

Research Article

## Educational Exclusion of Minority Girls in Andhra Pradesh

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### ABSTRACT

This paper assesses the educational aspects of Muslims in general and those of a Muslim girl child in particular. It looks into enrolment issues and reasons for low enrolment, problems of dropouts and factors responsible, gender disparities and how they are excluded from mainstream education. On the other hand, it is also surmised that there is a perceived amplified need and an apparent increase in demand that, if properly planned and executed, will promote equity across students even as it improves the overall efficiency of the educational system. This paper also explores ways to improve the education of Muslim girls, and the need to redress minority community grievances and improve educational mobility of the girl child.

**Keywords:** Enrolment, Gender Disparity, Exclusion, Educational Mobility.

### INTRODUCTION

Education plays an important role in the development of an individual in particular and society in general. The structure of an educational system is more important than the administrative, political or economic system of a nation. Education is the building block on which the progress of a nation is built. Education means to draw out the best in human beings. It promotes development of psychological, emotional, intellectual and physical energies of an individual, in order to equip him for playing a suitable role in society.

Muslims in India constitute 15 per cent of the country's population<sup>1</sup>, which amounts to ~170 million people. Therefore, the economic and educational progress of the community is very crucial for India, as the country heads towards a transition from being a 'developing' to a 'developed' nation. A large number of Muslims in Andhra Pradesh live in urban areas and are mostly artisans, petty shopkeepers, traders, skilled and unskilled workers and labourers belonging to the working class. A majority of

the Muslim masses are illiterate and poor. It is well known that mass education and literacy have not progressed very well. Most children from poor, low-caste and other underprivileged families tend to drop out before completing their primary education. Many regional and occupational groups among the Muslims fall among the underprivileged. Nevertheless, it is believed that Muslim education has to play an important role in preserving the growth of national identity.

While attending to the comparative homogeneity of Indian Muslims as a viable religious minority group amenable to descriptive studies and analysis, the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the Indian Muslim situation with all its regional, cultural and class components has been largely ignored by most thinkers and activists. It is at their own peril that Muslims ignore their regional and class-specific problems. What is needed today is a series of studies regarding educational aspects of Muslim communities from different parts of the country to investigate the many divergent patterns of their

secular and religious education. The present enquiry arose in the context of such a felt need for education of a marginalised minority community in contemporary India.

### **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Andhra Pradesh is the fourth largest state in India, in terms of area, and the fifth largest in terms of population. Geographically, Andhra Pradesh has three broad divisions: Telangana (ten districts), coastal Andhra (nine districts) and Rayalaseema (four districts). Each is a distinct area, geographically as well as in the socioeconomic composition of the population. The same can be said about the Muslim community of each area. They have distinctive social, cultural and linguistic characteristics.

According to figures from the 2001 Census, the Muslim population in Andhra Pradesh is 9.17 per cent of the total population.

In Rayalaseema – 12.51 per cent (four districts)

In Telangana – 12.43 per cent (ten districts)

In Coastal Andhra – 4.54 per cent (nine districts)

A large number of Muslims in Andhra Pradesh live in urban areas and are mostly artisans, petty shopkeepers, traders, skilled and unskilled workers and labourers belonging to the working class. A majority of the Muslim masses are illiterate and poor.

Many of the studies on Indian Muslims have shown that Muslims lag behind in education<sup>2</sup>. A positive endeavour has to be made in welfare measures to improve the status of Muslims to present day needs. It is noted that Muslims all over the country have long been subjected to neglect and isolation. On account of this, they have fallen behind in the march towards progress. Even a cursory look at the ethnic origin of the bulk of the Indian Muslims and their ethnography will indicate that the educational and social backwardness of this community is historical, going back to the period when they got converted to Islam.

### **EDUCATIONAL CONDITIONS OF MUSLIMS**

Education is the foremost important factor that brings about transformations or radical changes among underdeveloped people. Any nation, any community or

any individual cannot prosper and develop without education. Many scholars have referred to the role of education in the removal of poverty. For instance, Carl Weinberg<sup>3</sup> observed, 'Education is the major vehicle through which the generation to generation poverty cycle can be broken. The school must provide first the motivation and then the skills, abilities and knowledge that poor youngsters require to break free from the demoralizing and debilitating effects of deprivation'. Margaret Mead, the famous anthropologist, refers to education as a cultural growth. There are quite a few studies that stress education as an important tool in the development of human beings.

Russell<sup>4</sup> in his book 'Education and social order' focuses on the development of social order with the progress of education. He states that education makes people live their life in a more harmonious manner and leads to social order. Ramaswamy<sup>5</sup> points out the importance of education in economic growth. He infers that education will lead to positive economic growth to a considerable extent. Kamath<sup>6</sup> has studied various dimensions of education in rural Maharashtra, and he writes that although education has increased in level to a certain extent, stringent policies are still needed to augment it. He points out the fact that there is very little information on the educational status of Muslims in India since independence. He points out that there is poor literacy among the Muslims.

### **Muslim Education in Andhra Pradesh**

According to Muslim history and traditions, during the Muslim rule in India, the syllabi, teaching techniques and methods were perfected from time to time and were taught in both Arabic and Persian. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Madrasa syllabi had both depth and dimension and were multi-disciplinary. When British colonisers conquered India, they set English as the official language. They withdrew their patronage and facilities to Persian language. After the Mutiny of 1857, Muslims were the main targets of the British and they were the most suspect. The British felt that Muslims as the ruling class wanted to claim their authority over the entire subcontinent and so they had to be isolated and weakened. The Ulema also issued Fatwas against learning Western education. The Muslim life and education suffered in the

whole Indian subcontinent. Non-Muslims went ahead, compromised quickly and adopted the Western education. After some decades, Muslim intellectuals realising their situation, which was far behind the other communities, set themselves to start new institutions like the Dar-ul-Uloom at Deoband, the Mohammedan Anglo Oriental (MAO) College at Aligarh, the Nadwat-al-Ulama at Lucknow and many such institutions at many other places.

As the British introduced their own machine goods and machinery in the Indian market and increased taxes on Indian goods considerably, the balance in the Indian market for Indian goods had changed. Consequently, a large number of Muslims (over 70 per cent) who were engaged in rural vocations, handicrafts and industries were reduced to starvation levels. The loss of Zamindari system and state jobs made even the high-income group Muslims near paupers. Thus, the British reduced the whole of Muslim economic status to near poverty line. Increased poverty levels reduced Muslim education to a great extent.

Now, let us examine the condition of the educational system that exists in the Muslim community in Andhra Pradesh.

In pre-British days, there was no state administrative machinery of the modern type and education was not controlled by any external agency. Both Hindu and Muslim rulers considered it as a religious obligation to help the spread of education. Liberal grants and donations were awarded to the respected religious leaders to set up educational institutions. Royal patrons founded educational institutions and endowed them with funds. In medieval times, educational institutions were located in mosques and Dargahs. For instance, the Hazrat Baba Dargah in Penukonda had been granted land and villages by the Vijayanagara monarchs<sup>7</sup>.

During 1800 AD, when the Rayalaseema districts, which were otherwise known as Ceded districts, and the Andhra area came into the hands of the British, there were small Madarasas and Maktabas that were imparting education to Muslim students. The British introduced English and secular education in the region after 1813 with the efforts of Charles Grant, Wilber Force and others through the Charter Act of 1813. This was the beginning of the

Western system of education in India under the company rule. In the Telangana region, which was ruled by the erstwhile Nizams, educational institutions continued with their own version of medieval curriculum. Sir Thomas Munro, the Governor of Madras Presidency, began to pay more attention towards education in 1822. He was a real pioneer in the educational movement in South India. Since then, there was a positive change in the educational aspects of Muslims<sup>8</sup>.

With the consolidation of British rule during the first half of the nineteenth century and with the grants from the East India Company, education also underwent some changes. There emerged the Anglicist view represented in the extreme form by Macaulay's Minute (1835) and in more balanced statement in Wood's Despatch (1854). As a result, Persian was dislodged from its prime position in the administration in 1837 in Bengal, and thereafter successively in one province after another. English replaced Persian at the higher level, and Indian languages at the lowest level. Education among the Muslims was affected by these turn of circumstances, and their response to it varied from one part of the country to another.<sup>9</sup> Some of the Muslims in this region accepted English and were in the mean time serving in the British Government in various positions.

Minority education in our developing country is an aspect interlinked with Muslim education. It is well known that mass education and literacy have not progressed very well. Most children from poor, low-caste and other underprivileged families tend to drop out before completing their primary education. Many regional and occupational groups among Muslims fall among the underprivileged. Migration of the educated elite in the Muslim community to Pakistan even after partition had reduced the percentage of educated individuals in the community considerably. The percentage of educated individuals among the Muslims in all the income groups, be it at high, middle or low level, is low. Nevertheless, it is believed that Muslim education has to play an important role in preserving the growth of national identity.

#### **EDUCATION OF THE GIRL CHILD**

It is commonly said that if you educate a male, you have educated only one person, and if you educate a female,

then you have educated the entire family. Therefore, education of the girl child is desirable and it always shows progress in the family.

In 2002, the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act made elementary education a fundamental right for all children in the age group of 6-14 years. Most academic experts know that the primary hurdle in achieving this target would be bringing the 'girl child to school', especially those from lower and backward economic classes and castes of the Indian society (report of the task force on education for women's equality). It is of little surprise that the current United Progressive Alliance Government at the Centre, now entrusted to meet the law, has laid particular emphasis on education reforms, with special weightage being given to 'empowering women' and 'education for women's equality', in their National Common Minimum Programme. The NCERT framework that provides a guideline for the syllabi in the primary, middle and high school curricula was due to be released in April 2005. The central advisory board of education (CABE), which is the apex advisory body on education, has formulated a special sub-committee for 'Girl's Education and Common School System' and 'Committee for Universalization of Secondary Education', to identify the obstacles for gender parity in the current educational set-up.

Education is on the concurrent list and hence a responsibility of both the Central and State Governments. In July 2003, a special thrust on women's education came from the Indian Government through the National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Levels (NPEGEL), as a part of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). A budget of over Rs. 10 billion was promised to this scheme. The programme was aimed to develop a Model Girl Child Friendly School at the cluster level (ten villages) with incentives to provide uniforms, stationary, free textbooks, remedial teaching, bridge courses, etc. Another scheme was formulated on behalf of the government – the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) – to encourage girls preferentially of backward class and caste to be in school.

That women's education is a critical focus for any 'welfare state' has been brought out in reports by various committees and sub-committees, since India's

independence. There has been special provision for the education of women in every 5-year plan projects in India. Under the Constitution of India, men and women are equal citizens in the eyes of the law and hence have equal rights to all state resources. However, social, economic and cultural dynamics have prevented the law from translating into reality. As recent as 2001-02, the participation rates of girls in primary, middle and high school are 44.1, 41.8 and 39.5 per cent, respectively. Female literacy stands at 53.7 per cent compared with that of 76 per cent for men, from the 2001 Census report. According to government reports, 45 districts in India, mainly in the states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Orissa have female literacy below 30 per cent, according to the claims of Government of India's report.

What we have seen so far is that policy makers have time and again opened dialogues and tried to impress upon the State and its people the gravity and the need to address the role of education in gender parity and gender in the educational framework. In 1967-68, The Education Commission clearly stated in their report – 'For full development of our human resources, for improvement of homes and for moulding the character of children during the most impressionable years of infancy, the education of women is of even greater importance than that of men. In the modern world the role of women goes much beyond the home and bringing up of children. She is now adopting a career of her own and sharing equally with man, the responsibility for the development of society in all its aspects. This is the direction in which we will have to move.'

The National Policy on Education (NPE) that was drafted in 1986 and revised in 1992 was a landmark in the field of policy on women's education in that it recognised the need to redress traditional gender imbalances in educational access and achievement. It recognised that the entire 'educational system is alive to the gender and regional dimensions of educational disparities' and that there is a need for a 'positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women'. In their plan of action, it was recommended that all Bureaus of the Department of Education would prepare a concrete action plan addressing gender-related concerns, and that a monitoring unit would be created in the planning division of the

department to ensure integration of gender issues into policy programmes and schemes. In addition, all annual reports would have to clearly spell out what steps were taken to improve the access of women and girls to education. It is clearly stated in the Report of the Task force on education for women's equality that 'It is impossible to achieve Universal Elementary Education unless concerted efforts are made to reach out to the girl child'.

### **A) ELEMENTARY EDUCATION AND THE GIRL CHILD**

#### **ENROLMENT**

The Constitution of India stipulates that the state should provide free education for every child up to the age of 14 years. This implies that school enrolment should not differ across states and by socioeconomic groups. However, there is a lacuna in the percentage of enrolment of Muslim children *vis-à-vis* non-Muslim children. Considerable differences were evident with regard to Ever Enrolment Rates (EERs) by social groups between states. STs, SCs and Muslims recorded the lowest level of EERs, just ~62 per cent. Christians had the highest levels of 91.3 per cent, followed by Hindus with 72 per cent<sup>10</sup>.

The educational background of the head of the family is an important factor in determining the education of children. It is generally accepted that if the head of the family has received certain levels of education, the other members of his family would have also received either at least to the same standard of the head of the family or even higher. Further more, as they happen to be the decision makers in many activities of the family, education is bound to influence their judgment.

#### **REASONS FOR LOW ENROLMENT**

1. Low financial status of parents and unwillingness on the part of their children to attend school.
2. The social atmosphere of the inhabited area where the children are living.
3. It is also seen that as the income level increases, school enrolment also increases and there is a considerable improvement in the case of females. Female education not only helps improve enrolment but also reduces gender disparity in school enrolment.

4. Low school enrolment and gender disparity are manifestations of poverty and inaccessibility of the schooling system.
5. Landless wage earners and small artisans in villages with low development have very low levels of school enrolment.

#### **FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR NON-ENROLMENT OF CHILDREN IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS BY GENDER HAVE BEEN CATEGORISED BELOW:**

- Lack of interest of parents coupled with unwillingness of the child.
- Customary factors, such as girl engaged or married off.
- Supply-related factors, such as school too far, school not functioning properly, etc.
- Demand-related factors, such as domestic work, participation in economic activity, financial constraints, etc.

One can attribute this to the fact that Muslim organisations have still not charted out a long-term plan to consider aspects related to education and other social issues.

#### **DROPOUTS**

In the study of educational aspects of a community, the present day recurring educational phenomenon of dropouts is a significant one. This study assesses the problems of dropouts and the consequences arising from there. Dropouts are the natural result of a socioeconomic system that is prevalent in the Muslim community. The problems of dropouts among the schedule castes and other backward classes have been studied by few scholars like Srikanth<sup>11</sup>, Khan<sup>12</sup> and Chauhan<sup>13</sup>. There are extremely limited studies that focus on the problem of dropouts among Muslims.

#### **REASONS FOR DROPOUTS**

In urban areas, Muslim children take up employment at a very early age. They do petty jobs by being cleaners, helpers, vegetable sellers, fruit sellers, etc.; this is partly because of poverty and also because of the involvement of parents and their encouragement in such jobs.

Consequently, the environment becomes less conducive for their educational advancement. Both male and female children in rural areas do menial jobs like beedi making, agarbatti making, plucking the agricultural produce/grass, etc.

- a) Pressure of domestic work: girls take care of small children at home and also perform domestic chores. Therefore, they are in the majority among dropouts.
- b) Irregularity of teachers: in an environment where there are one or two teachers in a school of more than hundred children, if one teacher does not come to school, the students quarrel among themselves and create ruckus. This sends a wrong signal to the parents and they stop the children from going to school.
- c) Lack of facilities: a recurring phenomenon; many of the Telugu- and Urdu-medium schools lack the basic infrastructure.
- d) Large family size or joint family with illiterate elders pampering the children sows disinterest and irregularity among children towards education.
- e) Harsh treatment of teachers towards children is also one of the reasons for dropouts.
- g) Parents want most of the girls to study in Urdu-medium schools, where traditional values are taught. When a girl comes of age, parents show reluctance to send her to school.
- h) There are few girls' schools, and parents are wary of sending their daughters to co-education schools. Moreover, parents are also worried about the safety and security of the girl child.

## **B) HIGHER EDUCATION OF THE GIRL CHILD**

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## **GENDER DISPARITY IN LITERACY RATE**

In most of the Muslim houses, education for a girl is meaningless, because they do not find any future in it. They are forbidden from office work. They cannot think of leading an independent life, as it is not a part of their 'tradition'. As it is, girls do not opt for education. Those who manage to reach the post-graduation level see their parents finding it tough to look for an equally educated bridegroom.

Besides this, working girls are equally unacceptable in the neighbourhood. In fact, everybody finds them 'too advanced and outgoing'. However, in the Muslim tradition, most of the families consider teaching. To be a teacher is the best and only option for them. In fact, families are reluctant to let females pursue higher studies, first because they are afraid of looking out for educated matches and second because they fear that on seeing his wife earning, the husband might leave his job as has happened to many working women.

Apart from a small fraction of working and educated girls, there is a large percentage of teenage girls who should be going to school, but remain at home because they are not encouraged for higher studies. In fact, elderly women tell them that there is no point in studying, saying that 'karni to wohi chulhaa chakki hai' (ultimately they have to do cooking and household work), and since one day the girls would leave their parent's home, they feel that it is better for them to concentrate on washing, cleaning, stitching and other chores. Although most of the time, women and girls remain indoors and are not allowed to go out, yet they are specially sent to nearby institutes to take training in these fields.

In the pearl city of Hyderabad, the sad plight that is not highlighted is the fact that in Urdu-medium schools, buildings are in dilapidated conditions and without even basic infrastructure like drinking water. Students sit on mats whether it is summer or winter, toilets are in a bad condition or are unavailable and the behaviour of teachers towards their wards is very bad. There are some cases where the girl child is abused by female teachers who force them to perform their household chores. They come to school, take the attendance and then go to perform the household work. This is exploitation in the name of imparting education.

A Muslim girl faces ubiquitous unfairness basically on three counts.

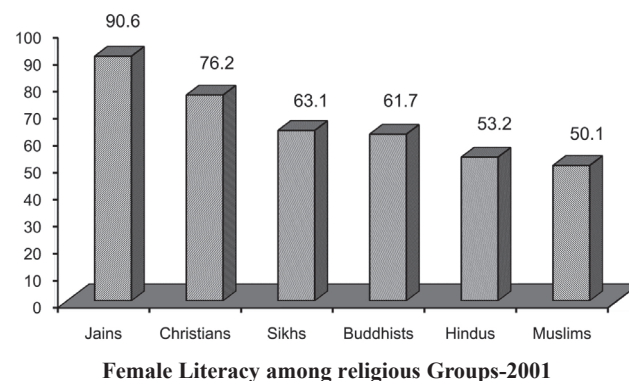
- i) As a girl in society
- ii) As a girl from a minority community and
- iii) As a girl from within the Muslim community due to several social restrictions.

This requires a change in the value structures of most of the societies. The diffusion of literacy, education and knowledge among the masses giving equal opportunities to females or without any gender restrictions play an important role in breaking down the monopoly of certain forces and gives rise to new groups of the learned, which is the need of the day. The following data reflect the state of female education in India:

#### LITERACY RATE IN INDIA (PERCENTAGE): 1951-2001<sup>14</sup>

Census year	Persons	Males	Females	Male-Female gap in literacy rate
1951	18.33	27.16	8.86	18.30
1961	28.30	40.40	15.35	25.05
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	23.98
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	65.38	75.85	54.16	21.70

#### RURAL-URBAN LITERACY RATES, GENDERWISE: 1991-2001



#### PROBLEMS IN MUSLIM EDUCATION

Poor participation of Muslims in education is specifically associated with certain problems in education.

**EDUCATED UNEMPLOYED:** Parents feel that it is a waste of time and money in giving their wards higher education. They feel that job opportunities are very weak as there are no reservations in education and employment for Muslims in the state.

**COST OF EDUCATION:** As education itself has become more commercialised in recent years, parents feel that an investment in education is taxing their small purse. So much so that some parents feel that college education itself is beyond their reach.

**UNINTERESTED PARENTS:** As the poor cannot afford to maintain their wards in higher education, what is more surprising is the economically well-off parents are not showing interest in their girl child's education.

**BUILDINGS UNSUITABLE FOR EDUCATION:** Many of the buildings are in such dilapidated and untidy conditions that an average person will not want to send his children to any school. The substandard nature of buildings makes it leak during the rainy season, and some of the schools have to be closed on a rainy day. However now, the state government has taken a new initiative to renovate the schools. They should provide basic facilities for children like availability of water, toilet facilities and sufficient furniture.

**LACK OF HOSTEL FACILITIES:** After children complete their education in upper primary schools and if there is no high school or college in the area, it is difficult for girl students to go far away to other towns to pursue their studies regularly; going to other towns and coming again to their own village daily is too taxing. For that, there should be hostel facilities for girls as there are no hostels specifically for Muslim children.

**ILLITERATE PARENTS:** Since they are ignorant about the advantages of education, parents do not encourage the girl child to pursue education.

Early socialisation with other illiterate children does have a negative impact on education. Girls start wearing a veil after the onset of puberty and do not want to go to college wearing veil, where there are other girls without a burqa; thus, they find themselves in a piquant situation. Hence, the veil acts as a deterrent.

If the girl goes for higher studies and gets a job, it becomes really difficult for the parents to find a suitable match for her. During the field trip, I met girls with jobs in state administration, teaching and other professions, who are desperately seeking suitable spouses. Two problems come in the way of marriage; first, they have to give dowry even though they hold jobs. Second, they are not getting suitable bridegrooms commensurate with their educational and occupational status. Therefore, when parents do not see any immediate practical utility in imparting higher education to their girl child, they restrict the education of the girl child up to tenth class or intermediate.

#### **EDUCATION OF MINORITY GIRLS WILL IMPROVE ONLY WHEN**

- i) Their economic and living conditions are improved.
- ii) Muslims must improve schools under their own managements, because the quality and standard of education available to Muslim students in their own institutions are more important than even numbers. Strict supervision of teachers, provision of subject experts for teaching and enforcement of discipline and attendance is the need of the hour.
- iii) More girls' high schools and junior colleges through the English media must be set up and more money

must be spent on the education of Muslims by the state and the community.

This would require a genuine, devoted grass-root leadership to strengthen and supervise educational institutions. The local leaders would have to be trained in management techniques by organising orientation and refresher courses and seminars for them. They should keep in touch with the district and state academic technical and technological education.

- Definite plan of action to set up new institutions, improve and expand older ones must be chalked out. National, state and regional monitoring cells may have to assess and evaluate Muslim institutions and organisational plans. This would make for better coordination and results.
- Education and professional training are the basic needs of the Indian Muslims.
- The constitutional commitment of Universalisation of elementary education should be introduced effectively.
- The government should establish primary, middle and high schools in all Muslim-concentrated areas.
- The school culture must be religiously neutral, and special care should be taken to keep school textbooks free of all controversial, ideological or religious objectionable material.
- People are not giving more interest to education just because of their weak representation in public sectors. If they were given reservation, they would get some assurance of employment and this serves as an incentive for the Muslims to invest in education, in future courses for their children.
- It is observed that females are preferred to male teachers up to the primary school level, because female teachers are generally more sincere.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

The National Policy on Education (NPE) that was drafted in 1986 and revised in 1992 was a landmark in the field of policy on women's education in that it recognised the need to redress traditional gender imbalances in educational access and achievement. It recognised that

the entire 'educational system is alive to the gender and regional dimensions of educational disparities' and that there is a need for a 'positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women'. However, the educational conditions of Muslim girls are not at all encouraging, although a certain amount of mobility has been observed since the last decade. There is no guarantee that their future will be better unless the government machinery and the Muslim organisations take special interests in developing them. There are many reports (Gopal Singh Commission Report on Minorities, Puttu Swamy Commission on Backward classes and the recent report of the A.P state B.C. Commission), Sachar Committee Report and the recent Ranganath Mishra commission report, which opined that Muslims are backward educationally, and that they deserve reservations in education and employment.

Civil society organisations should not only work with specific communities only (like with the Dalits, Tribals, Muslims, etc.) but must also bring different communities together to achieve social integration and generate collective strength. Voluntary organisations (NGOs) that work for education must also focus on the deprivation and discrimination of the minorities and work on their right to education and also on imparting quality education.

To conclude, redressing of minority community grievances by the government and socio-cultural modernisation of the Muslim society should go hand in hand. Indian Muslims in order to face the challenges of globalisation have to alter their outlook, their ways and their style of functioning. The government has to offer an integrated approach to human development that captures the creativity and potential of communities, schools and workplaces. It should combine the lessons of research and practice establishing lasting systems and structures that help learners achieve, workers advance in their careers and citizens improve their communities.

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