

Under-representation of Muslims in Higher Education: Current situation and indicative reasons

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Abstract

Elementary education is an absolute must and enjoys the specific mandate of the Constitution. Recent trends suggest that children should be kept out of workforce and wedlock and hence, by implication, in educational institutions till they reach the age of 18 years. One should complete higher secondary education by this stage. Beyond higher secondary stage lies the domain of higher education. Estimated to earn a return of 17%, investment in higher education is seen to be an extremely worthwhile investment both from the society and the individual. Higher education has both an intrinsic and an instrumental value. Inherent value is about capacity to develop one's worldview, building confidence in negotiating with the world on footing of equality and about emancipation. Instrumental value is about contribution in terms of usable life skills that lead to incremental income.

The reality the world over is that Muslim youth appear to lag behind their peers from other communities in participating in higher education. Interestingly, Muslims seem to do better in higher education when they are in a minority and small numbers. In India, Muslim representation in higher education is among the lowest, even below the level of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. This is despite the fact that in terms of enrolment, there appears to be a broad parity across communities.

It seems logical to believe that socio-political ethos, signals from families, availability of accessible opportunities and individual motivations and predilections influence the choice regarding education. This paper, based on nine papers prepared for the Conference, documents the situation regarding representation of Muslims in higher education and the factors that lead to the situation. The paper notes that there is an issue on the supply side: Districts dominated by Muslim population have fewer educational institutes both at school and college level. The quality of infrastructure and instructions in them also seems to be indifferent. The prevalence of institutional environment appears to be a function of the political articulation of the Muslim community as positively illustrated by the case of Kerala and negatively by the case of Bengal. Family signals come in the form of financial support to meet educational and associated expenditure, role models and inspiration from elders, goading to enter workforce at an early age, restrictions on movement of girls away from home etc. These signals are read early by children, and they shape or are forced to develop their life trajectories accordingly. Individual motivations seem to be determined more by the perceived instrumental value. Indifferent quality of school education makes entry into highly reputed institutions difficult on account of absence of reservations, and the number of Muslim minority institutions is way short needed the one needed to meet aspirations of students. As Muslims lack reservations in jobs in most places and as the quality of

the education they receive is at best passable, the incremental income levels after higher education do not appear attractive to the children. On the other hand, quick skill building training and migration to middle East is an easier way out of the poverty and the rut in which they live and hence further detracts children from taking to higher education.

The paper seems to imply that external inputs and facilitation such as financial assistance, establishment of more institutions in Muslim dominated districts and reservations could address the poor representation to some extent. However, Muslim community itself will have to take initiative in two respects. The first is exercising meaningful political influence the way IUML did in Kerala to shape the State's education policy, programs and schemes. The second is to work on the climate of opinions within the community that emphasises the need and utility of higher education.

1. Introduction

1.1 Importance of Higher Education

Higher Education, also referred at times as Tertiary Education is defined for the purpose of this paper as "Education beyond the level of Higher Secondary stage". This includes the formal degree programs of various Universities and Institutions as well as post HSSC Diploma or Certificate programs conducted by diverse institutions engaged in providing specific skill or technical training. Literature posits two fundamental types of value for higher education (Kromydas, 2017)¹. *Instrumental value* of higher education lies in its accomplishment in terms of preparing the student with a usable skill set which he can deploy for earning a livelihood. On the other hand, *intrinsic value* of higher education lies in its broadening the horizons of the participant, enabling her to become inquisitive, curious, instilling in her a desire to question assertions and points of views expressed by others and thus emancipating her. Institutions providing higher education have been classified in three types. The University College, classically in the British tradition, were seen as providing essentially a generalist education; which had much greater intrinsic rather than instrumental value; up to graduation. Research related higher educational institutions essentially prepared students for creating knowledge; often but not always continuing the research and epistemological traditions of the institution. The technical institutions have much more instrumental orientation and provide highly labour-market oriented knowledge, attitudes and skills to the students. The World Bank too recognises the value of higher education both in contributing to general development as well as leading to higher incomes². When viewed merely as investments in building income earning capacities in the recipients, higher education

1 Kromydas, T.: "Rethinking higher education and its relationship with social inequalities: past knowledge, present state and future potential" *Palgrave Communications* volume 3, Article number: 1 (2017)

2 Task Force on Higher Education, "Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise"; The World Bank, Washington DC, 2000. Also see <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/tertiaryeducation#2>

is seen to be highly rewarding: 17% incremental incomes are earned by those who have undergone three years or more of higher education compared to those who have not. Similar economic benefits of secondary education is 7% and of primary education is 10%. Thus investing in higher education is a good proposition for both an individual and his society.

1.2 Low participation of Muslims in higher education

Common observation reveals that barring the film industry and some other arts and also the sports related professions, Muslims are singularly under-represented in most professions. Data presented later in this paper reveals that the proportion of Muslim students in diverse higher education disciplines is also seen to be well below proportion of Muslims in population of the country. This gap between participation rate in higher education and proportion in population is by far the largest for Muslims. This phenomenon has continued over the last several decades. It appears to us that by missing the higher education bus almost entirely, Muslim youth are missing on both instrumental and intrinsic values; clearly a situation that is undesirable in itself.

1.3 Emergence of the low participation over time

It would appear that this situation has come about despite a very positive approach to acquisition of this worldly knowledge as expressed by the Prophet in the Holy Book. The Prophet has suggested that throughout life everyone must acquire *ilm*, that is knowledge and for doing so even if one has to search as far as China (which was very far from where the Prophet preached), one may do it. Thus there is nothing inherently anti-Education in the religion of Muslims. It is stated that Muslim rulers encouraged the young to acquire knowledge and supported centres of learning.

The situation seems to have changed drastically during the British rule. It appears that there was a strong intent of the British colonial power to oust Muslims from a position of dominance and power in India. Ousted from administration and the army and lacking a strong farm tradition in India, Muslims have tended to seek livelihoods in arts, crafts and trade. The Governments in provinces encouraged Muslim community to confine education of its wards in madrasas while positions of lower administration cadre were awarded to educated among the Hindus, the better off among which community therefore took more enthusiastically to modern education. This set of actions coupled with a deep antipathy in the religious leaders and emulated by the general Muslim community towards Western education caused a major progressive and steep decline in the Muslim people taking to modern education in the country. The Education Commission of 1882 noted the low enrolment of Muslims in educational institutions. It appears that such antipathy was much stronger in Northern and Eastern parts of the country and not Southern peninsular region and the results even today are influenced by the history. In 1990, the proportion of Muslims among all graduates in India was a little

over 2%. It improved only marginally to 4% by 2010³ and as per the report of All India Survey of Higher Education, it stands at about 5% in 2016.

2. The Global scenario

It needs to be noted that low participation by Muslims in higher education is not unique to India. A PEW Report states that this is a global phenomenon⁴. It notes that on an average Muslim adults above 25 years of age have 5.6 years of education. Interestingly, when all countries are compared, on an average they appear to have much higher levels of education in countries in which they are in small numbers or in minority. There is a pervasive gender gap in education, with Muslim men showing larger number of years of schooling than women. In Asia-Pacific region, the gender gap among Muslims is much smaller than among non-Muslims, but both Muslim men and women are poorly educated compared to non-Muslims.

3. Comparison in India

PEW Centre studies also point out that Muslims and Hindus have the lowest level of education compared to other religions and Jews are the most educated. While more Hindus are completely without formal education than Muslims, globally, more Hindus are graduates and above than Muslims.

Sachar Committee had looked the status of education of Muslims and discussed the status at higher education as well. The Committee had noted that Graduate Attainment Ratio (GAR) was the lowest at 4% for Muslims among all socio-religious categories and was almost half that of the country as a whole. It further noted that the under-representation was particularly high at Institutes of higher learning. It went on to understand the correlates of poor educational representation and found the chief reason in poverty (pp 64-72). A Fifteen Point program was mounted by the Prime Minister to attempt correction in this situation. Six of these 15 points dealt with Education, focusing on better access to ICDS schemes, better access to schools, more resources to teaching Urdu, modernization of Madarsas, enhancement of educational infrastructure through Maulana Azad Educationa Foundation, and scholarships to meritorious students. The progress under this program was reviewed by the Government and the report indicated indifferent progress of variable quality across different States.

The fact is that even as per 2016 report of AISHE, that barely 5% of graduates are Muslims. The gap between representation in population and participation in higher education is the highest among

Muslims (5% in higher education compared to 15% in population) than other sections of the Indian society. For Scheduled castes, these numbers are 14% among enrolled for higher education and 19% in population for Scheduled tribes 5.2 and 8% respectively, for OBC 35 and 41% respectively and for General category (considered the most privileged) 41% among enrolled for higher education and 17% in the population respectively.

The social infirmities and discrimination faced by the people of the scheduled castes is well documented. The geographic and cultural infirmities of the people belonging to scheduled tribes are also well known. What is counter-intuitive is the fact that despite being rules and hence dominant in the society for Centuries, the descendants of the community lag so far behind in enrolment in higher education compared to their share in the population. The purpose of this study is to understand the current situation, over a dozen years after Sachar Report and the reasons why the under-representation persists over time despite a clearly pro-minority stand taken over a dozen years ago.

The purpose of this study is to understand the current situation, over a dozen years after Sachar Report and the reasons why the under-representation persist over time despite a clearly pro-minority stand taken over a dozen years ago. This paper explores this phenomenon and underlying causes for its occurrence and continuance.

4. Method of study and its limitations

A set of studies was launched by Vikasanvesh Foundation towards this exploration. Key features of the studies are indicated in the Table 1.

Table 1: Table showing Geographical Locations, Method and Sample size for the study.

S. no.	Author	Geography	Method	Sample size	Remarks
1.	Acharya, S.	Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Assam, Kerala	Secondary data analysis	N.A.	Population aged 15-29 taken from Census
2	Acharya, S. and Gosai, P.	Maharashtra and Gujarat	Primary data	130	Also covered educationists
3	Amjad Khan, Md.	Delhi and Parts of Uttar Pradesh	Primary data	39	Covered Universities and colleges in New Delhi
4	Banerji, P.S.	West Bengal	Secondary and primary data	62	Political and social setup has affected education in West Bengal
5	Sebastien, J.	Kerala	Secondary and primary data	39	Highlight upon Mallapah Muslims and their education
6	Londhe, L.	Telangana	Secondary and primary data	98	Covered mainly Female students
7	Bhushan, S.	Uttar Pradesh	Primary data	80	Livelihood options for the Muslims are limited.
8	Rabha, M.	Assam	Primary Data	33	Awareness needed to improve Muslim status
9	Mistry, M.	India	Secondary data Analysis	N.A.	Evidences from Large scale NFHS data

Analysis of secondary data pertaining to population of Muslims and supply of educational amenities across India States was undertaken if the supply itself has a bias. Primary data regarding the struggles and difficulties encountered by current aspirants (students in the age group 16-25) among Muslims as was gathered through small and targeted surveys in Assam, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Parallely data about experiences of those who have completed their high education was also gathered through these field exercises. Finally attempts were made to understand the perspectives of educators and social leaders about this phenomenon and its causes. The data was not gathered through large scale and random sample procedures but in a manner that built on social contacts and ease of access. As such the inferences have an indicative and tentative value. Larger and more systematic surveys would be needed to convert these inferences into assertive conclusions.

5. Data and Inferences from Studies

Acharya, S. (2019) undertook analysis of secondary data to explore if there was a supply side problem in the sense that the education system in general does not provide for adequate facilities in areas where Muslims live. The study aims to analyse the status of Literacy among the Muslims in India by states, its attainment of higher education and relevance of the factors such as Distance, School Density, Population size, size of Urban/Rural population for selected states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Assam and Kerala. For the analysis of secondary data was obtained from District Census Handbook (2011) - for the district wise list of number of colleges and universities per district, separately for each state and Union Territory in India. She also used database of Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyaan (RMSA) – for the list of schools per district, separately for each state and Union Territory in India for 2013-14 and other such relevant national sources are tapped to address the objectives. She finds that in districts with high concentration of Muslim people (that is, proportion of Muslims is higher than the sample mean), the school density is poor and the average school caters to a much larger population of potential students. The case of colleges is even more skewed: districts with higher Muslim population have much fewer colleges per unit of population. This negative relation between proportion of Muslims in the population of a district and the school / college density can be seen across all States. Thus in general, it would appear Muslim children face a tougher challenge in accessing schools near their homes.

Banerji, P.S. (2019) notes that Muslims in West Bengal, like most other states in India, are under-represented in higher education compared to their proportion in the population. He combines a review of literature of previous studies with information collected through interviews of Muslim students, alumni and intellectuals. He wants to examine the reasons behind this prevailing imbalance in a state known for its pursuance of secular culture and politics. He notes that Muslims in Bengal live mostly in backward rural areas that are marked by under-development in almost all aspects, including the glaring deficit of educational infrastructure. Economically, Muslims in West Bengal are among the most

backwards in the state, belonging to the lowest strata of land ownership with nominal access to white-collar jobs. Politically, Muslims lacked a necessary voice to raise issues related to the lack of basic amenities that their community had to go without since the time of partition. The ruling elite of the state, irrespective of political colours, is dominated by the upper caste bhadraloks. Muslims are generally speaking marginal landholders, farm workers and unorganized sector employees. Only about 1% of the population each is employed in teaching (as school teachers), in public sector jobs or private sector white collar jobs. As such it is inferred that there is a very small “Muslim Educated middle class” in the State. Banerji notes that these Hindu leaders appear to have an inherent anti-Muslim bias (*and there is very little Muslim bhadralok!*). This is reflected not only in their indifference to improving upon the basic educational infrastructure in the Muslim-majority blocks, but also and more so by their adverse attitude towards independent endeavours to improve educational facilities coming from among the community. The resultant supply side deficit not only severely restricts access to higher education of the Muslims in the state, but also undermines their motivation and initiatives to alter the imbalance. He thus attributes the under-representation to deficit in educational institutions to indifference of ruling elite and poor voice of the community.

Banerji, P.S. (2019) reports that the enrolment of Muslims at elementary education level is much higher than the national average and certainly above their share of the population in the State. While almost a third of enrolled students at Elementary level are Muslims, this proportion drops to 25% by the time they reach Higher Secondary and a further drop to 11% at under-graduate enrolment level. AISHE has recorded the pathetic number and conditions of academic institutions for higher learning in Bengal. The State has only 13 colleges per lakh of people compared to the national average of 28. The number of colleges in Muslim majority districts are smaller: there is one college for 76000 potential students in Uttari Dinajpur, for 50000 students in Malda and 36000 in Coochbihar. Given the paucity of Institutions, their concentration in towns and cities and the largely rural nature of Muslim population in Bengal, it is not surprising that their participation in higher education is poor. This participation is constrained hugely by poverty. This leads to both the effects: children are encouraged, goaded or forced to enter labour market at early age and cannot study and that the family has no capacity to bear the expenses involved even if the child were to secure admission. The other factors of significance are distance to be commuted (or hostel for residence). Banerji reports that respondents suggested that provision for access to Muslim students to good institutions, financial assistance and reservation for them in jobs would help change the situation of very poor representation of Muslims in higher education.

Md. Khan, A. (2019) has looked at the issue of under-representation of the community in higher education in the setting of Delhi (Jamia Milia) and Aligarh (Aligarh Muslim University). In these institutions a large number of students come from provincial areas of UP and Bihar. Amjad reports

that there is a historical trend of lack of participation of Muslim youths in higher education due to multiple factors. The *vicious cycle* of poverty and lack of education, particularly higher education is often repeated over generations. It is important to understand the barriers to education, notably higher education from the perspective of Muslim youths. His research engages with 39 Muslim youths from different socio-economic backgrounds from North and North-eastern states of India. He explores the causes of low enrolment and identify interventions to enhance the participation of Muslim youth in higher education. Assumptions of the study are Poverty among Muslim is resulting in a low enrolment rate of Muslims in higher education, Religion is not encouraging modern education; thus, large population of the minority is focusing on 'literate below primary' and primary education and over years, the role of state governments for creating a conducive environment to raise the enrolment of minorities especially Muslims has not been doing much good.

The survey reveals that lack of timely guidance, support and networks are major barriers to pursue higher education. The students who were interviewed admitted that they felt inspired to get the higher education by other family members or neighbours who had already got higher education. The youths who were interviewed were mostly from Jamia, Delhi; 90% accepted that the reasonable fee structure of the this institution was an important helpful factor. Many Muslim youths prefer enrolment in institutions like Jamia and AMU compared to non-Muslim dominant institutions. This actually limits the scope of higher education for Muslim youths. This happens perhaps because the role models or the motivators graduated from these places. Also there is a strong pull of going to work in Middle East and pushing the family out of poverty. This becomes quicker and more possible if one acquires a skill rather than a degree!

Bhushan, S. (2019) has looked at this issue in the state of Uttar Pradesh. He states that the National Sample Survey 64th Round conducted in 2007-08 presents the information on participation in higher education in terms of social and religious groups. Result shows that the Gross Attendance Ratio (GAR) of Muslims stands at 8.7 percent as opposed to 16.8% GAR of Non-Muslims in higher education. If GAR of Muslims is compared with other social groups, it can be observed that it is higher than the GAR of Scheduled Tribes at 6.63 percent but lower than the GAR of Scheduled Castes at 10.65% and much lower than the GAR of Other Backward Classes at 13.67 percent. Building on his understanding of the situation reflected in sources of different secondary data & information; he has conducted a study in UP. This was based on interviews of over 50 Muslim youth, 10 youth who had completed their education and several educationists and social workers. The study was done in Tanda, a non-metro town with some neighbouring urban agglomerates. His inferences are based on discussions with adolescents and young Muslim persons, with Muslim persons who have gone through the stage of education to obtain their assessment of the factors which pushed them in and pulled them away from higher education and discussions with educationists and civil society actors. His study reports that 62%

families have 6-7 members; 12% families have 8-9 members. Families' want their children to get higher education and be engaged with livelihoods opportunity as the government jobs. Single earning member runs 60% families. 16% families are run by 2 earning member, and their focuses are on getting job and enhancing livelihoods. Women representation in income generation activities is zero. The main reason for low representation in higher education is the poverty followed by a sense of futility: they see neither any incremental income if they studied at college level nor do they see chances of getting a job improving much.

Rabha, M. (2019) studied the preferences, difficulties and situation of Muslim youth regarding higher education in Darrang, Goalpara and Kamrup districts of Assam. Muslims account for 34% of the population of Assam and form numerical majority in 9 districts, reaching 76% in Dhubri district. The proportion of Muslim students enrolling for higher education was a little less than 13% of all students in 2017-8, indicating a huge gap between these two proportions (AISHE report). The literacy performance in Assam is the worst in mostly Muslim habited char lands (river islands which have huge vulnerability to floods) where it reaches a nadir of 19% as compared to 53% of the State. The chars are dominantly habited by Muslims. Rabha records that physical access is not a serious problem for Muslim youth as they can access a college usually within 5 kilometres of their homes. However, poverty is the major deterrent. The families expect them to start earning early and definitely do not wish to continue to spend on their education. There is a strong bias against letting girl children go to college fearing their seduction by predators. The families also seemed to apprehend that an educated girl would be difficult to marry off. Those who were fortunate in being supported by their families in higher education felt that poverty and lack of awareness about the world of opportunities were the main hindering factors which made families unwilling to send their wards for higher education. The community leaders and educationists felt that despite the huge population, the community was grossly underrepresented in education for want of a suitable Government policy, often meaning by it the absence of reservations in seats and jobs for Muslims. They also felt that as a bulk of the Muslims were agriculturists in Assam, they had limited exposure to the world and were always cash strapped. As such they tended to goad the children to join the workforce as soon as the children became able bodied, not having much hope for better paying jobs post education.

Londhe, A. (2019) studied the situation in the city of Hyderabad. She notes that the new State of Telangana has conducive policy environment for education and is fairly well endowed with facilities as well. While enrolment of Muslims is fairly high in elementary level, it falls rapidly as one looks at higher levels. From an enrolment ratio of 14% at elementary level, a shade higher than their share in the population, Muslim enrolment falls to under 6% of all enrolled students at the higher education level. While such drop out occurs in all communities, this is the highest recorded drop out, way lower than a drop out from 13% to 8% for all categories. Londhe interviewed a total of 72 students in

Hyderabad; including 15 graduates. Seven of the 72 have continued their post-graduate study. She reports that 90% of the individuals interviewed expressed great confidence and respect for higher education. The reasons expressed were that it gave them higher awareness, social standing, respect and higher income. Family's education background, ability to meet college expenditure and quality of school education were listed by the respondents as the top three factors which helped them access and complete higher education. Her sample included a large number of ladies and the inference she draws is that there is gender parity in regard to higher education among the Muslims in Hyderabad. Girl students responded that they could take to higher education because of the support from the families, particularly their mothers. As is known, Telangana is home to the huge private education industry. In virtually every discipline, the number of Institutions run by Muslim management and hence eligible to claim the minority status is below the share in the population. Clearly, Muslim students are constrained to pick up the burden of high cost education somewhat more than others. This coupled with meagre means of many families puts a dampener on the ambition of the children. The Muslim minority institutions, respondents said, were unable to offer the same quality as some of the reputed general institutions but budget constraints forced the Muslim youth to flock there.

Sebastien, J. (2019) has done a study that sets the scene in Kerala as a distinct story in itself. It combines a review of past and also the situation as of now in Kerala. Today's Kerala is a state of the Malayali speaking people of both the erstwhile Malabar districts in North Kerala and the Travancore-Cochin princely States. Their histories are as different as their cultural composition. The state has some 54% Hindus, 26% Muslims and the rest Christians. Mapalah, who dominated the Malabar districts are considered descendants of Arab traders or local people converted by them to Islam. They have been rich through history. However when Arabs lost supremacy in trade and transport to the British, bad days fell on them as the British suppressed and suspected them. The mutually hateful relationship saw Mapalahs receding and withdrawing to such an extent that they became practically illiterate during the early British rule. Due to their religious affinity, Christians always had the best of Government support in creating educational institutions often allied with the Churches. Hindus, particularly high caste Namboodri and Nair communities were also privileged in terms of education. Muslims lagged behind. However, post-Independence Muslims dramatically changed their educational status. Sebastien attributes the dramatic change to two facets. The first one concerns the fact that a political party drawing its strength from and committed to wellbeing of Muslims was always an important constituent in the ruling formation and controlled the Education portfolio of the State Government for decades. The second concerns the formation of Muslim Education Society as an umbrella organization that undertook establishment of educational societies for Muslims in Malabar as well as other districts of Kerala. Sebastien documents how the Society has ensured that aided as well as unaided schools and colleges available to Muslims are almost at par with their proportion in the population. As a result, there is no under-representation of Muslims in higher education in Kerala of a magnitude and nature comparable

to the States discussed hitherto. Though largely driven by skilled blue collared jobs, emigration to Gulf and Middle East from Kerala has shaped the economy and polity of the State and is substantially dominated by Muslims. The impetus gained from this and the rising ability to pay due to Gulf remittances, even self-financing “private” institutional world sees many Muslim run colleges and schools. The issue of madrasa dominating schooling or of gender parity are not significant in Kerala context. However, the proselytizing nature of the new and aggressive Wahabism and its reflection in Islamophobia are the new realities which concern Muslim youth in the world of education and professions.

Mistry, M. (2019) has looked at the secondary data from National Family Health Surveys of 1992 and 2015 to analyse trends in the extent of education among Muslim women. She notes that rapid progress in literacy and education up to high school has been recorded between the Survey periods by women from all communities. She notes that while Muslim and Buddhist women were at the low end of the education spectrum in women’s education in 1992-3, Buddhists women have made rapid progress leaving their Muslim sisters far behind. She recommends special focus on education of Muslim women to bring about highly desirable changes in the situation.

Acharya, S. and Gosai, P. (2019) have undertaken a study of the under-representation of Muslims in higher education in Maharashtra and Gujarat. They note that in both the States, Muslims constitute a small minority at around 11% of the total. Both the States show high literacy rates of 80%. Muslims show literacy rates above the State or National average but the drop out of Muslims from education systems is very sharp. As per 2011 Census, Muslims account only for about 5% graduates in the two States. They interviewed 70 persons in Maharashtra and 60 in Gujarat to understand the attitude of the Muslim community towards higher education and causes for such a sharp decline in representation at higher education level. They find that among the chief factors lies the dominant livelihood pattern of Muslims: they are dominantly urban and have non-farm occupations dealing with motor skills or petty trade. These occupations can absorb a person early in his age without needing much formal education. Thus, the indifference towards education rather than poverty per se seems to keep the representation in higher education at low levels. Respondents also did tell the researchers about other issues: distance to good educational institutions, ability to bear expenses and apprehensions about religion based discrimination. There is a significant gender gap in education levels among Muslims caused substantially by community attitude towards role of women and what is considered appropriate for girls. by Muslim children feel more comfortable in Muslim management controlled and run Institutions as they are diffident due to insidious ghettoization and seeping if silent discrimination. However, these institutions are not plentiful and the quality of instruction and infrastructure in them leaves much to be

desired, leading to an indifferent quality education which then reinforces the belief that education does not lead to better income earning opportunities. This cycle needs to be broken.

6. Summary of inferences

The current situation regarding representation of Muslims in higher education and the apparent causes for that situation may be summed up as below:

- 6.1 The social and economic position of Muslims in different States varies substantially. In the Eastern States, Muslims form a substantial part of the population, live in rural areas and work in farm related occupations. On the other hand in States such as Maharashtra, Gujarat and Telangana, they Muslims are essentially urban settlers and are in relatively small numbers. Compared to other sections of the society, there appears to be greater poverty among the Muslims in several States
- 6.2 Virtually in all States, barring the extremely precarious situation of chars in Assam, enrolment of Muslim children in elementary level is not a matter of significant concern and in some cases like Maharashtra and Telangana, it exceeds the average for general population.
- 6.3 Transition rates for Muslims from elementary level to higher secondary level are in general much poorer than other communities. Transition rates for Muslim girl children are even lower.
- 6.4 At least a part of these inferior transition rates can be explained by inadequate supply of schools in districts dominated by Muslims.
- 6.5 The gap between share in total population and share in enrolment for colleges is huge everywhere except Kerala.
- 6.6 The poor supply of educational institutions in Muslim dominated districts is accentuated at college level. As Banerji points out, the gap in availability of institutions related to science and technology discipline appears to be even higher.
- 6.7 Indifferent quality of schooling, physical distance and social inhibitions tinged with apprehension about discrimination on religious ground tend to restrict the enrolment of Muslim students in higher education.
- 6.8 Except in Kerala, institutions managed by Muslim organisations are much fewer compared to the need of the community.
- 6.9 At the broader social and political level, the strength of articulation of the community rather than sheer demography seems to have impacted the level of development in terms of availability of

institutions as well as participation by Muslims in higher education. Despite huge numbers, Muslim articulation in Eastern states is poor resulting in their neglect while in Kerala, sustained voice in public policy has seen them gaining much ground and being able to claim their due.

6.10 At the family level, the chief force negatively impacting children's education among Muslims is poverty. This seems to restrict the ability of parents to support children at college level and also to compel them to require children to join workforce at an early age.

6.11 The other family related reason concerns girl children. Conservative views regarding role of women and regarding safety of girls going far to study in colleges tend to restrict their education in more traditional societies. In Telangana and Kerala, mothers seem to have substantially overcome these inhibitions resulting in salutary impact on participation of girls in higher education.

6.12 At the individual level, three sets of factors seem to impact motivation for participation in higher education. The first connects with the poverty: children are forced by family's financial circumstances to forgo higher education. The second factor relates to a sense of futility of higher education. It is not seen to lead to opportunities for substantially augmenting income. The third factor connects with the attraction of jobs possible through migration. These are seen as a way out of the rut and they need motor and mechanical skills rather than degrees.

7. Conclusion and Implications

Elementary education is an absolute must and enjoys the specific mandate of the Constitution. Recent trends suggest that children should be kept out of workforce and wedlock and hence, by implication, in educational institutions till they reach the age of 18 years. By this stage higher secondary education is completed. Beyond higher secondary stage lies the domain of higher education. Estimated to earn a return of 17%, investment in higher education is seen to be an extremely worthwhile investment both from the society and the individual. Higher education has both an intrinsic and an instrumental value. Intrinsic value is about capacity to develop one's own worldview, building confidence in negotiating with the world on footing of equality and about emancipation. Instrumental value is about contribution in terms of usable life skills that lead to incremental income.

The reality the world over is that Muslim youth appear to lag behind their peers from other communities in participating in higher education. Interestingly, Muslims seem to do better in higher education when they are in a minority and small numbers. In India, Muslim representation in higher education is among the lowest, even below the level of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. This is despite the fact that in terms of enrolment, there appears to be a broad parity across communities.

It seems logical to believe that socio-political ethos, signals from families, availability of accessible opportunities and individual motivations and predilections Influence the choice regarding education. This paper, based on nine papers prepared for the Conference, documents the situation regarding representation of Muslims in higher education and the factors that lead to the situation. The paper notes that there is an issue on the supply side: Districts dominated by Muslim population have fewer educational institutes both at school and college level. The quality of infrastructure and instructions in them also seems to be indifferent. The prevalence of institutional environment appears to be a function of the political articulation of the Muslim community as positively illustrated by the case of Kerala and negatively by the case of Bengal. Family signals come in the form of financial support to meet educational and associated expenditure, role models and inspiration from elders, goading to enter workforce at an early age, restrictions on movement of girls away from home etc. Clearly, these signals are read early by children, and they shape or are forced to shape their life trajectories accordingly. Individual motivations seem to be determined more by the perceived instrumental value. Indifferent quality of school education makes entry into highly reputed institutions difficult on account of absence of reservations, and the number of Muslim minority institutions is way short needed the one needed to meet aspirations of students. As Muslims lack reservations in jobs in most places and as the quality of the education they receive is at best passable, the incremental income levels after higher education do not appear attractive to the children. On the other hand, quick skill building training and migration to middle East is an easier way out of the poverty and the rut in which they live and hence further detracts children from taking to higher education.

The paper seems to imply that external inputs and facilitation such as financial assistance, establishment of more institutions in Muslim dominated districts and reservations could address the poor representation to some extent. However, Muslim community itself will have to take initiative in two respects. The first is exercising meaningful political influence the way IUML did in Kerala to shape the State's education policy, programs and schemes. The second is to work on the climate of opinions within the community that emphasises the need and utility of higher education.

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