REVIEW OF RESEARCH

A STUDY ON EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT TRENDS AMONG MUSLIMS AND OTHER COMMUNITIES IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT:-

Status of an Individual is dependent upon the education and employment. It signifies an overall position of a person in a society by virtue of which the person has certain rights and obligations and enjoys certain privileges. The issues related to status of Muslims are now being strongly discussed at national and international levels.

After the submission of the Sachar Committee Report, several studies have undertaken data-based analysis of the socioeconomic and educational conditions of Muslims in India. After the submission of the Sachar Committee Report, several studies have undertaken data-based analysis of the socioeconomic and educational conditions of Muslims in India. Many researchers, policy makers and, in fact, common Muslims believe that education can be the only mechanism to enhance their socioeconomic status and facilitate entry into better paid jobs. So the researcher is going to analyze the participation of Muslim community in education and employment.

KEYWORDS: Muslims, Sachar Committee, Education, Employment

INTRODUCTION

Probably Sachar Committee report was the first attempt to analyze the Socio-economic and educational conditions of the Muslim community using large-scale empirical data. It clearly brought out the relative deprivation of Muslims in India in various dimensions. The Sachar report highlighted the heterogeneity within the Community as well as the multi-dimensionality of issues that it faces. Broadly, the multiple dimensions of the issues get reflected in two inter-related ways. One, like other minorities, Muslims simultaneously face, problems relating to security, identity and equity. And the interplay of these dimensions is at the core of the socio-economic and political processes that the Community is exposed to on a daily basis. Two, the nature of these problems vary across 'spaces' – education, employment, political and social – and probably over time. Conceptually, participation in one 'space' can be seen to be linked with participation in another 'space'. For example, participation in education can influence participation in employment and vice versa. But, an empirical exploration of these multidimensional issues and inter-linkages between participation in different spaces is typically hampered by the non-availability of relevant 'hard and unbiased' data.

In the form of reservation policies, to address the issues of inclusion and equity affirmative actions have been in place in India for a long time. Through these policies higher participation of the marginalized groups is sought in the political, educational and work related domains. Over the years the scope and coverage of these reservation policies has been enlarged through the inclusion of new social groups and by incorporating new 'spaces' hitherto not available to certain social groups. For example, while reservation in both educational and work related domains has been available for scheduled caste (SC) and scheduled tribe (ST) persons, the higher education space has been incorporated for the other backward classes (OBCs) only recently. Similarly, while reservation in the employment domain was introduced for SCs and STs fairly early, OBCs were included at a much later stage. This paper reviews the available literature and empirical evidence to explore, in a comparative perspective, the role of these factors in explaining the patterns and recent trends in participation of Muslims in the areas of education and employment.

Socio-religious Categories

Economic conditions in Indian context, along with community and caste affiliations present themselves as appropriate variables that should go into defining these groups. Consequently, taking a lead from the Sachar Committee, socio-religious communities (SRCs) within both Muslim and non-Muslim population are sought to be defined in a fairly disaggregated manner. Explicit recognition of the heterogeneity among the communities is not only useful for the purposes of understanding the relative deprivation of the Muslim community through appropriate comparisons; it also provides insights into the emerging dynamics of political processes in the Indian society. Political parties have been increasingly exploiting this internal differentiation for political mobilization. Since political participation can potentially impinge on security, identity and equity, an understanding of such processes is critical.

Perception of Muslim Community regarding its Participation in Different Spheres:

Due to the absence of 'hard-unbiased' data, one way of exploring the complex links

between equity, identity and security related issues is to look at them through the lens of public perceptions. Based on extensive interactions with Muslims, it has been argued that Muslims carry a double burden of being labeled as "anti-nationalists" and being appeased at the same time. The fact that the so-called appeasement has not resulted in any benefits is typically ignored. Identity markers often lead to suspicion and discrimination by people and institutions. Discrimination also exists in employment, housing and education. Gender injustice is usually identified purely with personal law to the exclusion of gender-related concerns in education and employment that Muslim women do face on a continuing basis. Moreover, the feeling of insecurity is high among Muslims, especially in communally sensitive states/areas and among women.

Insecurity has its adverse affects mobility, especially of women, leading to situations wherein

Muslims are not able to fully exploit economic opportunities. The widespread perception of discrimination among Muslims results in a sense of alienation and is therefore seen by the Community as an important cause of inequity. Limited access to good quality schools is a major problem which is affecting female students more adversely. Discrimination and "communalization" of reading material and school atmosphere adds to this problem. Consequently, Madarasas at times, are the only source of education in the neighborhood.

Other than education, employment is another field of major concern. Low participation in government jobs is partly seen as a result of discrimination. The employment situation has deteriorated because globalization and liberalization processes appear to have affected Muslim occupations (mainly self-employment) more adversely than others, especially for women. This, coupled with low bargaining power of workers (especially home-based), results in low incomes. Generally for the Muslims who do not have education and mainstream occupation there are chances of low bargaining power. Non-availability of credit curtails the ability of the community to improve their economic status; Muslim concentration areas are designated as "red zones" where credit flows are virtually non-existent. Discrimination in the implementation of government programs and in infrastructure provision adds to the problems in the economic sphere.

The perception of Muslim community summarized above highlight a process wherein identity based discrimination reduces access, enhances inequity and adds to insecurity. Security problems with major concentration on women also reduce access to schools, housing, infrastructure etc., which in turn contribute to inequities in society. Singh et al (2010) collected data from Hindu, Muslim and Christian respondents to estimate 'perceived fairness scores' across different areas of opportunity - social, economic, employment, education and political – different spaces that we referred to earlier. In this study few features that stand out are:

• Perceived fairness of Hindu participants is higher than of others in all the five areas followed by Christians and Muslims;
• The area of education is the only area where Christian participants have higher scores (although not statistically different from Hindus) while Muslims have much lower scores;
• In the political space, both Muslims and Christians perceive lower fairness
• as compared to Hindus;
• In the remaining three areas (employment, economic and social) the three groups differ

significantly from each other, with Hindus reporting highest level fairness in opportunities followed by Christians and Muslims. Muslims report scores that are much lower than the other two groups for economic and employment opportunities.

Participation in Education

There are plenty of debates concerning Muslim education. The Sachar Committee report brought out very sharply the relative deprivation of Muslims in the field of education. Literacy rates among Muslims are lower than most other SRCs (except for SCs and STs) and have not increased fast enough to converge with literacy rates of high caste groups. Literacy rates are the lowest for Hindu-ST (and also low for Hindu-SC) but have increased significantly in recent years. Among Muslims, the decline in illiteracy rates was more dramatic for Muslim-General (37 to 19 per cent) than for Muslim-OBCs (34 to 26 per cent) during the decade of 1999-2010. More detailed estimates on literacy rates among different SRCs reported bring out some interesting patterns:

• As expected, literacy rates are much lower in rural areas as compared to urban areas but both for males and females, the rates have improved in the last decade, especially after 2004-05. Also, the patterns and trends are more or less the same as the aggregate trends described above, except that literacy rates have not improved very significantly for rural women belonging to Muslim-OBC households;

• In urban areas the rates of literacy are higher but the improvements have not been that dramatic. Moreover, while for urban females belonging to the Muslim community (both OBC and general) show the same pattern as the one described above, Muslim men living in urban areas are worse-off than all other SRCs, Muslim OBCs reporting the lowest literacy rates.

These trends are consistent with the Sachar Committee findings that school enrolment rates were among the lowest for Muslims but had improved in recent years. This is also consistent with the perception that the Community is increasingly looking at education as a means of improving socio-economic status. Dropout rates are also among the highest for Muslims and this seems to go up significantly after middle school. Higher secondary attainment levels are also among the lowest for Muslims and in relative terms, inter-SRC differences rise at the school leaving stage. In terms of crossing the school threshold and graduate attainment rates, the rural-urban differences are interesting as far as Muslims are concerned. The condition of Muslims is particularly bad in urban areas while in rural areas they more or less seem to be on par with Hindu-STs and in some cases Hindu-SCs which have the lowest educational attainments among all groups. In urban areas, Muslims clearly constitute the lowest rung in terms of educational attainment of passing school or going to college.

These low educational achievements of Muslims explain that in urban India it could both be due to supply and demand side issues and several studies have explored these dimensions. In what follows we try and summarize key insights. The Sachar Committee suggested that the availability of Urdu schools is very limited. And Mulsim parents prefer to send their children to urdu school compared to modern schools. Such schools are important for the community in Urdu-speaking areas, especially at the primary level where education in the mother tongue is generally preferred. Madrasas are an important community initiative but their reach is very limited; less than 4 per cent school-going Muslim children go to madrasas. Consequently, mainstream schools are the only means to satisfy increasing demand for education in the Community. And the supply of such schools in the vicinity of

Muslims habitats may be one of the reasons for lower educational attainments.

Bhalotra and Zamora (2010) utilize sources of data not used by the Sachar Committee to provide evidence of low Growth in School Enrollment and Completion Rates amongst Muslims in India, which is in line with the evidence compiled in the Sachar report and also reported above. Exploring the extent to which enrolment and completion rates have grown over time, they find that while enrolment rates among Muslims have gone up, drop-out rates have not declined as much. The behavioral features are found to be important because this suggests that the same characteristics seem to influence enrolment choices differently across religions. The importance of the so-called behavioral aspects in explaining interreligious differences in the participation in education gets further highlighted when the authors compare educational shortfalls of Muslims and low caste children relative to high caste children. While the shortfall among low caste children could be explained by the disadvantages these children have in terms of the characteristics that positively influence schooling (e.g., their being poorer), this was not the case for Muslims. In other words, even with more positive characteristics than low caste children, Muslims either have less positive attitude towards education or their opportunities to attend school are poorer. The authors argue that their results are consistent with discrimination against Muslims but may also reflect that the Community is faced with poorer quality (or less suitable schools) or has less appreciation of the rewards of education. The rewards of education are linked to the prospects of employment and it has been argued that better employment potential may enhance participation in education. Moreover, the supply side variables (i.e., easy access and availability of educational institutions) can influence participation of Muslims in education in a significant manner.

Employment and Working Conditions

The estimates provided in the Sachar Committee report show that in general, the mean per capita consumption expenditure (MPCE) is lower for Muslims than for all SRCs except SCs/STs and the incidence of poverty (headcount) is also higher for Muslims than for all SRCs except SCs/STs. The situation is the same with respect to the intensity of poverty in urban areas; the mean expenditure of the poor as the ratio of poverty line is the lowest for SCs/STs followed very closely by Muslims. In rural areas, the intensity of poverty is somewhat lower for Muslims than for SCs/STs and OBCs. Further exploration of urban poverty showed that the relative situation of Muslims is worse in urban areas, especially smaller towns where they experience the highest poverty levels. As in the case of other SRCs, poverty levels have declined among Muslims but the conditions of Muslims have improved at a slower pace than most other SRCs, especially in urban areas. Moreover, Unni (2010) shows that the proportion of poor among the working ('working poor') population is higher among Muslims. That is, the community constitutes a relatively larger share of the working poor implying thereby poor working conditions.

In comparison with other SRCs, Muslims are concentrated more in self-employed activities and their participation in regular jobs, especially in non-agriculture is much less than for others. A significantly higher share of Muslim workers in self-employment can be witnessed in urban areas as compared to rural areas and for women who prefer home-based activities. Other sources show that the share of Muslims in regular work, especially in the government, public sector and large private sector is very low or inconsiderable. In the secondary sector, the share of Muslim workers engaged in regular jobs is somewhat better than SCs and STs, but their participation as regular workers in the tertiary sector

is particularly low as compared to other SRCs. Studies have revealed that the working conditions are more precarious for Muslim workers than for most other workers. Their earnings are relatively low among Muslim regular workers. Moreover, vis-à-vis others, a much larger proportion of Muslim workers is engaged in street vending and are without employee benefits and long-term (even written) contracts. Besides, a larger proportion of Muslim self-employed women work with contractors under poor contractual conditions. In other words, their participation in the informal sector is much higher than most other socio-religions groups, especially in own account trade and manufacturing enterprises. (Unni, 2010) Low participation of Muslims in regular employment and concentration in self-employment has attracted research attention. Obviously, among other things, the links between employment and education are explored along with the possibility of discrimination. Das's study clubs together all types of post-primary education; it is possible that a more dis-aggregated education variable that distinguishes between secondary, higher secondary and college education may have provided a clearer picture with self-employment and education among Muslims showing a non-linear relationship. This is clearly an area where some more work needs to be done.

Concluding Observations and Policy Options
One the basis of discussion of earlier sections brings out the following key insights on Muslims participation in education and employment:
• In comparison with other communities/religions, Muslims have a higher perception of unfairness and this sense of discrimination is especially high in the employment and education spaces;
• While there is some evidence to suggest that Muslims choose self-employment to avoid discrimination in the formal labor market; educational endowments and other attributes like experience explain a large part of the differentials across SRCs in participation in regular employment as well as earnings. At the same time attributes are not able to fully explain these differentials and therefore discrimination remains an issue so does the measurement of attributes like quality of education.
• While limited access (supply of schools) and discrimination is not ruled out, household endowments along with location play a critical role in determining participation of Muslims in the education space. There is some evidence to suggest that the Community does not fully appreciate the rewards of education even as returns to education are high;
• Muslims are predominantly engaged in self-employment and their participation as regular workers especially in the tertiary sector (that has grown in recent years) in urban areas is low as compared to other SRCs.
• Participation of Muslims is relatively low in the educational sphere but with a slow growth in recent years. However, the situation is particularly poor in urban areas, especially for Muslim males;
• The participation of Muslim youth in higher education is particularly poor but once they cross the threshold of school education and once other factors that affect participation in higher education, the deficits for Muslims decline significantly. Therefore, a focus on eligibility is quite critical for Muslims as for other marginalized groups and consequently the links between secondary and tertiary education are quite important for Muslims especially because the drop-out rates are quite high after middle school;

There is an urgent need to enhance diversity in different spheres. In this competitive world Muslims are lagging behind. They need the support from the Government and from

non-government organization and from all communities as well. There should not be any discrimination towards Muslims or rather they may need not to prove their patriarchy then and there. They need due share in society. Lot of awareness should to be created regarding the socialization of Muslims. For this purpose, as suggested in the Sachar report, it may be desirable to evolve an acceptable, transparent diversity index which may include SRC status, gender and other elements depending on the context. Certain incentives for educational institutions, private sector, builders, etc, can be linked with this diversity index.

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