Right to education: Status of Muslim female children in Rural Uttar Pradesh

Accepted 13th April, 2017

ABSTRACT

Muslims in India are in the developing stage in socio-economic fields. At the same time they are lagging behind in many fields such as education as compared to other religious communities. This study enhances the various reasons for the educational backwardness of Muslims especially its girls in the country. For this purpose, a study was conducted among the parents and teachers of the drop-out girls from Muslim and other disadvantaged groups. The objective of the study was to understand the various factors affecting the discontinuation of female children school education. The following factors were identified from the outcome of the study, that is, the conventional understanding, financial background, school infrastructure, social environment and security, standard of education and government schemes. The Constitution of India assures women of equal rights and opportunity in every field. In spite of the Constitutional guarantees and other safeguards, females in general and Muslim girls specifically are still lagging behind in education. There might be various barriers affecting female education such as poverty, traditional customs, cultural practices, gender based discrimination and traditional notion of the family. Therefore, it is an urgent need to address these problems faced by Muslim girls, so that they can contribute to the nation development.

Keywords: Female education, literacy, drop-out, empowerment, gender equality, disadvantaged group, marginalized group.

INTRODUCTION

Muslims in India are in the developing stage in socio-economic fields. At the same time they are lagging behind in many fields such as education compared to other religious communities. The basic reason behind this backwardness of Muslims suggested by the various scholars is religious traditionalism. "The backward mindsets of those professing Islam, the identity crisis after the partition of the country, the feeling of alienation as a minority religion and the discrimination from the majority society are other reasons" (Kaur, 2012).

Sachar Committee (2006) identified many reasons behind the backwardness of Muslim community of India, such as, "low socio-economic status of Muslims, higher poverty, lower literacy and educational attainments, higher unemployment rates, lower availability of infrastructure, participation in decision making and in civil services (including police, judiciary and in elected bodies) and above all a perceived sense of insecurity and discrimination.

The major reasons for the low rates of enrolment of girls’ education in India are due to various reasons such as: social discrimination, cultural barriers, relative isolation, high opportunity cost, lack of accessibility of schooling, distance from the habitation sites, high rate of poverty, familiar priority issue, struggle for livelihood, household works, responsibility to look after the younger sibling, early marriage, lack of self-confidence, lack of separate schools, lack of women teachers, limited coverage of
Female education in India

Literacy is one of the standard tools to measure the development of the society and nation as a whole. Indian government is continuously taking steps to bring gender equality in education. Still, the literacy rate of female is far behind from their counterparts. Overall female literacy rate in India is 85.46%, while male literacy is 82.14% and the total literacy rate is 74.04% (Census of India, 2011). Although female literacy rate has improved from 8.86% in 1951 to 65.46% in 2011, still it is not up-to-the mark.

Table 1 shows that female literacy is relatively far from low in India in all the census conducted. It is evident that incentive schemes, insufficient facilities in schools, shortcoming implementation, monitoring and evaluation of schemes” (Kaushal, 2013).

Muslim women in India are pulled back as the most disadvantaged group in the country. They have being victims of misuse and abuse inside and outside their family. Poverty, rigid family system, lack of education and ignorance of rights made them more vulnerable and prey of exploitation in multiple forms. The problems raised by women did not receive much attention from the government and civil society. Even the Muslim intellectual and community leaders are keeping silence in women matters.

This study enhances the various reasons for the educational backwardness of Muslims especially its girls in the country. For this purpose, a study was conducted on the parents and teachers of the drop-out girls from Muslim and other disadvantaged groups in Lucknow district in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

The objective of the study was to understand the various factors affecting the discontinuation of female children school education. The sample of the study comprises of 419 female students, those who are either never enrolled or dropped out; 354 concerned parents; 30 teachers; 10 principals and 25 educational officials were consulted and interviewed. In the present study, most respondents were from poor economic background, either agricultural labourers or engaged in unskilled work.

Table 1: Gender wise literacy rates in India.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>18.33</td>
<td>27.16</td>
<td>8.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>28.30</td>
<td>40.40</td>
<td>15.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>34.45</td>
<td>45.96</td>
<td>21.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>43.57</td>
<td>56.38</td>
<td>29.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>52.21</td>
<td>64.13</td>
<td>39.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>64.84</td>
<td>75.26</td>
<td>53.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>74.04</td>
<td>82.14</td>
<td>65.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India.

India is still lagging in achieving gender equality in the case of education.

Status of Muslim education

Although the Government of India made various policies, programs and laws to improve the literacy rate of the country, the literacy rates vary from state to state and community to community. The complex system such as caste, religious and ethnic groups in India left the particular section of the country more marginalized. Muslim is one of the largest minority groups of India with the population of about 14.2% which has the lowest literacy level as compared to other minorities in India.

The Jains has the highest literacy rate of 94.1% followed by Christians (80.3%), Buddhists (72.7%), Sikhs (69.4%), Hindus (65.1%) and Muslims (59.1%) in the country (Census of India, 2001). Figure 1 shows the distribution literacy rate based on religion in the country. Muslim literacy rate is lower than the national level, that is, 64.84% (2001). Muslim is the only religious group which has a negative literacy gap point compared to the national average.

Figure 2 shows that in India Muslims are the most disadvantaged religious group (gap of -5.71 in terms of literacy rate as compared to the national literacy in 2001 census. Jain is the most advantaged religious group (literacy gap of +29.24) in relation to literacy rate.

Status of Muslim girls’ education

Muslim women education is more vulnerable in India. Literacy rate of Muslim women is 50.1%, which is far behind from Muslim men literacy by 17.5% and it is also behind general women literacy by 3.6% (Census of India, 2001).

With exception of Jain and Christian women, women from other religious community have negative gap in female literacy rate and among all, Muslim women have the highest negative value in literacy gap (Table 2). Since independence, the drop-out rate among Muslim girls was
high but in the recent years the situation has improved.
In the context of Muslim girls’ education, recent studies revealed that financial constraints are the major obstacles for continuing in school. It contradicts with the existing stereotype related to Muslim girls’ education which says conservative force is the major reason for backwardness. The poverty of Muslim households in the country itself is the explanation for the low level of education among Muslim girls (Hasan and Menon, 2004).

Theories related to the disadvantage of Muslim education are given in various dimensions. Some argued that social circumstances led to the polarization of the Muslim communities in the case of educational attainment. Some other sociologists argued that internal factor or the nature of Muslim culture itself made them separate from the mainstream society.

Khan (1978) opposed the first two explanations by saying that Muslims are neither reluctant toward secular
Table 2: Female literacy gap among religious groups in India.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Female Literacy</th>
<th>Literacy Gap*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jain</td>
<td>90.6</td>
<td>25.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>11.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td>63.1</td>
<td>-1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>61.70</td>
<td>-3.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>53.20</td>
<td>-11.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>50.10</td>
<td>-14.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India, 2001 *against national average 64.84 (2001).

education, nor do they suffer due to their minority complex. He argued that the invidious discrimination practiced against them is the prime cause for the educational disadvantage of Muslim community. Ahmad (2000) opined that Muslims gave more preference to the Madrasa education as part of their disregard to other systems of education. Many Islamic scholars are not aware that Madrasa system denies the opportunity for meaningful interaction between students of different community, hence, they grow up feeling alienated in Indian religiously pluralistic environment and besides, the Madrasa education make the Muslim children narrow minded.

Hasan (2003) pointed out that bureaucracy and politicians play key role in keeping Muslims as disadvantaged category by neglecting poverty among the community. He also points out that some Muslims parents even refuse to provide education for their female children due to fear that it will create problem of finding a suitable match for marriage. It is believed that less educated men are reluctant to marry well educated women. The basic reason behind the disadvantages of Muslims education suggested by various scholars (Kaur and Kaur, 2012) is religious traditionalism. They pointed out that the backward mindsets of Indian Muslim, identity crisis after the partition of the country, feeling of alienation as a minority religion and the discrimination from the majority society are other reasons.

However, little macro level data are available on the educational situation among the Muslims, or indeed on any religious minority in India (Jayaram, 2012) despite that many studies attempted to highlight the status of Muslim children education. The enrolment of Muslim children in primary schools is generally poor even in those areas where the Muslims constitute a majority. In the background of Muslim girls’ education, recent studies revealed that financial constraints are major obstacles for continuing in school. It contradicts with existing stereotype related to Muslim girls’ education which says conservative force is the major reason for backwardness. The enrolment of Muslim girls is extremely low. Similarly, the drop-out rate is significantly higher for Muslim students as compared to their non-Muslim counterparts.

Furthermore, related study shows that the educational status and condition of Muslim children especially girls are not satisfactory. Some early literature shows there was a tendency of backwardness in education among the Muslim community due to the cultural ethos. Latest studies showed that this backward tendency disappeared, but social, economic and political factors influenced the educational advancement of Muslim community. It is observed that most of the literatures used the term ‘backwardness’ instead of ‘disadvantaged’ to state the educational status of Muslim community. The prior one gives the wrong notion that the community is moving in opposite direction or against the mainstream education. The latter one means the inferior circumstance or awkward tendency of the community in educational attainment. Consequently, in this study the researcher used ‘disadvantaged’ instead of backwardness as a relevant terminology.

In Islamic philosophy, education is the birthright of every Muslim. Islam provided equal opportunity for education to all and does not discriminate between male and female education. Historically, females played a very significant role in the field of education, established themselves and proved their capacity in various fields. Islam is not limited to religious education (Deeni Talim) as orthodox perception and provides equal opportunity in every walk of life and allows them move equally with the male counterparts.

Muslim women played a very significant role in the foundation of many educational institutions. They received both religious and worldly education (Dunyavi Talim). According to the Sunni scholar, IbnAsakir in the 12th century, there were various opportunities for female education in the medieval Islamic world. He wrote that “that time women could study, earn academic degrees (ijazahs), qualify as scholars (ulamā’) and teachers (usthad). Female education in the Islamic world was inspired by prophet Muhammad’s wives: Hazrat Khadijah, a successful business woman and Hazrat Aisha, a renowned Islamic scholar. According to a report attributed to Prophet Muhammad, he appreciated the women of
Medina due to their desire for religious knowledge (Shinde, 2012).

The Indian constitution talks about equality in education in spite of many difference based on gender, caste, class, religion and ethnicity in the country. The constitution emphasized that education would be given to all citizens of the country. Article 21A mentioned that “The state should endeavor to provide free and compulsory education for all children until they are fourteen years of age”. The right to education was from the right to life in Article 21 of the Constitution. Thus, India showed its dedication to provide free and compulsory education to all in the age group (6 to 14) and made the fundamental rights by passing the 86th Constitution Amendment Act in 2002.

Moreover, many forward policies and programs related to education have been made and reviewed from time to time, keeping in mind the goals of national progress. The National Policy of Education was formulated in 1986 and was further updated in 1992. In this national policy, female education was emphasized and in spite of various legal provisions, Muslim in general and Muslim girls and women in particular are far lagging behind their counterpart as well as, among the other minority group and its educational percentage are comparatively low from others. Therefore, to review the situations and influencing factors, National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (NCMEI) and Ministry of Human Resource Development formed a committee on Girls Education in 2007. The Commission highlighted points of which few are education of the female child and received inadequate priority in the Indian society especially due to the rampant backwardness of masses and social taboos ascribed to it.

The Fifteen Point Program was set up by the Government of India to improve the conditions of the Muslim minority and it focused on the welfare of the minorities of India by enhancing the social, educational and economic status of the minority. In this program, education has been the significant issue to address the problems of the backwardness of the minority community. Some points related to education have been highlighted in these programs. They are more accessibility to school, modernizing Madarsa, scholarships for minority students and improving infrastructure. Apart from this, in order to enhance the conditions of Muslim minority, the government of India made several policies and programs.

**Research design and procedure**

**Methodology**

The phenomenological research method was adopted in this study. Phenomenology is the study of facts, occurrences, or circumstances which are observable. It tries to understand people's perception as well as, awareness of a particular situation. It also looks for multiple perspectives of the same situation to make generalization. Ethnographic accounts of villages, community and schools were studied in the perspective of socio-educational status and access to schools. The school provisions and their role in bringing up the children of the Muslim minority girls and other educationally disadvantaged community girls were also analyzed in the study. For detailed and in-depth analysis, the sample of the study were identified. The sample consisted of the two blocks of Lucknow districts of Uttar Pradesh.

The Lucknow district in the state of Uttar Pradesh was selected for the purpose of the study. The two blocks of the district covered in this study was with a view of understanding the influencing factors on female education. Although the study does not cover all the blocks of this district, it only took few selected Muslim concentrated villages of the two blocks of Lucknow. The present study took into account the enrollment, drop-out and factors that influence the Muslim and disadvantaged groups of Muslim girls. For the purpose of current research project, the chosen methods for the study are survey and interview method for the collection of data purpose. The study was delimited because it was not possible to study all the dimension of female education with limited resource and short span of time.

**Sampling and procedure**

The sample of the study consisted of drop-out girls from Muslim and other disadvantaged groups in the two blocks (Kakori and Malihabad) of Lucknow district in the state of Uttar Pradesh (Figure 3). The sample extended to their parents, teachers, principals and officials.

The data of the study were collected from the household of 10 villages of two identified blocks, Kakori and Malihabad (Figure 4). The names of the villages are: Kakori: Saidpur Mehri, Mahipatmau, Pahia Azampur and Kakori NP and Malihabad: Malihabad NP, Mandoli, Khaslispur, Mujasa, Kanar and Kanar Sahilamau. Intensive Field work was done in two phases.

**Phase I**

Phase one includes survey related to occupation, income of population of the particular areas of the minority and disadvantaged groups. The population was categorized in
three major income groups such as upper, middle and low income groups of the selected communities. These categorizations of the people are generally based on the economic characteristic and their standard of living. With a view of the aforementioned, the following samples were identified and taken for the study after consultation of
various subject experts, policy makers, teachers and the parents of the concerning villages. Figure 5 shows the sample sizes of the data which are:

- Four hundred and nineteen (419) female students consist of those who are either never enrolled or dropped out from school;
- Three hundred and fifty-four (354) concerned parents were consulted and interviewed;
- Thirty (30) teachers were consulted and interviewed;
- Ten (10) principals were consulted and interviewed;
- Twenty-five (25) educational officials were consulted and interviewed.

Girls were identified at the upper primary levels schools from the minority concentrated population. Girls that came from the socially and culturally disadvantaged groups of identified villages were also recognized. These children were identified on the basis of either they never went to school or dropped out from school.

Parents were identified on the basis of economically and socially disadvantaged group of the community from the Muslim and disadvantaged groups. They were chosen from the two Muslim concentrated populations’ blocks of Lucknow district. They are both coming below poverty line or economically disadvantaged groups of the Muslim and other educationally disadvantage communities.

Principals and teachers were first identified on the basis of Muslim concentrated population school areas. Secondly, it was identified on the basis of more Muslim and other educationally disadvantaged area schools. In the educational authorities list, the following educational officials were identified:

NPRC: Nayay Panchayt Resource Centre; ABRC: Additional Block Resource Centre; BRC: Block Resource Centre; ABSA: Additional Basic Siksha Adhikari and BSA: Additional Basic Siksha Adhikari.

The sample also extended to local community leaders whom were first identified on the basis of Muslim concentrated population areas schools. Secondly, it was identified from the areas where more educationally disadvantaged population is concentrated.

**Phase II**

In phase two, data were collected from the minority and disadvantaged group dominated village. In this phase of data collection most of the issues that were generally debated in the civil society included intelligentsia community NGOs and government platform kept in consideration. In this phase of field visit, the following persons including children were consulted. A study was conducted among the parents and teachers of the drop-out girls from Muslim and other educational backward groups. Since the objective of the study was to sort out the factors affecting Muslim and other educational backward female education. As a part of the study, a survey was undertaken in two blocks, Kakori and Malihabad of Lucknow district,
in the State of Uttar Pradesh, India.

Tools and techniques

The relevant data was gathered for the study from the various sources with the help of various means. Structured interview, semi-structured interview and observation techniques were used for data collection. Interview schedules were used for the study for collecting data from:

1) Drop-out girls;
2) Parents of the drop-out girls;
3) Teachers;
4) Principals;
5) Educational officers.

Besides, interviews were taken from the political representatives and civil society members of the concerned identified villages.

Data analysis

The analysis of various factors affecting education of Muslim girls and other educationally disadvantaged groups, that is, their drop-out and barriers of returning to school and continuing education was carried out. For the purpose of convenience, all the variables were categorized into five factors that are familial, economic, social, institutional and political. Social factor was classified further as cultural, environmental and interaction and communication. Similarly, institutional factor was classified as lack of awareness, lack of facilities, services and infrastructure. Political factor includes government schemes and policies related variables. Data was analyzed qualitatively as well as quantitatively.

Delimitations

The delimitations of the study areas are:

1) The field study covers only two CD blocks in Lucknow district;
2) The sample conformed to lower economic class;
3) The study concentrated only on elementary level education;
4) The groups are concerned on the bases of gender, religion and caste;
5) The study covers only Muslim and SC/ST girls.

RESULTS

The study shows that Muslim girls are the most educationally disadvantaged group in India in the case of religious classification. There is no difference in the case of Muslim women of Lucknow and state of Uttar Pradesh. Similarly, in caste classification ST females were in the least position. It is observed that school authorities are not showing interest in passing information about the schemes (uniform and books) to the needy. Muslim women are the most marginalized group in getting benefit from government schemes due to their social status and lack of awareness. In comparison to Muslim women, ST/SC women are far better in the case of accessing benefits from various schemes. This kind of environment inversely affects the education of Muslim girls from low economic families. Thus, Muslim girls are not attending schools regularly, which gradually motivate them in discontinuation of school.

This study found that financial constraint is the common factor affecting the continuation of girl's education supported by previous studies. In the present study, most of the respondents are from poor economic background, either agricultural laborers or engaged in unskilled work. So for earning extra income they assume that larger family with more children is helpful and consequently large number of children in the family. In such a situation, girls are supposed to look after their younger siblings, though; it will hinder their regular schooling. Parents and teachers agree that large family system among Muslim and other backward communities hinders the education of the female children.

This study shows that conventional mind-set about female education is another important factor of drop-out among Muslim female students in this area. There was a belief that female children are the 'wealth of others' hence, spending money on their education is wastage and will not bring any return in future. So, the parents arrange marriage for their female children at early age and because of that they discontinue their education at the earlier stage.

Another conventional belief is that educated girls are not willing to do domestic work in their home or in-law's home when they get married; due to this they may face difficulty in getting good proposal. For this question, there was a mixed response among the parents. However, this study revealed that this conventional beliefs and stereotypes on female education have begun to change. Majority of the parents responded that they are aware of the importance of educating their female children. As a result parents are ready to spend money on education of their female children despite their low income status.

This study further revealed that separate toilet for girls are necessary for their continuation in school. However, the facilities such as table, chair and walls are not mandatory for them. Some parents demand separate school for girls as they do not prefer co-education. Some Muslim parents think that Urdu medium school would be better for the education of Muslim girls. In the case of accessibility, the distance of the school is an important factor for discontinuation of the schooling of girls.
Teachers believed that better transportation facility and school van will help to increase the enrolment among the female students. Distance factor may also be linked to the extra financial burden on the parents in the case of female education.

Security is another concern of parents while sending their female children to school. This study shows that lack of security is not a major reason in the case of discontinuation of girls schooling in the study area. Though, majority of the respondents showed their satisfaction on security arrangements in the school, some of them are still worried about the security. Their concern comes from the ever increasing incidents of molestation and sexual harassments of the female children. Teachers also give security factor as a reason for the drop-out among the female students. This could be inter linked with the other reasons such as parents reluctance in sending their female children out of their home after a certain age limit due to the custom existing in traditional families. Security issues could also be linked to the distance from school, transportation facility, female teachers and neighboring students’ etc.

The study shows that parents are less concerned about the quality and standard of education provided by the school. They think that extra-curricular activities are not required; however, they are concerned about completion of textbooks and home works given by teachers. In other words, parents are willing to send their children to school even if there are no co-curricular activities. They are totally ignorant of the fact that the absence of school activities will not create interest in learning among children. Schools should have adequate activities that have the potential to enhance the interest in education among students because it helps in retention of every student in school. The parental concern on school homework given by teachers shows that probably, they may judge the standard of school education through the regular homework given to their children. The findings of the study depicts that most parents are satisfied with the present standard of education in school.

This study also covered the functioning of various governmental schemes, that is, Aganwadi, National Literacy Mission (NLM), Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) and special scholarship for girl students, which were launched for promoting female education. Majority of the parents said that they got some information about these schemes; however, very few of them agreed that they got benefits through these schemes.

The outcome of this study shows that girls from Muslim and other educationally disadvantaged groups such as SC/ST received some financial help from these schemes in the form of scholarship. Teachers claimed that they are giving information about various running or newly launched schemes and projects related to education to the parents directly and indirectly. Teachers added that these schemes made a positive impact on the enrolments of female students in the area. They are of the opinion that, SSA is the most effective scheme for increasing female enrolment followed by Mid-day Meal and Girls Scholarship. Besides free uniforms, free books, Beti foundation project and Aganwadi also helped to increase the number of female enrolment. Government officials expressed their opinion that Right to Education (RTE) was much effective in the promotion of female education.

During the field visit it was observed that boys are more regular to school compared to the girls’ attendance. Irregularity of female students was linked with various factors earlier explained. In this regard, some headmasters were of the opinion that, this tendency is largely seen in the case of lack of female teachers in schools. This argument is supported by the demand from parental side for special school for female student. The dual-face existing in the society towards female education was also noted. The burden of household chores, looking after the family, zero earning from indoor works and social notions spoiled the female education. As a result, Muslim girls and other disadvantaged groups turn their face toward education and keep hesitancy for involving in various activities, governmental schemes and school activities etc. They have very little faith in the current system which is supposed to improve their situation.

DISCUSSION

Factors influencing Muslim girls’ education

For the purpose of convenience, all the variables were categorized into five factors that are familial, economic, social, institutional and political. Social factor was classified further as cultural, environmental and interaction and communication. Similarly, institutional factor was classified as lack of awareness, lack of facilities, services and infrastructure. Political factor includes government schemes and policies related variables.

Familial factor

Familial factor include variables such as size of family, household work, early girls’ marriage and parental support. Besides, some psycho-social variables such as readiness, perception and mentality were included in this category.

Figure 6 shows the percentage of responses of females, parents, teachers’ and headmasters (H.M) and the mean value related to the familial factors inversely affecting female education. Large family size (58.45%) is the most influencing factor in this category. It is interlinked with other factors such as the early marriage of girls, engagement in household work and consideration as ‘Parayadhan’ (Wealth of others). The tendency of female early marriage is higher in large families. In such families, the household works are normally handled by females.
families where both parents are working to get their daily wages, their female children do various kinds of household work and look after the house in the absence of their parents. Some parents think that females are 'Parayadhan' or wealth of others. This thought that is 'one day she has to go to someone’s home' explicitly disinclined them towards education of the female child. The data shows that 13.5% of girls responded that they lack support from their parents in the continuation of their school education. Data also shows that 5.50% of parents are not ready to send their female children to school and 3.30% of girls are not interested in going to school. It means 2.2% of girls are not going to school due to lack of parental readiness.

Economic factor

Financial burden is the common factor that affects the continuation of female education. It is because most of the parents are from poor financial background and are engaged either in agricultural or unskilled labor for their livelihood.

Figure 7 shows the percentage of responses of girls, parents, teachers, headmasters and officials and the mean value related to the economic factors inversely affecting female education. Low income of the family (72.20%) is the most precise variable affecting the education of girls in this area. Most of the parents agreed that their low income is hampering the education of females. Government has provisions to provide educational aids to economically deprived students. This fund arrives through various schemes and programmes, but due to ignorance of parents and intervention of mediates and stakeholders, many families are not getting the benefit.

However, even those who got benefit from schemes said that they are not fully satisfied with it. For example, many parents said they did not get scholarship for their girls on time or the amount of the scholarship is very low. It means that the entire purpose of the schemes to promote and support girl's education becomes futile if grants or funds are not timely distributed or properly implemented. On the other hand, the case of other disadvantaged groups such as SC and ST are relatively more aware about the schemes and are getting benefit from the programmes. Reason for this difference might be attributed to the factor that many SC or ST women are working outside their homes. Even if they are working in unorganized sector, they have more knowledge about their rights compared to Muslim women.

In addition, another economic reason affecting female education in this category is that females work or indulge in some form of economic activity to support the family. It
was observed that drop-out girls are being engaged mostly in particular commercial works such as ‘Chikankari’, a traditional embroidery work on clothes. The small earnings and possibility of work at home attracted many girls to this work. This is an example of child labor that still exists in India. If the family is standing Below Poverty Line (BPL) and having a large family, it definitely hinders the education of children especially, female children.

**Social factor**

Three sub-factors, that is, cultural, environmental and interaction and communication are included under this factor. Cultural factor refers to the religion, believes, customs and tradition etc. An environmental factor refers to the physical surrounding and interaction and communication refers to the point that links teachers and parents.

**Cultural aspects**

Discontinuation of female education in India and specifically, Uttar Pradesh has huge impact on its socio-cultural factors. Cultural notions about female education are the major factors of drop-outs among Muslim female students in this area. Although majority of the parents responded that education for female children is important, somehow there is connection with the cultural ethos.

Figure 8 shows the percentage of responses of girls, parents, teachers, headmasters and officials and their mean values related to the social factors inversely affecting female drop-out from school. Lack of Muslim teacher representatives (46.17%), Urdu medium school (37.80%) and no ‘parda’ (veil) system (37.00%) comes out as the biggest problem affecting the continuation of Muslim female education. Girls and parents also said that lack of female school is an issue, which is indirectly linked to the pursuance of ‘parda’ system in Muslim society. Regarding the common belief on female education in a family (32.40%), parents are still of the opinion that once girls become educated, they will not do domestic works and disobey their parents at the time of marriage or they may face problems getting an educated partner. Some parents responded that the society is responsible for discontinuation of female education.

**Environmental aspects**

Social and other environmental factors affecting female education impact has always been high in the rural areas. In traditional societies, the female children are expected to do household work and are not allowed to leave the home locality. So, there is need for encouragement from authorities for the improvement of female education.

Figure 9 shows responses of girls, parents, headmasters and officials and mean values of it on the environmental variables affecting female school education. It shows that high distance from the school (63.00%) is the highest affecting variable on school drop-out for girls. Long distance also points towards the problem that the area is still lacking in sufficient school or separate school for girls. Secondly, a point responded by the girls is that if their friends are not going or discontinued their school education, it affects their schooling. Many girls (44.50%) responded that their continuation in school is also
Figure 9: Environmental aspects.

Figure 10: Interaction and communication factors.

depended on whether their friends were going or not. Similarly, neighborhood children going or not is also a matter of concern for them. Besides, less number of female teachers, corporal punishment and lack of encouragement are also seen as hindrances.

**Interaction and communication**

Interaction and communication is a vital way to get into any problem and its causes. To access any information or awareness about education, communication between responsible people is required. To understand the causes of the drop-out of girls and failure of various schemes, it is imperative to have communication between various responsible stakeholders.

Figure 10 shows responses of parents, teachers, headmasters and officials and mean values of it on the interaction and communication variables affecting female school education. It shows that the failure of media in assuming their role is a reason for the drop-out among girls. Lack of proper communication in passing information about schemes is the second most affecting variable on the school education of girls. There is no proper awareness program or it is not running effectively.

**Institutional factors**

Under this category, three sub-factors, that is, lack of awareness, lack of facilities or services and lack of infrastructures are discussed. Lack of awareness about importance of education for girls and use of Right to Information (RTI) are discussed. Under the subject of facilities, school timing, teacher-student ratio, standard of education, security and other services related facilities are discussed. The final sub-heading of lack of infrastructure discussed is about school facilities, playground, water, toilet and mid-day meal, etc.

**Lack of awareness**

Figure 11 shows responses of parents, official and mean values of it on the lack of awareness category affecting female school education. There is no or less knowledge about RTI which can be used for getting information related to the education and school officials and teachers are not interested in passing information to the needy.

Majority of the official respondents’ said that RTI is not properly used, which is a very strong legal provision for all citizens. Secondly, there is gender discrimination against female education, as parents favor the education of boys. This tendency might be due to ignorance and illiteracy of
Lack of awareness

Figure 11: Lack of awareness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No knowledge on RTI</td>
<td>58.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less priority for girls’...</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No job guarantee</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not essential</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 12: Lack of facilities/services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility/Service</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No favorable timing</td>
<td>60.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No teacher-student ratio</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No sport activity</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No distinct program</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No teacher role taking</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No homework</td>
<td>17.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No homework checking</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No distinct program</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No homework checking</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No favorable timing</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

parents or conventional understanding of the society. It is a general perception in society particularly among the lower strata of community that females will never be contributors to family, thus, spending on female education is outright wastage whereas a boy is considered as a ‘liability’. Although maximum number of parents agreed that in present time female education is essential, however, others still think otherwise.

Lack of facilities and services

The various facilities related to school such as, standard of education, co-curricular activities, status of regular homework, Environmental Science (EVS) teaching, sport facilities and other important related activities are further discussed.

Figure 12 shows the responses of girls, parents, headmasters and officials on the variables related to facilities and services and the mean values as well. School timing (60.65%) is the largest variable affecting female school education. Majority of parents said that timing of school for girls is not very favorable. This could be examined with family background, income and family size etc. It also highlighted that there is lack of sufficient separate schools for girls and the distance from school is unbearable. Majority of the officials said that teacher-school ratio and teacher-student ratio are not in an appropriate manner.

It is evident that lack of human resources such as teachers or other necessary staffs have immensely affected the standard of education. Lack of cleanliness in classrooms and in school premises also affect female dropout from school. Lack of sport activities for girls and no proper teaching of interesting subjects such as EVS which has scope for excursion activities are also seen as important variables affecting the diminishing interest of female school education.

Lack of infrastructure

The various aspects of school infrastructures that should be available in any school were studied. Some of these are clean water, toilet, transportation, playground and boundary wall etc.
Figure 13 shows the responses of girls, parents, teachers, headmasters and officials on the variables related to lack of infrastructure and the mean values as well. Lack of proper transportation to the girls impacted their continuation in school. This highlights the need for establishing schools in the rural area for easy accessibility. Transportation problem also depicts that student school ratio is not favorable especially for girls. There is an urgent need of opening new schools to ensure all children are enrolled including girls.

Lack of infrastructures such as table and chair in the classroom also affects the interest of females. Similarly, boundary wall is also an important point in terms of security concerns. Besides, unavailability of clean water, proper working toilet is also an important variable in the case of female drop-out from school. Child labor is highly seen in this area which is also a factor of discontinuation of female children. Children are engaged in these works to get additional income for the family. In this area, children suffer from malnutrition, but the mid-day meal programme is not enough to solve this problem.

### Political factors

The various schemes and its status of implementation among the targeted groups are discussed. It is further divided into two sub-factors which are defect of government schemes and failure of government policies used for the enhancement of female education.

### Government schemes

The question of whether the schemes are sufficient for female education and if present schemes reached the needy groups on time were asked. There was also an inquiry about the popularity of the schemes and whether it reached the Muslims in particular and other disadvantaged groups and if it was enough to increase the enrolments of girls in that area.

Figure 14 shows the responses of the parents, teachers, HM and officials on the running governmental schemes on the education of females and its mean values. Lack of
sufficient relevant schemes (50.00%) is seen as the biggest problem in the promotion of female education. Secondly, those schemes which are already running are not reaching the needy groups on time. Although majority of the officials claimed that the schemes are reaching the needy, most parents disagreed with that by saying no or very little benefit of schemes has reached them. It revealed that the schemes are not reaching on time. Some officials, teachers and headmasters agreed that present schemes are not helping to improve the enrolment of females in schools.

**Status of government policy**

The possibility of impact or not of various kinds of policy introduced by the government in order to improve the enrolment and also the degree of its effect on the education of female was further discussed.

Figure 15 shows the responses of the teachers, headmasters and officials on the status of some government’s initiatives on the improvement of school education, its quality and mean values. In this category, the biggest factor is that there is no or less action taken by government officials and related responsible agencies to stop the rampant problem of child labor (48.00%). Secondly, teacher’s reluctance in following Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) is the important negative variable pointed by 40% of headmasters. It also found that 70% of headmasters responded that teachers are not getting proper training for the use and implementation of National Curriculum Framework (NCF).

Government policies of using contractual teachers as ‘ShikshaMitra’ (Friends of Learning) are also not very effective ways of replacing the regular teacher. Some teachers and headmasters said that the system of ShikshaMitra for teaching purposes is wastage as most of the Mitras are untrained and it is a clear case of misuse of human resource.

The overall analyses of all the five factors affecting female education and drop-out are presented. Figure 16 depicts that economy is the significant and deciding factor among all other factors.

**Conclusion**

The universalization of education among the Muslim girls’ and other educationally disadvantaged group still remains a big challenge in Uttar Pradesh as in other parts of the country. There is a huge gap in terms of literacy and educational attainment among the different groups. Girls are mostly engaged in household work and sometimes outdoor also, but they are not getting proper payment for their works. They are supposed to work for longer time
which eventually hampers their school education. Besides, most parents do not want to send their female children to school, once they attain puberty especially in the case where the school is far away from her home. This is identified in many studies conducted on drop-out of girls from school.

Education is the means for creating awareness among the society to make a gender just society that gives empowerment to the women. It is a burning light which ensures social security and self-reliance for women. As a result, female education has received priority in our governmental policies and planning. The Constitution of India assures women of equal rights and opportunity in every field. In spite of these guarantees and other safeguards, women in general and women of ST, SC and Muslim community in particular are still lagging behind.

This study highlighted the various barriers in the way of female education. They are poverty, customary practices, social and political environment; among all these economy comes in front draw. Therefore, it is an urgent need of time to address these problems faced by the disadvantaged groups in society so they can contribute to the nation’s development. The primary task of the study was to identify the educationally disadvantaged groups. It was visible that there is a tendency of lower literacy rate, low enrolment and high drop-out among ST, SC and Muslim communities especially, female student. Inherent problem of poverty in these areas among the Muslims and other educationally backward groups have highly impacted the education of the children of these groups and in particular, girls.

Men and women in these areas were dependent on seasonal works such as mango plantation and other agricultural labour employment which is not sufficient for their livelihood. Similarly, women from Muslim communities indulge mainly in some traditional earning activities like chikankari or zardozi (a kind of embroidery work on clothes). It is observed that those who are involved in this kind of work in their homes are lacking knowledge about the outer world due to less chance of interaction with people. They are not much aware about providing education to their children, especially, female children. SC/ST women are comparatively better in thinking about the education of children than the Muslim families in the area.

The family size of the Muslim community is considered a barrier to female educational continuation. In a large family, female children are expected to do household chores and caring for children etc. There is a custom in the society, that is, it is the responsibility of females to engage in household work and look after the younger children in the family. The study perceived that this tendency is a factor affecting the continuation of schooling of the female children. Economic discrimination against the female child also made an impact in terms of their continuation in education. Parents from orthodox families are not promoting their women to look for jobs, so they think that female education is also not important. There was a perception that Muslim clergy class often shows their reluctance for the promotion of school education among Muslims and particularly to female students. But the present study shows that majority of clergy are accepting school education of females.

Women constitute almost half of the entire population of the country and their full contributions are very vital for national development. Education is one of the significant means for creating awareness among the society and brings a gender just society that gives empowerment to the women. Education is regarded as a powerful tool for the development and empowerment of women. It is considered as a light, essential and adds value to a person’s life. Education ensures empowerment, social security and self-reliance for women.

In this regard, education has received high priority agenda of the government and the policy planners. The Constitution of India also assures women of equal rights and opportunity in every field. In spite of the Constitutional guarantees and other safeguards, women in general and Muslim girls in particular are still lagging behind. There might be various barriers in the way of female education such as poverty, custom and cultural practices, gender based discrimination and traditional notion of families. Therefore, it is an urgent need of time to address the problems faced by the Muslim girls so that they could contribute to the nation development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author conveys his special thanks to University Grants Commission for providing him the opportunity to conduct the project entitled “A study of factors influencing the Education of Muslim Girls’ and other educationally disadvantaged groups of Lucknow District in U.P.” This paper is based on a major project of the University Grants Commission in the academic year, 2015.

REFERENCES


