disadvantages that Muslims confronted in India.⁶⁶ This included the formation of the NCMEI- the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions, NWDC- the National Waqf Development Corporation, and MAEF- the Maulana Azad Educational Foundation.⁶⁷ All these constructs were aimed at educational purposes, developing the economy, and empowering the Muslims in society. This has also progressed with setting up educational institutions in areas of high Muslim density, yet it is deficient as demand outstrips supply. Efforts have been made to establish these schools and colleges, but there are infrastructure and qualified staff issues.

The government launched many schemes and programs aimed at reducing the educational, economic, and social disparities of Muslims in India.⁶⁸ There are provisions for scholarship schemes for students belonging to the Muslim community, coaching for competitive exams, skills development programs for Muslim youth, and microfinance schemes for Muslim

⁶⁴ Government of India, "Cabinet Committee on Welfare of Minorities" (2006), p. 1.

⁶⁵ Government of India, "High-Level Committee for the Implementation of the Sachar Committee Report" (2006), p. 1.

⁶⁶ National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions, "Annual Report 2007-08" (2008), p. 10.

⁶⁷ Maulana Azad Education Foundation, "Annual Report 2007-08" (2008), p. 15.

⁶⁸ Ministry of Minority Affairs, "Annual Report 2007-08" (2008), p. 20.

entrepreneurs.⁶⁹ By and large, all these schemes and programs attempt to empower Muslims through education, economic development, and social upliftment.

While some of the constraints that limits the government implementation of the recommendations of the Sachar Committee Report include inadequate finance and resources, lack of cooperative and monitoring provisions, representations of Muslims in state institutions, and disparity in society and economy, these are not exhaustive of the challenges and limitations that the effective implementation of the report's recommendations has been encountering.⁷⁰

VII. CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted the considerable educational disparities and social exclusion faced by Muslims in India. According to the findings, Muslims have, on average, lower literacy rates, lower enrolment rates, and, higher drop-out rates than other communities. Apart from that, several causes are being pointed to in this study for contributing to these disparities: poverty, lack of access to quality education, and discrimination. Ironically, this education gap exists even though Islam upholds the importance of formal education. It greatly appreciates knowledge and education; the Quran expresses the need for seeking knowledge and wisdom. Though often perceived as anti-education and anti-modern, stereotyping of Muslims in India harms their public image by perpetuating such negative attitudes and biases. Comparative analysis of the educational status of Muslims in India with the standard of education in Islam could reveal the differences that exist to a very great extent. The focus on education, knowledge, and wisdom proves to be futile, however, in the face of the innumerable obstacles that the environment offers to Muslims living in India for gaining quality education. While this gap reflects the general societal and economic challenges faced by all Muslims in India, the roots of the gap lie deep within the Indian education system's failure to address the specific needs and challenges of Muslim students.

VIII. SUGGESTIONS:

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations have been suggested:

1. The government and other stakeholders should carry out targeted interventions to close the

⁶⁹ National Waqf Development Corporation, "Annual Report 2007-08" (2008), p. 25.

⁷⁰ National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions, "Annual Report 2007-08" (2008), p. 30.

educational gaps faced by Muslims, including initiating improvements to access to quality education, enrollments, and decrements in dropouts.

2. Scholarships and assistance for economically backward Muslim students should be provided by the government and other organizations for the purpose of accessing better quality education.
3. Teachers' training and capacity-building programs should be invested in by the government and other stakeholders to enhance educational quality in Muslim-dominated areas.
4. Government and stakeholders should engage with Muslim communities and involve them in educational planning and decision-making processes to ensure their needs and concerns are taken on board.
5. Governments and stakeholders must ensure equality of access to educational opportunities and resources for all, including Muslim students, and the subsequent absence of discrimination and bias within these educational settings.
6. The challenge of negative stereotypes and biases against Muslims must be addressed to promote an inclusive and equitable education system that incorporates all cultures.
7. The madrasa education system needs to be reformed to encompass not only religious education but also modern subjects in its curricula. The government should augment these institutions financially and with resources so that proper infrastructure, well-paid staff, and quality education are possible.
8. Islamic values and principles of education, including but not limited to seeking knowledge and wisdom should be promoted, along with the importance of education as a tool for personal and social empowerment.