

**Under-Representation of Muslims in Higher Education
A Case-Study of Telangana**

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CONTEXT

“Iqra” the first word of Islamic holy book Quran implies “read and seek knowledge”. It is unfortunate that in India the followers of Islamic tradition, which instructs to seek knowledge from every possible source, have become topic of their under-representation in higher education. As per the latest AISHE Report: 2018-19, the percentage of Muslims enrolling for college education is measly 5.23, compared to their share in Indian population at 14.5 percent.

Evidence from NSSO data shows that although Hindu OBCs started off marginally lower than the average citizen in 1999, they are almost on par with the upper castes now. However, Muslims who were on par with OBCs then have fallen way behind. They were at the average forty years ago but now are behind everyone including the STs. As per the empirical data provided by the Post-Sachar Evaluation Committee Report (2014), India Exclusion Report (2013-14), 2011 Census and latest NSSO reports Muslims are the poorest and most discriminated community of India. The low access to government jobs, land-ownership and access to bank credit make them dependent on the informal economy of unorganised sector.

However, the worrying trend is Muslims are increasingly finding it difficult to get better education than the previous generations as per the finding of World Bank-Dartmouth-MIT study. They have become the least upwardly mobile group in terms of inter-generational educational mobility among other historically disadvantaged groups like Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.¹

The study also found that their chances improve if they are living in places which are urban or in southern part of the country or in general have higher education levels. From this perspective, the case of Muslims in Telangana becomes interesting as it meets all the three criteria of upward mobility. Secondly, Muslims in Telangana have enjoyed state patronage due to Nizam’s rule and even now they have political leadership in the state. We need to understand the social, political and economic background of the Muslim community of Telangana before venturing into their education status.

HISTORY OF TELANGANA MUSLIMS

Mohan Guruswamy in his post in The Citizen presents a view of Hyderabad² in pre-independence period. As per the 1941 Census Hyderabad was the largest princely state in terms of GNP and cosmopolitan population. 85 percent of the population were Hindus and 12 percent were Muslims. Hyderabad not only had its own army, but also its own railways,

¹ “Intergenerational Mobility in India: Estimates from New Methods and Administrative Data” by World Bank, Dartmouth College and MIT (2016).

² <https://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/en/NewsDetail/index/9/17535/There-Once-Was-A-Hyderabad>

airline, postal service, broadcasting network and currency. Although Muslims made up just 10 per cent of his realm's population, they held three-quarters of the state jobs. And of the seven major feudal estates, six were controlled by Muslim notables. Out of 1765 administrative posts, 1268 were held by Muslims, 421 were held by Hindus, and 121 others, presumably British, Christians, Parsis and Sikhs. An earlier report from 1911 states that 70 percent of the police, 55% of the army and 26% of the public administration were Muslims. The Nizam and his nobles, who were mostly Muslims, owned 40% of the total land in the kingdom.

Compared to the elite Muslim population in Hyderabad, the common people of Hyderabad were living in abject poverty without any irrigation and education infrastructure. The long subservience to Urdu speaking elite made them disadvantaged compared to the Telugu speaking people in Andhra Pradesh who benefitted from the excellent investment in infrastructure and English education by British government.

According to M.A. Moid and A. Suneeta, "There was no political activity in the state till formation of the Majlis-e-Ittihad-ul-Muslimeen (MIM) in 1927 to unite various Islamic sects within the principle of Islam; and to protect the economic, social and educational interests of the Muslims. The balance of power between the Hindus and Muslims began to shift in the 1930s. The small but growing urban Hindu middle classes started getting politically mobilised demanding a share in employment and educational opportunities, civil and political liberties.

The demand for change shook the Muslim subjects and the Majlis began to consolidate the political interests of the non-elite Muslim subjects through its idea of popular sovereignty and emerged as a decisive power. MIM was opposed to the idea of merging of Hyderabad state with Indian union. In the mind of an average Hyderabad Muslim, the Razakar organisation appeared as an effective barrier against the establishment of responsible government which was synonymous with Hindu Raj, because it would be based on the will of the Hindu majority.

By 1947, the Congress, the Arya Samajis and the Communists waged armed battles, the first two in the urban centres of border areas for protecting interests of Hindu subjects and the latter in rural Telangana for peasants. It was in this context, the Majlis decided to convert the existing volunteers (Muslim and Non-muslim) of the party into a paramilitary wing, popularly called Razakars with a simple mandate: to protect women and children as well as to protect the population against the 'disturbing elements'.

Over a period of time, they started helping the Nizam's police and the army in resisting the attacks from the border camps and putting down the peasant rebellion in Telangana. They got special powers from the Nizam, which they started to misuse. and the Nizam had to abide by their dictates. The Razakar militia brutally put down the armed revolts by Communist sympathizers and the peasantry and even eliminated activist Muslims such as journalist Shoebullah Khan who advocated merger with India. The genocide carried out in rural Telangana gave the Indian government the *raison d'être* to march its armies into the Hyderabad State to merge Hyderabad into the Indian Union, popularly known as the Police Action."

Post Police Action, communal riots broke out in the Marathwada and Telangana region of Hyderabad estate. To get the ground reality of both Police Action and the riots Sunderlal Committee was constituted which reported that, "Twenty-seven thousand to forty thousand people lost their lives during and after the police action, mostly in Marathwada and Telangana region of Hyderabad state. Rape, loot, arson, desecration of mosques, forcible conversions, seizure of houses and lands, followed or accompanied the killing. Tens of crores worth of property was looted or destroyed. The sufferers were Muslims who formed a hopeless minority in rural areas. This communal trouble followed close upon the heels of the police action and the consequent collapse of the Razakar organisation. Muslim masses were generally slow to realise that their sufferings were the inevitable repercussions of the atrocities committed on the Hindus only, a few days before, by the Razakars."

The accession of Hyderabad state with Indian union brought abolition of Jagirdari system, which led to loss of employment, income and social status of Muslim literati and aristocracy and the families dependent on them. According to Laurent Gayer in his book "Muslims in India: Trajectories of Marginalisation", majority of Hyderabad State Force was disbanded which left around 33,000 Muslim individuals jobless and without any income. Roughly estimated, this action alone affected 165,000 people. The lawyers and teachers trained in Nizam's legal system and with Urdu medium began to feel the narrowing of prospects due to change in language from Urdu to Telugu and English. The biggest blow was brutalities on Muslims as a result of Police Action entrenched communal divide and branding of most of the Muslims as razakars.

The sudden shift in power followed by re-organisation of states in 1956, many Muslim elite found themselves marginalized and many migrated to Pakistan. The middle class and poor Muslim concentrated in the Old City in a ghetto environment with marginal significance elsewhere in the state. At the time of State Reorganisation, the people from Hyderabad state were assuaged with safeguards like reservations in educational institutions and government for *mulkis*, as the locally born were known. Most of these assurances remained on paper and the people of Andhra gained ascendancy over Hyderabad and Telangana's social and economic life further crumbling the aspirations of Muslims.

As per the study conducted by COVA³, "the large-scale migration of Hindus from rural areas, further dwindled the percentage of Muslims in Hyderabad, resulting in the friction between the two communities. The industrial estates, established decades ago, had all gone sick and shut shop. Government offices were shifted to the new City. All these events have had a negative multiplier effect on the economic situation in the Old City, and it is today in a downward spiral. The economy here is largely informal with men mostly engaged as rickshaw pullers, auto drivers, petty hawkers, shop assistants, hotel employees."

³ COVA is a national network of over 700 organisations working for communal harmony, peace and social justice. COVA works with women, children, youth and professionals from different sections and communities on the issues of peace, communal harmony, women's empowerment, child rights, youth advancement, education, health, financial inclusion, environment, compassionate citizenship and responsible activism, natural disasters and man-made conflicts like communal riots.

“After the economically difficult decades of 1950s and 1960s, Muslims’ immigration to middle east starting from the 1970's, resulted in economic prosperity. The Muslims then tried to enter into different trades. The Hindus who were already in those fields and in most cases dominating felt insecure. This insecurity and growing competition with Muslim newcomers resulted in ill will and jealousy. The money from the Gulf was accompanied with the puritanical Wahabi ideology, leading to rise in orthodoxy. After Babri Masjid demolition, the politics of religious identity became strong, especially in the Old City area.”

“Liberalisation and integration with the global economy has brought many private sector jobs to Hyderabad, but very few of them have gone to young people from the Old City. Many educated young people are frustrated by the lack of opportunities for advancement, and their continued dependence on their families for survival.”

As in 2016, according to the Commission of Inquiry on Socio-Economic and Educational Conditions of Muslims in Telangana (Hereafter referred as Sudhir Commission), only 19.2% of the Muslims are regular salaried and 16.4% of the Muslim workers are self-employed in non-agricultural activities. 26.5% of the Muslim household members work as casual labour in the non- agriculture sector. They account for only 7.36 percent of state government jobs (at low cadre and very few as gazetted officers) as against their population at 12.68 percent. Share of Muslim employees in Welfare Department is only 3.37 percent followed by Education Department (6.06 percent), Energy Department (6.53 percent) and Home Department (8.73 percent). This under-representation in socially crucial departments is not only a sign of exclusion but it adversely impacts their role in decision making and participation in the implementation process.

It is evident that even after enjoying political patronage in the past, the current socio-economic situation of Telangana Muslims is abysmal and comparable to an average Indian Muslim, marked by discrimination and neglect. We still need to examine their status from the lens of education, as the education is only instrument to cause upward mobility.

STATUS OF EDUCATION IN TELANGANA

According to Census 2011, the literacy rate of Telangana is 66.5 percent making it the second lowest literate state in India. The state has however achieved 100 percent enrolment in primary education. In terms of access the schools at secondary and higher secondary level are uniformly distributed in terms of location (urban and rural areas) and ownership (government and private). In 2015-16, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher Secondary School in Telangana was 61.3 percent, higher than national average of 56 percent.⁴ However, the enrolment from class 9 to 12 shows a downward trend with only 58 percent of the enrolled students in 9th class reaching 12th class.

⁴ <https://community.data.gov.in/stateut-wise-gross-enrollment-ratio-at-higher-secondary-schools-during-2015-16/>

From Table 1, it can be concluded that in higher education Telangana has done well compared to national average and other southern states.

Table 1: Comparison of Telangana with other Southern States w.r.t Higher Education

	GER	Colleges per lakh of population (18-23 years)	Average enrollment per college
GER India	26.3	28	693
Telangana	36.2	50	554
Andhra Pradesh	32.4	49	524
Karnataka	28.8	53	426
Kerala	37	45	568
Tamil Nadu	49	35	924

Source: Census 2011 and AISHE Report 2018-19

To increase the enrolment of students belonging to SC, ST, OBC and minority, who have successfully completed their 10th for pursuing 12th, Polytechnic, ITI, Graduation, Post Graduation, PhD and professional courses, Government of Telangana has introduced the Fee Incentive Scheme⁵. The income criteria for availing the scholarship is parental income below Rs 200,000 for SC and ST and parental income of Rs 100,000 for Backward Class, Economically Backward Class and Minorities. Muslims in Telangana meet all the three criteria for upward mobility, as their population in the state is highly urbanized (74 percent) and Telangana being a southern state with high education performance.

Status of Education of Muslims in Telangana

As per Census 2011 and NSSO's 68th Round, Muslims constitute 12.68 percent of Telangana's population (3.51 crores). Their population is comparatively young (52.5 percent in 0-23 years), urban (74 percent) and majorly working (64 percent in the age group of 15-60 years) with average household size of 5 members. Their literacy rate is 76.89 per cent, little higher than the national literacy rate and much higher than the SCs (59 per cent), STs (50 per cent) and Hindus (64.64 per cent) within the state. The rural-urban gap in literacy is towards lower side, implying poor performance in urban areas as the population is mostly urbanised. Like all the communities, among Muslims also gender disparity in children exists in rural areas. The percentage of those who have never attended the school (0-23 years) is also one of the lowest.

The problem lies in gradually declining enrollment as the age increases. The data from Unified District Information on School Education (**UDISE**) 2014-15 clearly indicates declining enrolment and transition rate of Muslim students from primary to secondary and from secondary to higher secondary level of schooling.

⁵ <https://govinfo.me/telangana-epass-scholarship-scheme/>

Table 2: Muslims as Percentage of Total Enrolment (2014-15)

	Primary			Upper Primary			Secondary			Higher Secondary		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
India	14.2	14.68	14.43	11.93	13.3	12.6	9.34	11.23	10.24	7.4	8.77	8
Telangana	14.2	15.16	14.67	12.17	13.54	12.84	10.63	12.01	11.31	5.13	6.51	5.83
Andhra Pradesh	8.1	8.13	8.11	7.12	7.3	7.21	6.73	6.68	6.71	na	Na	na
Karnataka	14.9	15.37	15.11	14.14	15.16	14.63	12.12	13.61	12.84	7.72	8.69	8.22
Kerala	34.5	34.57	34.51	33.29	33.23	33.26	32.13	31.72	31.93	23.01	24.31	23.69
Tamil Nadu	5.85	5.92	5.89	5.62	5.85	5.73	5.26	5.56	5.41	5.07	5.28	5.18

Table 3: Transition Rate of Muslims (2014-15)

	Upper Primary to Secondary			Secondary to Higher Secondary		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
India	79.8	79.62	79.7	59.04	59.7	59.38
Telangana	94	93.99	94	55.51	63.18	59.31
Andhra Pradesh	100	95.97	99.05	na	na	na
Karnataka	92.1	92.79	92.43	36.03	38.84	37.48
Kerala	100	99.41	100	53.41	64.34	58.77
Tamil Nadu	94.3	93.76	94.02	67.45	74.64	71.13

It can be noted from both the tables, that enrolment of Muslim girls is higher than Muslim boys across all the levels of schooling. Similarly, their transition rate from one level to the next is also better compared to boys. The admission data of Telangana based universities for the year 2017-18 also shows the similar trend.

Table 4: Admission Data of Muslims vis a vis SCs and STs in Five Telangana based Universities.

	Scheduled Caste		Scheduled Tribe		Muslims	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Mahatma Gandhi University, Nalgonda	216	240	101	67	14	45
Osmania University, Hyderabad	824	1080	357	327	124	388
Potti Sriramulu Telugu University	15	3	0	3	2	0
Palamaru University, Mahbubnagar	155	171	65	40	22	60
Telangana University, Nizamabad	165	218	86	78	22	53
GRAND TOTAL	1375	1712	609	515	184	546

Source: Admission Office, Osmania University

Table 5: Comparison of Higher Education of Muslims in Telangana to other Southern States

	Muslims as % of population	GER of Muslims	GER of SC	GER of ST	Gender parity in GER	Growth rate of GER of Muslims since 2013-14	Reservation in Higher education and Govt. Jobs
India	14.2	5.24	26.4	17.2	0.97	56.41	
Telangana	12.7	9.13	33.7	30.7	0.93	45.53	4
Andhra Pradesh	9.56	3.34	28.9	26.4	0.76	52.67	4
Karnataka	12.92	6.31	21.0	19	0.91	46.53	4
Kerala	26.56	14.53	25.9	23.1	1.37	111.09	8 and 12
Tamil Nadu	5.86	3.62	41.6	37.8	0.72	45.85	3.5

Source: Census 2011, AISHE Report 2018-19 and PIB

It is encouraging to see higher GER of Muslims in Telangana and gender parity at par with national average and higher than three of the southern states. It is still lower than SCs and STs, at 33.7 percent and 30.7 percent respectively (AISHE Report: 2018-19). Further the GER growth rate is slower than other states. It can be deduced that presence of one of the best education infrastructures in the country coupled with financial assistance by state government have not been able to sufficiently increase the GER of Muslims in higher education.

Our case-study conducted in Hyderabad has attempted to understand the aspirations, motives and decision-making process of the Muslim youth. The study has used personal-interview method to understand role of family's education, occupation and support in education, nature of residence and education institutes and personal views and experiences in the decision-making process. Since Hyderabad has about 45 percent of state's Muslim population and has been a crucial center of their politics, boasting of a strong service-sector based economy, Hyderabad was chosen for the study.

METHODOLOGY

The study used questionnaire based personal interview of the 72 respondents, out of which 57 are undergoing graduation and post-graduation courses from Osmaniya university and 15 respondents have completed their graduation, are either working or looking for work. The study also includes interaction with 13 professionals belonging to Muslim community working in the field of education, journalism, development sector, research and religious studies to get the overview of the problem. The profile of the students is shown in the table.

Table 6: Profile of Respondents for the study

				Name of the courses			
	Students	Alumni	Availed Scholarships #	BA/ B Com	B.Sc/ B.Biotech	BE/ BTech	B.Pharma
Male	23	12	14	3	1	18	9
Female	34	3	12	8	11	0	13

Of the total 72, only 7 are pursuing or have completed Post-Graduation course. Four of them are student, all women. Among the three who have completed Post-Graduation, all are working, two are men and one is woman. The respondents were selected from government college (Muslim dominated area, Hussaini Alam), Computer and English-Speaking Class (Muslim dominated area, Mozzamjahi Market), two private colleges (Campus of Osmania University and Muslim Trust). The alumni were employees of an IT Company and a car showroom.

All the professionals/experts interviewed are Muslims and their profile is as follows: Owner of education institutes 3; RTI Activist and Gender Activist 2; NGO worker 1; Development economist 1; Islamic Studies Expert 1; Member of Sudheer Inquiry Commission 1; Education Professional 2; Business owner 1, Journalist 1.

INFERENCES

Need for Higher Education and factors affecting it:

According to 90 percent of the 72 respondents, higher education makes one more aware and responsive to the changes in the economy and that's why important. 45 respondents opined that it is needed for financial independence (45) and 29 said that it is needed for gaining respect and status in the society (29). However, 45% of them do not think that it is must for a successful career as one can earn more through business for which higher education is not required. 50 percent seek career related guidance from the family and idolize a family member for his/her application of college education in a successful career. 35 percent seek career related support from teachers and neighbours. 15 percent do not have any role model.

Only 30 percent of the total want to study further and 38 percent hope to secure and continue with a job after their graduation. 40 percent of the male respondents want to pursue business as their career aim, either by studying further or saving up enough capital from their jobs, as and when they get one.

Among the factors helping them to access higher education, family's education background was ranked highest (36 percent), followed by quality of schooling (31 percent), affordability of the course/institute (10 percent), career counselling (9 percent), extra coaching (7 percent) and easy transportation (7 percent).

Family's education background: 61 percent of the respondents were first generation graduates of their family. In case of parental education, mothers have studied more than the fathers. Among mothers, 3 percent are Post-Graduates, 14 percent are Graduates, 12.5 percent have cleared Intermediate and 15 percent had studied upto Class 8. Among the fathers, 26 percent were graduates, 10 percent have cleared Intermediate, 33 percent had studied upto Class 10, 14 percent have studied upto Class 8.

Details of institute:

English medium private educational institutes are the most preferred option for the respondents. The factors affecting choice of the institute at Matric and Intermediate level for all the 72 respondents were easy access (43 percent), affordability (23 percent), parents' recommendation (21 percent) and finally the reputation as a quality institute (7 percent). 50 percent of the girls were not even consulted and parents' recommendation was the most important factor. At the level of graduation, 40 respondents were pursuing B.Tech and B. Pharma course, whose decision relating to choice of college was made on the basis of allotment and affordability. The rest of the 32 respondents decided on the basis of parents' recommendation and access. 65 percent of the male respondents and 35 percent of female respondents were unhappy with the quality of education they were receiving at the undergraduate level and considered extra coaching and career counselling as possible solutions.

Table 7: Break-up of Respondents into type of educational Institution

	Kind of Institute	Males	Females
Class 10	Govt	6	10
	Private	25	26
	Minority & Open	4	1
	TOTAL	35	37
Class 12	Govt	5	8
	Private	24	29
	Minority & Open	6	0
	TOTAL	35	37
Graduation	Govt	1	10
	Private	28	27
	Minority & Open	8	0
	TOTAL	37	37

Gender Discrimination

For girls, being allowed to complete their graduation level is their biggest achievement, as the parents begin the search for suitable match as soon they attain the legal marriageable age of eighteen. Early marriage was considered as the biggest hurdle by 53 percent of the total respondents since in Muslim society married women are not allowed to venture out and hence disallowed to complete their education. The other factors cited for impending girls' education were family restrictions (47 percent), safety issues (35 percent) and unaffordable fees (17 percent). More than half of the 36 girls were not consulted in deciding the college and the decision was taken by the fathers or elder brothers of the family. Quality of their education was rarely seen as a cause of concern for the parents. The purpose of their education was to take care of their families after marriage. Seven male respondents openly stated that girls should not be allowed to study beyond intermediate level as the exposure to college environment may disturb their priorities and they may get "out of control" of the family. The commonality among these seven respondents is they are studying in different minority institutes.

One of experts, Mr Asghar Ali, one of the founders of COVA responded that, educated mothers play a crucial role in encouraging daughters for higher education, however the final decision rests with the male members of the family. Educated mothers are able to teach their children at least upto class 5 level and seek help of tuition teachers for higher classes. However, in recent times the number of cases of marriage counselling and marital discord has increased in Muslim community, the reason attributed to girls college education compared to low education level of their spouses. In his words, "Girls are becoming assertive because of their education while boys are still living in the middle ages." On being asked to respond to this education-disbalance, many girls admitted that while looking for "suitable match" only income of boys is considered as the favourable attribute not his education and since the married women are rarely allowed to work the disbalance never bothered them. Mr. Asghar cautions that the number of education Muslim men and women would have to reach a tipping point to change the social fabric of Muslim society in Hyderabad.

Case of Nooren Saba and Adhiba : Struggle against Social Norms

Saba is pursuing M. Com from a reputed private girls' college. Her father has studied upto Class 8 and works as an auto driver. Her mother is a tailor and has studied upto Class 5. Her family doesn't have financial stability due to her father's work and ill health but she considers herself fortunate to have full support of her family. She lives in a Muslim dominated area and did her matric from the nearby government school. Since she is a meritorious student, she got free education during her intermediate and graduation. She had to forsake admission in good private college for her under graduation due to financial constraints. To support her education, she started conducting tuition class from the age of 15 and now works in a call centre where she receives cab facility which ensures her safety. Her parents have kept her job in the call centre as a secret from the extended family as they are opposed to her education and would further criticise her working at night. She considers her mother instrumental in supporting her education who hails from an educated family but was forced to marry early and hence could not study further. Saba feels that thought family's education background helps a child but more than that supportive environment plays more important role.

Adhiba is the first girl from her family to be a graduate. She is currently pursuing MBA from a girls' college. Her mother has studied upto Class 10 and after Adhiba's father's death, her mother got the government job. Her elder sister studied upto Class 12 and was married off early under relatives' pressure though she wanted to study. Adhiba says she has convinced her mother about her ambition to work first and then to get her married. She was inspired by her neighbour who after doing an MBA was earning well. She wants to become a bank officer after her MBA. She is her own role model. She thinks that family support is most important for girls to pursue higher education. She also says that girls need to fight their own battle if they want their wishes to be fulfilled.

CAUSES OF UNDER-REPRESENTATION

Financial Constraints for Quality Education

Telangana government's Fee Reimbursement Scheme offers scholarships to Backward Class Muslims to students who have successfully completed their 10th for pursuing 12th, Polytechnic, ITI, Graduation, Post Graduation, PhD and professional courses. The criteria for availing the scholarship is parental income below Rs 200,000 and 75% attendance in each quarter.

From the study sample, one third of the respondents have availed the scholarships. The criteria for availing the scholarship doesn't consider rank of the aspirants in the entrance exam. This has caused mushrooming of private colleges benefitting the colleges more than the students. The fees reimbursement schemes together with benefits accrued to minority institutes have led to increase in Muslim Minority Institutes also. Mr Amirullah Khan (Development Economist) said that in wake of Mandal Commission to appease the Muslim community and improve their access to professional education, Minority Institutions were accorded some leniency in recruitment of teachers and student composition. However, the plan backfired and the result is lack of quality and diversity in the classrooms. One can gauge this phenomenon from the number of AICTE approved institutes in Hyderabad 2018-19.

Table 8: Number of Muslim Minority Institutes

Name of Programmes	Un-aided Private Colleges	Un-aided Private Colleges for Minority	Muslim Minority Institutes
Engineering and Technology	220	32	22
Management	322	50	25
MCA	35	7	3
Pharmacy	131	12	11
Total	708	101	61

According to the Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao, "Many colleges lack basic facilities like laboratories. Most of the colleges do not pay salaries prescribed for teaching and non-teaching staff. Many do not have qualified teachers."⁶ Mr Fasihuddin, one of the trustees of Madina Group of Institutions, informs that in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, Muslim Minority institutions tops the list of institutions being closed down for not following the AICTE norms, jeopardising education of thousands of Muslim students.

The respondents in the survey are aware of these lacunae but in absence of any other option resort to studying in these colleges. 43 percent of the respondents said that access to quality education is urgent for improving Muslim community's share in higher education. Their main problem is not access to education but access to quality education. 28 percent of the

⁶ Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Hyderabad/fee-reimbursement-scheme-a-big-scam/article6242532.ece>

respondents said that for them financial assistance played key role in accessing higher education while 50 percent of the respondents need financial assistance to access good quality education right from the schooling days. They said that in absence of good schools, their foundation becomes weak and they find it difficult to cope with the rigour of a professional course without extra coaching.

Case of Younis: A Difficult Battle against Odds

Younis works in an IT firm as a software professional. He has a B. Tech degree. Younis's father is illiterate and retired from the post of watchman of Singareni coal mines. He understood the value of higher education and have been encouraging and guiding Younis to pursue higher education. Younis didn't pay much attention to his studies till he joined tuition classes of Ms Farzana in 8th class. She cleared his concepts and helped him to pass his 10th grade with good score. Younis, a native of Adilabad, went to Warangal for his intermediate studies for which he received free tuition fees. His father used his contacts to ensure the free education. According to Younis, the two years of freedom from family restrictions and staying with Hindu friends improved his social skills. After 12th, he got selected in a private college where he again received scholarships and also worked part time jobs to support himself. He watched YouTube videos and underwent coaching to learn software testing which helped him in getting the job. He used to read Hindu and watch English movies and thus improved his spoken English. He chose Engineering because it was a safer career option. He credits the coaching he received during his schooling days for his success today and absence of career counselling is his biggest regret.

Lack of Aspiration and Inward-Looking Attitude

If we look at the occupation of the parents, 53 percent of the fathers either conduct business or are self-employed with 34 percent have studied upto Class 10, while 18 percent are graduates and 18 percent are Class 8 pass. 40 percent of the fathers have salaried jobs with 11 percent in government jobs. Among the salaried fathers, 34 percent are graduates and 34 percent are Class 10 pass. 95 percent of the mothers are housewives and have not indulged in any income generation activity. The occupational and educational background of the parents partly explains the inclination of male respondents towards business and their opinion that higher education is not must for a successful career.

According to Asghar Ali (COVA) in a typical poor Muslim household, boys start to learn family trade from the age of ten. With every passing year, they spend less time in the school and more time at the workshop. By the age of fifteen, they learn all the aspects of business and start earning independently. In old city, the maximum educational achievement of children in the age group 15-18 is Class 10. Afterwards, they lose interest in studies and become financially independent.

Another perspective is given by Ms Asma who trains teachers and works for a private school in the old city area. She says that remittance from gulf is the main cause of youth's disinterest in studies. In every household, there is one person who works in gulf and send enough money to take care of the household needs. For personal needs, the young boys take up odd jobs

and simply loiter afterwards. They basically lack aspirations as they have no exposure of life beyond the old city. On being questioned they quote Quran where Prophet insisted on leading a simple life and on being self-reliant.

Ms Asma says the religious education is being misinterpreted and misused to hide the inherent laziness. Mr Rashid Ali Khan, an expert on Quran and Islamic studies explains that Prophet's insistence on being self-reliant was relevant to the time when slavery was rampant and hence being self-reliant was being extolled. Mr Rashid says that Maulavis in Masjids need to contextualise the relevance of Quranic teachings to the changing economic and social tidings. Another example of misinterpretation of Quranic teachings was given by the professor of genetics at one of the government colleges in Old City. She told that when genetics course was launched in the college, for the first two years many students showed interest but not even a single student took up the course. On inquiry it was revealed that the Muslim teachers in the college were discouraging students to take up Genetics subject as it was considered blasphemous (haram). Similarly, the reason of blasphemy is used to discourage the girl students from participating in workshops/seminars and extra-curricular activities.

Lack of Diversity and Rising Muslim Identity.

25 percent of the respondents said that living in ghettos affect their exposure and inclination for higher education. Among girls, the demand for diversity in neighbourhood is much higher. The following table denotes the percentage of respondents who have interacted with/taught by non-Muslim persons.

Table 9: Diversity Score based on Interaction with Non-Muslims

	Male in %	Female in %
School	89	59
College	59	68
Neighborhood	26	29
Diversity score	58	52

According to Fasihuddin, one of the trustees of Madina Group of Institutions, lack of diversity in neighbourhoods, schools and colleges and focus of these institutions on religious teachings is making young boys and girls unaware of the world outside. In these institutions, even holidays are not given for major Hindu festivals, cutting the last connecting link with a normal diverse learning environment. He informed that in the schools and colleges located in Muslim dominated areas, teachers are also drawn from the existing community which not only affects the quality of the teaching but also social awareness and social skills to operate in a diverse working environment.

Mr Asghar Ali (COVA), Mr Amirullah Khan and Mr Bashir Babu Khan (Businessman) all of them studied in a normal school learning with and from people belonging to different culture, religion and languages. They lament the loss of diversity in the current generation of schools catering to the Muslim community. All of them complained that this factor affects the social

and communication skills of Muslim youth further diminishing their employability in service industry. Mr Asghar Ali said that earlier religious teaching was imparted by families now the educational institutions are doing that job. Mr Fasih even commented that ironically some of the famous Minority Institutions use religion as a marketing tool instead of the quality of education.

Mr M A Bari (Mr M A Bari is one of the members of Commission of Inquiry to study the Socio-Economic and Educational Conditions of Muslims in Telangana, constituted by Telangana government in 2015. He had his school education in Medak and college education from Osmaniya University, Hyderabad. He is a retired lecturer and a known social worker.) said that one of the reasons for educational backwardness of Muslims, especially Hyderabad based Muslims is their lack of knowledge of Telugu language. Most of the Telangana Muslims from lower income group study in Urdu medium schools and later on find it difficult to assimilate in Telugu dominated college environment. It not just affects the conceptual knowledge imparted in classroom but also their communication with peers.

Mr Asghar Ali, narrated an incident where a three months free training was being imparted by GMR's Varalakshmi Foundation on Skill Development, for poor Muslim boys and schools undergoing Graduate course. The students insisted on allowing them to perform Namaz during the training hours and also on gender segregation within the classroom. The training didn't achieve the desired outcomes due to shift in the focus of the students.

Mr Zahiruddin (Editor of Urdu daily Siasat) blames apathy of privileged Muslim class of disinterested political leadership of Hyderabad for this situation. He said that the both these groups do not care for the poor Muslim youth and hence the vacant leadership space is being taken over by over-religious groups. Mr Fasihuddin cited example of Jain community, though traditionally known in business circle, have collectively created spaces for subsidised training and coaching of Jain youth in professional fields. He contrasted it with the case of elite Muslims who are not involved in any such collective action.

CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

It becomes clear that a gamut of interlinked factors is proving to be hurdle for Muslim community' higher education. The political leadership, absent in other Indian states, has only dealt with identity issues of Muslims and wilfully neglecting the case of higher education. The first step is higher involvement of educated Muslims in leadership space for social reforms and education reforms. The education sector cannot be left at the mercy of private players profiteering from the demand-supply gap, especially for a community as vulnerable as Muslims. Increased reservations and merit based financial assistance can also help. About 54 percent of the female respondents opined that reservation for Muslims and especially reservation for Muslim women in jobs and educational institutes will improve their chances of getting higher and better-quality education. Lastly, one cannot expect representation in higher education of Muslims without investing in their crucial schooling years. The respondents demand better quality and availability of counselling centres. This can be achieved only through vision and willingness of government.

