

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

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Background and review of the sources:

The Sixth Annual Report of the Central Minorities Commission confirmed what everyone already knew: Muslims are one of the most economically and socially backward communities in India. 39, out of the 172 districts, identified as backward has sizeable Muslim population. In terms of [economic upward mobility](#), Muslims are at the lowest rung among all categories in India. [The percentage of Muslims living below poverty line](#) is higher than the National average.

These data is in line with historical trends since the opening up of the Indian economy. In the National Sample Survey (NSS) 43rd Round conducted in 1990, less than 3% Muslim men and about 1% Muslim women were graduates. The 55th NSS data for 1999-2000 shows only marginal process with Muslims participation in higher education in urban and rural areas being 3.9% and 0.8% respectively. This is far lower than the Hindus participation rate was 11.5% and 1.8% respectively. The Sachar committees report in 2006 merely confirmed the extension of this historical trend. The literacy rate among Muslims was 59.1%, compared to national average of 64.8 %. The number of graduated in the community was less than 4% compared to 7% in the average population. Only one out of 25 students enrolled in an undergraduate program is a Muslim (despite being about 13% of the population). This corresponds to just 2% in post graduate courses.

The NSS data of 2011-12 says that 31% of Muslims are illiterate compared to 26% Hindus. Despite being slightly well off at early education, the proportion of Muslims in post-middle and higher education reduce far below their Hindu counterparts. At levels of graduation and post-graduation, merely 3.5% and less than 1% of Muslims are enrolled in colleges and universities, when compared to 6.30% and 2% of Hindus, respectively. The AISHE report of 2016-17 highlights no change in the status quo in higher education. Only 4.9% from Muslim community are enrolled compared to 14% from SC and 5.1% from ST communities.

Why this research?

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. It is important to understand the barriers to education, notably higher education from the perspective of Muslim youths. This research engages with 39 Muslim youths from different socio-economic backgrounds from North and North-eastern states of

India further explore the causes of low enrolment and identify interventions to enhance the participation of Muslim youth in higher education.

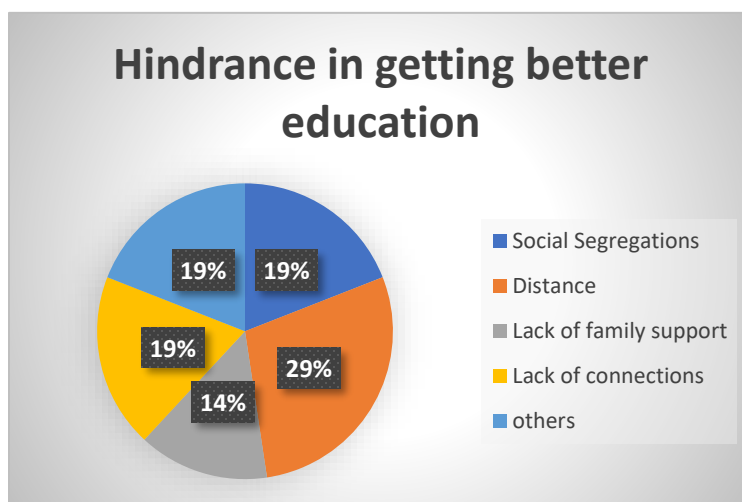
Assumptions and consequences

1. Poverty among Muslim is resulting in a low enrollment rate of Muslims in higher education
2. Religion is not encouraging modern education; thus, large population of the minority is focusing on 'literate below primary' and primary education.
3. State governments are not creating a conducive environment to raise the enrollment of minorities especially Muslims

Method of exploration:

1. Interviews of youth who could manage their enrollment in higher education
2. Focus group discussion with target communities
3. Visit and exploring minority institutions

Major hindering factors to getting enrolled in higher education (based on face to face interview with 39 Muslim youth) : -



Universities like Jamia Milia Islamia have a good number of students from Bihar, UP, Odisha and Jammu and Kashmir. These students shared that they had very few options in their state for higher studies. The lack of sufficient opportunities at the local level is therefore a major hindrance to enroll in higher education for Muslim youths. Anyone who wants higher education must have sufficient family resources to support. This is lacking in many families, given the high incidence of poverty in the community. Many Muslim families do not see the long term cost benefit of investment in education compared to the short term earning opportunities. Given the dire economic condition of most Muslim families, there is an incessant pressure on the young to earn a living to support their families, particularly on the male child.

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 inspired to get the higher education by other family members or neighbors who had already got higher education. These *role models* had also facilitated their stay and supported them during their move from homes to the place of higher learning. In some cases, close relative or neighbor in villages facilitated the students to opt courses that may help them in the future job market.

Social segregation also appeared high on the hindrance list for higher education in Muslims was another reason cited by the respondents for low educational outcomes. This corresponds to [the observation of the Sachar Committee](#) that basic infrastructure is largely missing in Muslim settlements, including education infrastructure.

The youths who were interviewed were mostly from Jamia, Delhi and on the question “what made them attracted to the institution?”, 90% accepted that the reasonable fee structure of the institution was an important factor. For similar reasons, many of them had also in AMU admission tests but they had not applied for any other university or institution. Some of the student were aware of the other university and colleges for similar courses but did not pursue due to the high fees structure. Many Muslim youths do not thus do not explore beyond Jamia and AMU thereby limiting their chances of higher education. This is again also backed by available data from these institutions. [Muslims 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. For the academic session 2019-2020, application for science stream in class 11 reached 14,274 against total available 160 seats and Arts and Commerce for the same class 2,814 applied against 145 seats and 2,708 against 65 seats.

Other barriers to higher education among Muslim youth in India:

Based on Focused Group Discussion (FGD) with a group of 9 Muslim who are graduated, the following were other barriers to higher education:

1. Labour opportunities in the Gulf and other countries

Students interviewed and sub-group discussion on the subject highlighted that higher education is seen as a ticket to better economic life. Yet Muslim youths are not witnessing evidences to validate this assumption. Even youths

with BA and MA degree struggle for job and steady source of earning. Many see work opportunities in the Gulf as semi-skilled and unskilled labour as a way out of poverty. Though this was a widespread phenomenon for [Muslims in Kerala](#), this trend has also caught up with Muslim youths seeking opportunities as semi-skilled or unskilled labourers in the Gulf. This is further facilitated by easily available gulf job facilitation centers.

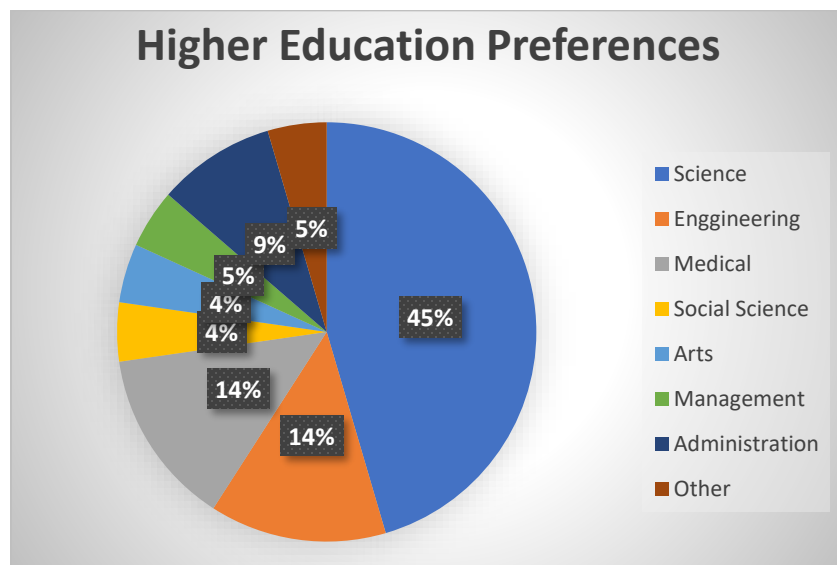
2. Business orientation and skill based livelihoods among community

Muslim community residing in urban and semi-urban India (more than 40%) are engaged in semi-skill based livelihoods working as tailors, butchers, cooks and shop keepers etc. Children follow their fathers in this livelihoods which anyway do not require high level of education. Therefore, there is barely any aspiration in the youth for higher education. This also corresponds to all India urban data for Muslims which says [46% of this population is self-employed](#) through traditional jobs as mentioned above.

3. High dropout of Muslim girls from education system

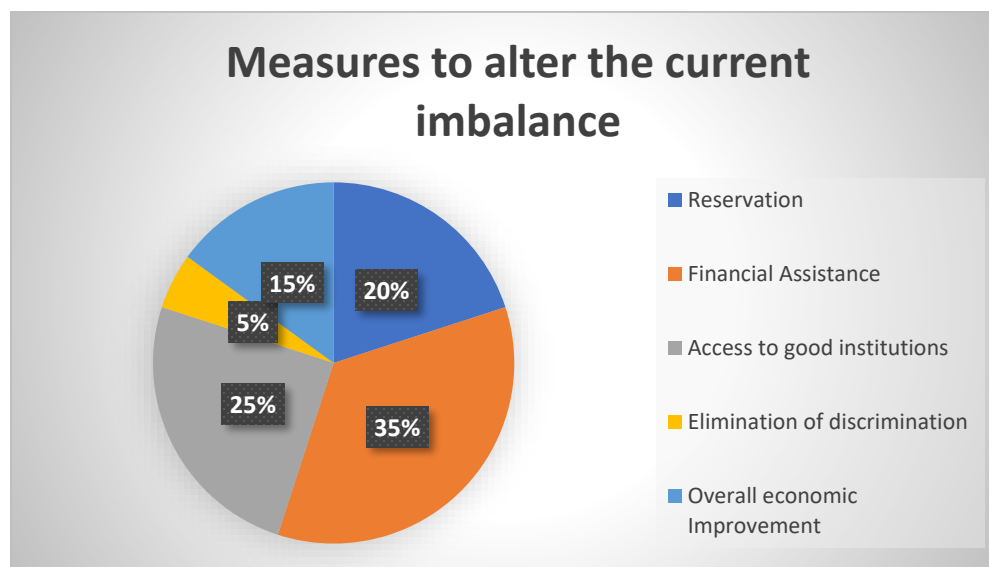
Apart from barriers of mobility as well as lesser scope of opportunities, early marriage is the biggest barrier for girls. Moreover, institutions of higher learning are generally not in the home town and families are unwilling to risk their limited resources and invest on the education of their girl. Other factors, as mentioned by the participants were absence of affordable hostels for girls, and female teachers. The literacy rate of Muslim females is just 51.9% which is much lower than the national average (65.4%). A staggering [40% Muslim girl's dropout of school](#). Given, the dire early situation of education in girls, the participation of Muslim girls in higher education is limited.

Aspirations among higher studying Muslim youth:



Science is the most preferred course in higher education for Muslim youths as the survey shows. In the FGD, most participants linked science courses to better opportunities in the job market. Professional courses like medical sciences and engineering were other attractions, which is also a reflection of the influence of the larger society on the aspirations of Muslim youths. Yet many Muslim youths have below par educational foundations to enroll in this courses apart from other factors, including poverty and exposure. Other specialized courses like MBA and hotel management were appealing but costly to pursue and most families cannot afford it. On the other hand, in the FGD most participants said that normal graduation as well as post-graduation is not seen as a stepping stone for a fulfilling work life. The survey reflects that research was the least desired higher among the youths. This can be explained in terms of lack of clarity and relevance of research in adding economic value and job opportunities later.

Ways to enhance Muslim youth's participation in higher education



Many Muslim youths from poorer households simply drop out because of the lack of sufficient support to pursue higher education. 35% of the respondents felt that financial support in terms of scholarships to pay fees or stipends to support themselves during their higher education period will go a long way in ensuring better participation. 20% of the respondents also felt that some form of inclusive action will go a long way in bringing change in the higher educational status of the community.

From the FGD, the following interventions were expected to bring about positive change:

1. Grassroots level guidance and facilitation centers

Lack of guidance was another major hindering factor for higher education participation. In today's day and age, with the availability of technology, off-site help centers to fill this gap can easily help many Muslim youths caught on the cross-roads.

2. Emphasis on English medium curriculums

Many Muslim youth, despite their acumen, are unable to participate in the growing economy, particularly in the services sector because of the lack of English fluency. There has to be emphasis on English based curriculum to bridge this gap.

3. Facilitating Masjid and Madrasas to play a role in inspiring youth to get higher education

The clergy can play a pivotal role in inspiring youths towards higher education, given the role that they play in the general life of the community. Therefore, orienting the clergy class on higher education should be another priority.

Other findings from the Survey:

Questions:	Percentage of respondents who said yes
Do boys get more opportunities than girls?	81.0
Is early marriage is a barrier for girls?	85.7
Should Muslim youth should get reservation?	66.7
Has Madrasa schooling any role in the under-representation of Muslims in higher education?	23.8
Is social insecurity affecting the career prospect of the Muslims?	81.0
Did you ever felt discriminated?	28.6