



MUSLIM MINORITY HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN AZAMGARH DISTRICT

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Abstract: Almost two decades after the Sachar Committee highlighted the issue, a report from the National Statistical Office reveals that Muslims are on various yardsticks of academic marginalization as bad as or even worse than SCs and STs. For children above the age of 17 years, the educational attainment of Muslims at matriculation is 17%, as against national average at 26%. Only 50% of Muslims who complete middle school are likely to complete secondary education, compared to 62% at national level". The report shows that among the various social groups, the literacy rate for those aged 7 yrs. or more was the highest for "others", which is non-SC/ST/OBC population groups, at 91% for men and 81% for women. This proportion declines to 84% for OBC men and 69% for OBC women. For SCs, the ratio was 80.3% for men and 64% for women and for STs 78% for men and 61% for women. Among religious groups, 88% of Christian men and 82% of were literate, the highest proportions for both genders. This was followed by Sikhs and Hindus. The literacy rate of 80.6% among Muslim men was equivalent to that for Dalits and marginally higher than the rate among tribals. The literacy rate for Muslim women was higher than Dalit or tribal women, but lower than for women of any other religious strata. This thematic paper highlights attainment of Education of Muslims and the status Muslim minority higher educational institutions in the District of Azamgarh.

Key Words: Higher Educational Institutions, National Minority Commission, Constitutional Right

1. Introduction

India is one of the most diverse countries in the world. It inhibits people from numerous dialects and different religions. The Indian constitution guarantees its citizens equal rights irrespective of caste, class, gender, race, language and religion. The responsibility lies on the government to ensure equal rights to all citizens in the light of constitutional provisions. If Muslims, neo-Buddhists, scheduled castes and tribes continue to lag behind in educational and economic spheres, it will have the effect of pulling down the general growth rate and increase in social tensions (Ansari, 1992). It is worth mentioning that a country cannot flourish if a group of its people are left behind from the mainstream and disadvantaged from availing resources. Since education was viewed as an instrument of social change, social mobility, equality and integration, the political elite, social reformers and intellectuals agreed, at the advent of independence 1947, that the disadvantaged groups have to be given access to education even if it meant giving special privileges (Channa 1993). Hence, we see that the Indian constitution also provides security to the minorities and disadvantaged groups in terms of affirmative actions. Numerous Articles in the constitution are added to ensure preferential treatment to specific groups of citizens. The Chairman of the constituent assembly, Dr Rajendra Prasad assured the minorities that:

"To all the minorities in India we give the assurance that they will receive fair and just treatment and there will be no discrimination in any from against them. The religion, their culture and their language are safe and they will enjoy all the rights and privileges of citizenship, and will be expected in their turn to render loyalty to the country in which they live and its constitution. To all we give the assurance that it will be our endeavor to end poverty and squalor and companions, hunger and disease, to abolish distinction and exploitation and to ensure decent conditions of living".

Though all the provisions are made in the constitution, the state of affairs in terms of availing the benefit of its stake, minorities particularly Muslims lagging behind from mainstream. Since education is the key indicator of development one must ponder upon efforts being made in the field of education.

2. Indian Minorities and Higher Education

According to Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India: “Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jain and Zoroastrians (Parsis) have been notified as minority communities under Section 2 (c) of the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992. As per the Census 2011, the percentage of minorities in the country is about 19.3% of the total population of the country. The population of Muslims are 14.2%; Christians 2.3%; Sikhs 1.7%, Buddhists 0.7%, Jain 0.4% and Parsis 0.006%”

As per the above statistics Muslims are one of largest groups among all Indian Minorities. But it is a tragedy that Muslims are most backward among them in all aspects of life. The worrying thing is that the situation of Indian Muslims is deteriorating continuously. Allam (2015) writes “Minorities have a special place in the development of India. The percentage of population of minorities is not less than 20 percent of the country. Among all the minorities, Muslim community is the most backward. One of the most important reasons for the backwardness of Indian Muslims is the lack of education. Among all the communities of India, the Muslims are the most backward community in terms of education and economic means”. Through the various sources and researches, whether government or private, it is confirmed that at every level of education Muslim community is behind other Minority community. The situation of Christians are ahead in terms of educational attainments and availing the resources. Sikh community has also empowered themselves through economic activity and establishing institutions to serve the purpose of their community. On the other hand, Muslims community find themselves in a helpless situation where they are not able to uplift their standard of living and avail quality education.

Moreover, a number of studies have confirmed that students from Muslim community studying at secondary and higher secondary stage three to four times lower than what should be as per the population ratio. It is a major concern that the dropout rate among Muslims is higher than other socio-religious groups. And it is shocking to see that their dropout rate increases as the level of education increases. Muslim students’ achievement level is also low. They are not able compete with other groups in terms of performance. Achievement level of Urdu medium students is also not up to the mark, even Muslim students studying in Hindi medium are performing better than students studying in Urdu medium institutions. When it comes to the Institutions which are managed by Muslim community it is also noted that the representation of Muslim community decreases when the level of education increases. In such a state the performance of the Muslim management institutions must be taken into discussion.

3. Constitutional Safeguard: Right to Establish and Administer Educational Institutions

The Constitution of India provides rights to the minorities to establish and administer educational institutions under Article 30 of the constitution. Article 30 states:

(1) All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

[(1A) In making any law providing for the compulsory acquisition of any property of an educational institution established and administered by a minority, referred to in clause (1), the state shall ensure that the amount fixed by or determined under such law for the acquisition of such property is such as would not restrict or abrogate the right guaranteed under that clause.]

(2) The state shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language.

Article 30 serves the purpose of protecting rights of minorities with regard to establishing and managing educational institutions of their choice. This reflects that minorities have constitutional safeguard to have an opportunity to preserve and promote their culture and religious values. Moreover, the true meaning of liberty, equality reflects in having the free environment where a community can have the opportunity to flourish culturally in the same manner as what they are culturally. It is also worth mentioning that due to prevalent majority culture and practice it will be obvious that minorities may feel insecure and neglected resulting in their isolation. The Article empowers minorities to protect their culture, language and script. Every minority wishes people from their community attain intellectual heights in the field of modern education but at the same time they wish to maintain their identity that can surely be achieved by practicing propagating their cultural and religious values. Educational institutions of their choice will necessarily help to achieve the same purpose.

4. National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions

In preview of the Article 30 of the constitution, the Indian minorities are empowered to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. This led to the opening of various minority educational institutions in the country after independence. There have been various educational institutions already established and administered by minorities in pre independence. The matter of Minority institutions was not dealt with proper attention. Due to this negligence these institutions have suffered a lot. In this connection National Commission for Minority Educational Institution (NCMEI) was enacted by the Act of Parliament in 2004. The purpose of the Act was to constitute a commission to provide a platform to Minority Educational Institutions to solve their grievances. This Commission has done a remarkable Job since its formation under the able leadership of Justice MSA Siddiqui. A large number of seekers of Minority status approach this commission after struggling with education departments of various states. Most of the applications this Commission receives are related to Minority Status certificate, many applications are also related to affiliation, recognition and grants in minority institutes. Applicants from Kerala, U.P and West Bengal are Maximum. It was found after studying its various judgments in multiple cases that Education departments are reluctant to recognize schools or colleges opened up to persons of the Minority community. Long Unwanted delay and harassment in recognizing their institutes has become a regular routine on one pretext or another. Same is the case with affiliation and registration. It has been found that state departments of education rarely give minority status to institutes which leaves no option but to approach this Commission.

5. Muslim Minority Higher Educational Institutions in Azamgarh District.

Azamgarh district is among the largest districts in Uttar Pradesh in terms of area. After the separation of Mau district, it covers the area of 4234 (Km²). The total population of the district was recorded 4,613,913 in census 2011. The total population of Muslims were 15.58 % Christian 0.08 % Sikhs 0.02 % Buddhists 0.12 % and the population of Hindu majority was 84.06 %. According to census 2011 the literacy rate of Azamgarh district was 70.93 % which was greater than the average literacy rate of Uttar Pradesh. Historically Azamgarh has been notorious for its role in the freedom struggle and at the same time it has been home to great philosophers and literary personalities. People of Azamgarh district have served the nation in freedom struggle and worked in the field of social upliftment also. The total literacy rate of Azamgarh district was 70.93% in 2011 which is greater than average literacy rate 67/68% of Uttar Pradesh. Azamgarh district is distinct for its communal harmony, friendliness, cultural diversity, unity and a prevailing sense of brotherhood among people. The city has been the birthplace of great Freedom fighters, philosophers, writers, educationists, poets, politicians, and social reformers. The district produced luminaries like Rahul Sankrityayan, Ayodhya Singh, Upadhaya Hariadth, Allama Shibli Nomani, Hameeduddin Farahi, Kaifi Azmi, and many mores who illuminated the sky of literature and poetry and took the district on literary and cultural heights. The district has been fertile land which has contributed in promotion of literature, research, teaching and learning. Muslims intellectuals of the district noticed the wind of change in the early 20th century and worked towards modern education. A remarkable work has been done by one of these intellectuals known as Allama Shibli Nomani. His stature was highest among all of them. He has established one of the renowned libraries in Azamgarh. This library has been a center of excellence in terms literary activities and has been home to noted scholars. Moreover, a number of Madrasas were established in the district which have furthered the urge to seek knowledge and go for higher studies in youths of Azamgarh district. Currently these Madrasa are working as bridge to connect them with higher educational institutions in the country.

5.1. Shibli National PG College-an aided College

Shibli National PG College is one of the notorious colleges in Azamgarh district. *Currently* out of eight govt. Aided colleges, the college is the only govt. aided Muslim minority college in the city. The college was founded in 1883 by famous scholar Allama Shibli Nomani. He was a great Islamic historian, critic, religious scholar, academician and educationist. Shibli Nomani had a nationalistic view and used the term national at that time when any kind of such anti-British thought put one into behind bars. The institution established by Shibli rose to a degree college in 1946. Since the college is providing secular higher education to youths of Azamgarh districts.

The college is currently affiliated to newly established Maharaja SuhelDev State University, Azamgarh. In its earlier stages the college has been affiliated to Deen Dayal Upadhyay University, Gorakhpur and Veer Bahadur Singh Purvanchal University, Jaunpur. Muslim community wished that due to its legacy the college should have got the status of a university since its contemporary institutions have got their due status. With a long history the college has completed a number of decades but, the Muslim community of Azamgarh find themselves deprived of the avenues of higher education. In modern times students pursuing higher education supposed to meet the current challenges of information age but due to unavailability of professional courses in the college, the students find themselves clue less in terms of future studies or jobs.

5.2. Private Colleges and Institutions of higher education.

The district has a number of private colleges. The number goes near about hundred, but in theses colleges most of them are substandard. Out of these colleges there are only five degree colleges which are managed by Muslim community. These colleges are serving mostly the female students by providing the simple course of studies. Some of them are providing B.Ed. course since it is feasible for the female students. This shows that the efforts have been made to provide required essential higher education to Muslim girls in their native place. There is a great demand of higher education institution in the district but a sense of insecurity or some cultural restraint the Muslims of Azamgarh prefer their girls to be enrolled in women colleges. Due to dearth of engineering and medical colleges, higher secondary students face numerous problems. They have no choice but to migrate in different states and get enrolled in costly but substandard colleges of engineering in Lucknow, Puna, Noida, and Faridabad etc.

Muslim youths of Azamgarh district are not able to avail the opportunities available in the field of higher education. Due to lack of awareness, they are not able chose desirable and suitable courses which may have career opportunities. Various studies have already found that Muslims are low in availing the opportunities and resources. Most of the fund meant for them through various department and institutions and ministries remain unspent. It has both the aspects, the one from the part of administration which lack responsibility and accountability to trace the stakeholders and the other one from the part of the community which is not able make themselves aware and competent to utilize those schemes and opportunities.

There is a great need to open colleges which could provide various professional courses. Since most of the Muslim managed private colleges are offering arts courses exclusively for female students, they cannot serve the purpose for the whole community. The colleges must prepare its students for job which are currently on demand. Due to lack of opportunity and quality institutions gradually the Muslim community in Azamgarh district has witnessed a decline in its educational status. The situation got worsen when Muslim youths and their parents feel insecure in studying out of their native place. Though they are studying in higher educational institutions of different states but they face so many challenges. The Muslim community of Azamgarh district has been stigmatized and the way they were painted by media as a preparator of terror had its damaging impact on the community. Though, lack of quality higher education institutions in the district has worsened the situation but at the same time a sense of insecurity among parents to send their children away from home to higher centers of study has also become the strong reason for the Muslims of Azamgarh to withdraw from opportunities to access the higher education

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