



Review Article

Qualitative Analysis on the Academic Achievement of Muslim Girls Belonging to Economically Privileged Families

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ABSTRACT: To attain a 100% literacy rate, India Government has adopted various policies and steps. India is a land of diversity and Muslims are the largest minority in India. But the literacy rate of the largest minority is comparing low and the persisting gender gap is a subject of concern. The Sachar Committee (2016) summed up with the report that poverty is the main cause behind the low literacy rate. Therefore, this study is concerned with economically privileged Muslim families where the economy is not the major factor behind girls' educational attainment. The direct interview of the teachers, educators, and Principals of high fees-structured English medium private schools reveals the educational attainment of Muslim girls of economically privileged families. The study shows that the percentage of Muslim girls significantly drops in higher classes. The analysis indicates that early marriage is the major factor behind their low academic achievement. Social prejudices, social norms, and cultural orthodoxy rule over the education system. Therefore, in spite of various steps taken by the Government the number of students has not increased drastically at the higher education level. The negative attitude of Muslim parents towards girls' higher studies must be changed in order to elevate the status and educational attainment of Muslim girls. Thus, the comparative Islamic religious studies with reference to Muslim girls must be encouraged by society to remove the cultural orthodoxy that impedes girls from their basic rights. The present study will help to understand the specific socio-cultural factors. Religious scholars must create awareness among Muslims about the specific cultural orthodoxy which does not have any religious foundation.

KEYWORDS: Academic Achievement, Muslim Girls, English Medium, Higher Education, Economically Privileged Families.

INTRODUCTION

India is a land of diversity and it is characterized by a diversity of religious beliefs and practices. The data given in Table 1.1 shows that the majority of the population in India practices Hinduism and the largest minority is the Muslim community (CENSUS of India).

Table 1.1: Size and Growth of Population by Religion from 1991-2011

Religion	Percent to total in 1991	Percent to Total in 2001	Percent to Total in 2011	Decadal Growth Rate 1991-2001 (%)	Decadal Growth Rate 2001-2011 (%)
Hindu	81.53	80.5	79.8	20.0	16.8
Muslim	12.61	13.4	14.23	29.3	24.6

Christian	2.32	2.3	2.3	22.1	15.5
Sikh	1.94	1.9	1.72	16.9	8.4
Buddhist	0.77	0.8	0.7	23.2	6.1
Jain	0.4	0.4	0.37	26.0	5.3
Other Religion	0.08	0.6	0.66	11.3	19.5
Not stated	0.44	0.1	0.24	21.5	17.7
TOTAL	100	100	100		

[1991 Source Census of India 1991, For 2001 Source: Census of India 2001 and 2011]

The data shows that Muslim population growth in India is higher in comparison to other religious communities (Table 1.1), though it has declined in the past few decades; (From 29% in 2001 to 24% in 2011) this growth is significantly higher than other religious communities. To reduce the gender gap in the educational field and in work participation, it is very important to focus on the literacy rate of males and females in every section of society. In spite of various initiatives taken by the Government of India, the literacy rate of Muslims especially females are considerably lower than other religious communities (Table 1. 2: Census 2011).

Table 1.2: Literacy Rate among Religious Communities: (In % age)

Religious Community	Female	Male	Total
Muslim	51.9	62.41	57.155
Hindus	55.98	70.78	63.38
Jains	84.93	87.86	86.395
Christians	71.97	76.78	74.375
Sikhs	63.29	71.32	67.305
Buddhists	65.6	77.87	71.735
Others	41.38	59.38	50.38
TOTAL	65.46	82.14	74.04

[Source: 2011 Census]

In 2006, Sachar Committee was formed to study the social, economic, and educational condition of Muslims in India, and that report brought into light some major issues of this community. According to the report, Muslim girls' enrolment in primary level education is 35% whereas in Higher Secondary Level this percentage drops to only 4 %. (Figure 1.1). The Sachar committee Report analysed the collected data and concluded that poverty is one of the major factors behind the low literacy rate and high dropout among Muslims in India. Thus, the literacy rate of Muslim girls from economically privileged families is a subject of study. The qualitative analysis helps us to explore for in-depth study of economically privileged Muslim girls and their educational attainment.

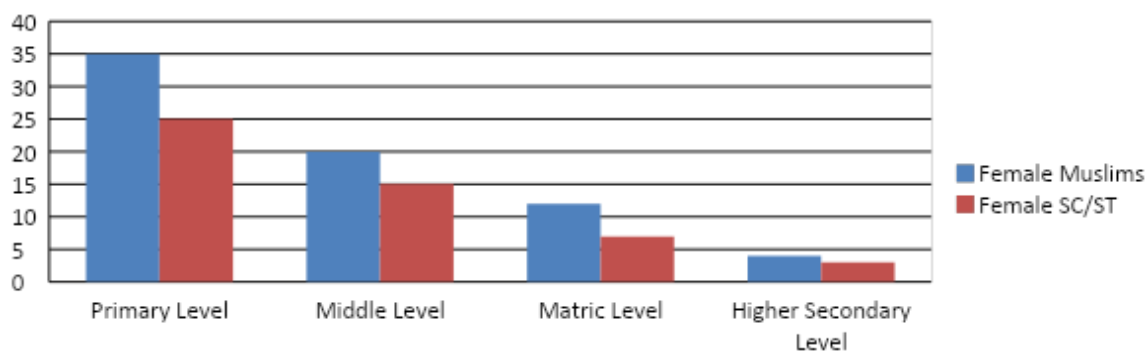


Figure 1.1: Percentage of enrolment of Female students at a different level and comparison between Muslim and SC/ST students:

Delimitation

For the study, the adjacent area of Kolkata, Garden Reach, mostly populated by the Muslim population has been chosen. The high fees-structured school of that particular area has been selected. Most of the economically privileged Muslim parents of that area prefer high fees-structured schools for their children. Thus, the teachers and principals of those schools are the primary sources to know the mindset of the parents and the academic progress of the Muslim girls of the area. As well as serves the purpose of our study.

Procedure

Semi-structured and audio-recorded interviews each lasting approximately 20 minutes were conducted to record the opinion of the participants (N= 15) on the academic achievement of the Muslim girls and their performance and attitude towards education. 3 principals and 12 teachers of different English medium high fees-structured private schools in the Garden Reach area were included. The data collection was done under a semi-structured interview schedule consisting of 7 questions regarding the academic performance of Muslim girls and the attitude of Muslim parents and students (see Table 1.3). Initially, there were 20 participants. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed to meet the eligibility for quality analysis. 5 interviews were rejected due to the poor quality of the interview and ambiguous responses which led to a mismatch with the interview questionnaires.

Finally, 15 participants' interviews were considered. For the sake of confidentiality, the names of the teachers are not mentioned and participants were assured that their interview and transcript would not be read in their entirety by anyone except the researcher. Furthermore, informal engagements with the teachers were maintained throughout the research study to get insight into the Muslim girls and their thought regarding Muslim girls' education and their future target. Among the participants, 3 participants were male and the rest were female. The responses were recorded from the participants of different religions (2 Christians, 10 Hindus, and 2 Muslims).

Research Questions

The detailed interview focused on the statements and opinions of the teachers and principals to comprehend their perception of Muslim girls and their parent's attitudes towards the education of girls and women empowerment. In order to determine whether religious factors constrain the academic achievement of Muslim girls, the questionnaires were designed to give an in-depth view of the participants. Sample questions include "Is there any significant difference between the performance of Muslim and non-Muslim girls?" "Do you think that any religious factor plays role in the academic achievement of Muslim girls?" or "Do Muslim girls get encouragement from family for higher studies?"

Table 1.3: Prompt Questions to the Teachers and Principals.

1. Are the numbers of Muslim girls' enrolment increased, decreased, or has no such remarkable change in the number or percentage?
2. Is there any significant difference between the academic performance of Muslim and non-Muslim girls?
3. Do religious factors play any role in the academic achievement of Muslim girls?
4. Do Muslim girls get encouragement from family for higher studies?
5. Do Muslim girls have any career achievements or targets??
6. Is there any specific reason behind the marriage of Muslim girls at an early age?
7. What attitude do the parents have towards women empowerment?

DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic Analysis was applied due to the flexible nature of this method, which suited the high complexity of the information and the lack of a priori theories or conceptual models available to guide coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic Analysis is a technique that focuses on analyzing information by finding recurring patterns in the data, making inductions based on knowledge of the subject area, condensing the information into emergent topics, and subsequently describing these as key themes (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). From the thematic analysis, a large set of themes emerged, and these were then reduced by conducting an in-depth interpretative analysis. With the help of latent content analysis, coding structures with themes and sub-themes were developed under a series of domains corresponding to content foci of interview questions (e.g., early marriage, orthodoxy, prejudices, women empowerment education). A final coding scheme was created based on emergent theme identification and coder agreement.

To find the factor behind the low academic achievement of Muslim girls from economically privileged families, the data collected from interviews were analyzed to code the data appropriately to generate the themes from the interview extract. The generated themes are as follows- *Rise in enrolment of Muslim girls in junior classes; Misinterpretation of religion and the inferior status of women in Muslim society; Social prejudices, norms, and cultural orthodoxy rule over the education system; Significant attitudinal differences between Muslim and non-Muslim girls and their academic achievement; Early Marriage and disapproval of women empowerment in Muslim society.*

THEME 1: RISE IN ENROLMENT OF MUSLIM GIRLS IN JUNIOR CLASSES

The participants' responses were analyzed for an in-depth study to find the answer to the questions related to the enrolment of Muslim girls from economically privileged families. Teachers and principals of English medium schools reported that the number of enrolments of Muslim girls has increased comparatively. The participants' view regarding the educational attainment of Muslim girls gives a clear picture of the current situation of Muslim girls in the area.

“Yes, there is a huge change in the number of Muslim girls in our school. At the very beginning, the numbers of Muslim girls were not so much but now boys and girls are more or less equal in number in junior classes.” [Principal, IQRA EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION]

Parents' active involvement in junior classes: Participants from different schools are active observers of the students. Their experience and observation unfold the current situation and evolving attitude of the parents. Interest in admitting girls to school during childhood, regular involvement of the parents in children's (daughters) studies, and eagerness to know about the development and progress of the children and their performance in school are the changed behaviour of the parents toward their daughters' education.

"Previously they were not bothered about the education of children. But in recent times, they take part in everything. They have a lot of queries about the development and progress of children." [Principal of IQRA EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION]

"Muslim parents do not delay in admitting their kids to school irrespective of gender." [Junior Section teacher, Birla Bharati]

"Previously it was very hard to find Muslim girls in a class. Now, almost 90% of the students of our school are the Muslim. As the school is located in a Muslim-majority area, 90% of the girls are Muslims. In that comparison, I can say that the number of Muslim girls' enrollment has drastically changed in past few years." [Teacher of All Saints High School]

Additionally, the participants themselves concluded that the involvement of the parents in their daughters' education has comparatively improved with time and it is a positive sign which may bring a brighter future for the girls of the community.

"Previously they were not bothered about the education of children. But in recent times, they take part in everything. I believe, slowly parents will show interest in higher studies of the girls but it may take time." [Principal of IQRA EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION]

"If you see the number of Muslim girls' enrolment- yes it has increased in comparison to previous years. 10 years ago, the number was less." [Principal of All Saints High School]

"In that comparison, I can say that the number of Muslim girls' enrollment has drastically changed in past few years. Maybe in coming years, we can see more changes in the attitude of parents" [Teacher of All Saints High School]

Reduction in the number of Muslim girls in higher classes: Participants from different schools described how the number of Muslim girls decreases in higher classes. From the surmise of the respondents, it is perceived that the parents who are very active in junior classes show very little interest in their daughters' higher studies. Most of the students are first-generation learners or their parents have very little knowledge about education and its scope. In higher class, they cannot assist their daughters academically; therefore, they lose interest and detach themselves from their involvement. Due to an inferiority complex, they hardly interact with teachers regarding the progress of the children. After a certain time, the parents, especially mothers ignore the teachers. The gap between teachers and parents takes shape in form of the disinterest of parents in their daughters' studies and parents become negligent towards their daughters' studies. As a result, girls show hardly any inclination toward studies, and the number of girls decreases in higher classes.

"There is a greater number of girls present in junior classes than higher class." [Principal, IQRA EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION]

"In higher classes, the number decreases significantly. Some of them change schools and many discontinue their studies." [Principal, JD English Medium School]

"If we talk about girls, the number is more in junior classes. The number does not remain the same in higher classes. The drop-out is not less." [Teacher of JD English School]

“Yes, till class V and VI, parents are very active. After that, it is difficult for the parents to look after their studies.” [Principal, JD ENGLISH MEDIUM SCHOOL]

Fluency in English is more significant than knowledge acquisition: Economically privileged Muslim families prefer English medium schools for their girls. In general, parents enroll their daughters in school as a formality without forming career goals for them. The primary aim of choosing an English medium school is to maintain standards. Private English medium school is a symbol of status. Therefore, admitting daughters to English medium schools is a question of affordability for the parents. It determines the economic condition of the parent. Knowledge acquisition is not a top priority for Muslim privileged parents who send their daughters to English medium schools. Economically privileged families have access to everything in terms of money and fluency in English sets their standard, adding an extra feather to their hat. Almost every parent chooses an English medium school for their child (girls) to develop good fluency in English.

“They need to get a tag of an English medium school, so they admit their daughters to English medium school.” [Principal, JD English Medium School]

“Economically privileged families are more concerned about English speaking. Money is not a factor. So, they admit their children (boys and girls) to English medium school.” [Teacher of JD English Medium School]

Generally, students develop fluency in English by class IX or X, so sending daughters to school after gaining proficiency in the language is meaningless. From the perspective of Muslim parents and daughters, Education is not a ladder to upgrade their careers. The value of education is still not instilled in parents or children. Education is barely meaningless to them since it lacks value.

“Moreover, parents also think that they have learnt enough. By the time they go to class X or XII; most of them gain confidence in fluency. Parents are happy to see that and that is only their target.” [Teacher, BIRLA BHARATI]

The rise in enrolment of Muslim girls indicates a positive sign for the development of the entire community. The ulterior motive behind the rise in number is not directly correlated with the development of girls and their status in society. Still, gender discrimination exists and girls are given education not for obtaining their desired careers but to maintain their parents' status in society.

THEME 2: MISINTERPRETATION OF RELIGION AND INFERIOR STATUS OF WOMEN IN MUSLIM SOCIETY

In addition to the perception of the factors responsible for the drop-out of Muslim girls in general, participants also discussed specific factors that act as a barrier to Muslim girls for their educational attainment. As it is a study of a specific community and its academic achievement, therefore it is significant to know the religious factor and its influence on its people. The participants revealed that religious interpretation and lack of knowledge of the parents steer the life of Muslims in different directions.

“As it is a Muslim-majority area and Muslim students are being spared from education so the question arises about the particular community. Religion is the factor or not I am not sure but some religious interpretations stop them from acquiring knowledge that I am sure about it. When we talk to the parents- they say “it is not allowed in our religion”, “We are bound to do” and many more.” [Teacher of JD English Medium School]

“Religion can be one of the factors. Some religious philosophies may have an influence on their life. Mind-set and sociocultural factors are also responsible for the existing status of the girls in the area. Many families (especially males) use religion for their purpose.” [Teacher of All Saints High School]

“Religious interpretation plays a major role, not religion.” [Principal, JD English Medium School]

According to the opinion of the respondents, it is tough to convey to the parents- the importance of women's education for the development of the community and nation. The preconceived notion regarding women's role in family and society contradicts the significance of women's education in Muslim society. 1400 years ago (during the Prophet's time) the lives of the people were not the same as 21st century. Since then, many changes have been brought and dynamically embraced by everyone including Muslims around the world; to meet the demand of the time. Education is indispensable to progress and it leads to the development of a country.

In general, education—as a critical component of a country's human capital (irrespective of gender)—increases the efficiency of each worker and helps economies to move up the value chain beyond manual tasks or simple production processes (WEF 2016). Therefore, the educational attainment of every individual is a basic need, irrespective of gender. It is noted from the responses of the participants that Islamic fundamentalism, however, adheres strictly to customs that were practiced 1400 years ago without considering their validity in recent times. Moreover, the majority of the Muslims in this area use their interpretation of religious philosophy at their convenience. In this context, the association of religious philosophy with women's education in present times- resulted in a backlash in the form of social alienation of women from the outer world. The participants opined that for the sustainable development of the community there is a requirement for substantiation in religious interpretation.

“According to the parents, Muslim girls should get married in adolescence. After puberty, daughters get to be married as early as possible. From their religious perspective, every father must give their daughters in marriage to perform Sunnah. But the value of the education they do not understand.” [Principal, IQRA Educational Institution]

“I feel that the parents who give their daughters in marriage at an early age hardly know about religion.” [Principal, All Saints High School]

“If we say that Islam also gives importance to education, they deny the fact. People must be flexible to adapt to change. It is impossible to embrace changes with a rigid mindset.” [Teacher of IQRA Educational Institution]

“People bend their religion as per convenience and flexibility is observed when it is necessary.” [Teacher of Birla Bharati]

Parents take refuge in religion to defend their negative attitude: To substantiate the ideology of any religion, it is important to read, understand and apprehend the philosophy of particular religion. To read and understand, one must have basic education. Education enables the thought process and develops the reasoning and logical ability of a person. (Al-Shuaibi 2014). Lack of education keeps people in dark. Due to the lack of education, the religious view of Muslim parents toward women has not evolved with time. The recorded view of the participants indicates that the Muslim-majority society of Garden Reach disregards women's education and the lack of education of the parents is one of the factors behind it. Rather than accepting the importance of women's education, most of the fathers justify their negative attitude under the refuge of religion without giving any conventional reasoning.

“Most importantly, many of the students are first-generation learners. May the next generation will have some changes in their belief and practices.” [Teacher, Birla Bharati]

“Parents are not interested in education because they do not want the women to work outside or to get involved in earning. Hence, education has no value to them. They say, Sharia does not allow the girls to go out or it is prohibited in Islam”. [Principal of JD English Medium School]

“But here, it is said that Muslim girls are not allowed to go to school, college, or for work. I don't know the philosophy behind not allowing daughters for basic needs of the society.” [Teacher, JD English Medium School]

“I do not know whether Islam prohibits girls from knowledge acquisition. But the mindset of the male of this area must be changed to improve the status of the girls.” [Teacher, JD English Medium School]

“They say, Sharia does not allow girls to go out or it is prohibited in Islam. So, it is not a good choice for them to send daughters to school after a certain age. I wonder, from where they get such instances to implement in their life.” [Principal, JD English Medium School]

“The girls have very low self-esteem. From childhood, they are brought up in that way. They have no opinion. Early marriage, less freedom, low access to education is not a big issue.” [Teacher, JD English Medium School]

Probability of Religious Influence on Education System: To discuss in detail the barrier to Muslim girls' educational achievement, the participants' responses regarding the existence of religious factors were inexplicit. However, the participants expressed their views ambiguously to avoid any controversy. The subtle statements indirectly indicate the participants' acknowledgment of the persistence of religious factors that impede women's education in a Muslim privileged society. Some of the participants used restrictive language while talking about religious factors for fear of hurting the sentiment of any particular community. The erroneous allegation without proper religious knowledge may lead to turmoil in society. In that context, the participants, with partial knowledge of Islam, hesitated in making statements regarding the influence of religious factors on the education system. The recorded view conjectures the possibility of religious influence on the education system and women's education in Muslim privileged societies.

“Religious factors may play some role in the mind of the parents. Though, I am not sure about it.” [Teacher, BIRLA BHARATI]

“Religion can be one of the factors. Some religious philosophy may have some influence in their life.” [Teacher, ALL SAINTS HIGH SCHOOL]

“I don't know about the religion too much but I think some Religious factors play some major role in the mind.” [Teacher, ALL SAINTS HIGH SCHOOL]

“Religion is used as a weapon. I do not know whether Islam prohibits girls from knowledge acquisition”. [Teacher, JD ENGLISH MEDIUM SCHOOL]

Religious Support on the sustenance of prevalent culture: In Muslim privileged society; most families keep their daughters over-protected from exposure to the outer world to prevent the girls from being exploited by males in the society. The participants claimed that most Muslim families encounter their thought with the interpretation that over-protection is predominantly the prerogative of Muslim girls. Therefore, every Muslim male must provide safety and security to the woman by not allowing them to move out without any valid reason. Many

privileged Muslim families sustain prevalent cultures without any evolution through the intervention of religion.

“Parents feel insecure to send their daughters alone. Parents say women are to be protected by men. For that reason, they do not want to defy the religious instruction by providing emancipation to Muslim women.” [Teacher, JD ENGLISH MEDIUM SCHOOL]

“When we talk to the parents- they say “it is not allowed in our religion”, “We are bound to do” and many more.” [Teacher, JD ENGLISH MEDIUM SCHOOL]

THEME 3: SOCIAL PREJUDICE, NORMS, AND CULTURAL ORTHODOXY RULE OVER THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Every culture has its intrinsic value that helps us to understand our ancestral ethics and their significance in society (Matthes, 2018). Over time, certain practices evolve; others are modified and even certain norms and prejudices are abolished for the sake of mankind and the needs of society. Education and its utility in life are essential for every mankind irrespective of gender. But in Muslim privileged society, some social norms deprive the school attendance of Muslim girls after a certain age, especially after puberty. In this context, the participants explicitly described how prevalent norms in society deprive Muslim girls of higher education. Muslim girls' educational attainment is hindered by society's disapproval of higher education. It is noted that religious orthodoxy undermines the scope of logical and rational thought developed by modern education. Hence, the girls never show their eagerness for higher studies or career-making.

“In my opinion, they follow the tradition and culture of the society without understanding anything. They do not want to adapt to the change in society. Earlier early marriage was practiced in every religion but now it is completely stopped. People have to adapt and acceptance is required.” [Principal, All Saints High School]

“No one is so dared. So, I must say it is a practice that is continuing generation after generation with little or no reformation.” [Teacher, Birla Bharati]

“There are Muslim families who give education to their children and they admit that it is the need of the time. But in this area, people are so rigid that they will not make changes in their traditions and practices. If we say that Islam also gives importance to education, they deny the fact.” [Teacher, IQRA Educational Institution]

Social Norms Disapprove Women's Upliftment in Society: In Most Muslim-privileged societies women are considered to be an individual with no self-identity. The responses of the participants intended to be pertinent to women's emancipation and it indicates that the prevailing cultural orthodoxy is against women's emancipation. As a result, it creates demarcation and limitations in women's career opportunities, professional engagement, and role in family and society. Girls' prudence in the profession is disregarded and explicated by creating the occupational delimitation for girls. Sometimes parents are forced to follow the existing culture to escape from the social allegation of not being obliged by religious command. Due to social pressure parents are forced to discontinue their daughter's education in fear of being stigmatized for giving liberty to their daughters. The participants believe that women's social upliftment is completely against social norms. Therefore, no changes are observed in women's status in society.

“Whenever we ask the parents the reason for giving their daughters in marriage at such an early age? They say “Now only very good proposals of marriage are coming, after this if it

does not come then who will marry my daughter?" It is traditionally going on year after year. No one is ready to break the chain. [Teacher, All Saints High School]

"Parents are scared to allow their daughters to higher studies. In their society, no one gives exposure to their women. If anyone distorts the traditional practice, he must be prepared to hear the negativity. But most of them are not dare to face the criticism."[Teacher, IQRA Educational Institution]

"They accept the culture; they accept the tradition. Even girls are very lazy; they don't want to do anything in their life." [Teacher, All Saints High School]

"They blindly follow the culture without any question. Education helps people to think and question. Due to the lack of education, these people never question their existing culture. What is the value of the existing culture or does it have any negative impact or not no one thinks?" [Teacher, JD English Medium School]

The most important fact is that none of the participants spoke about girls' continuation in school after marriage. Happy married life can be possible with the adjustment of girls in the relationship. The concern is that educated and knowledgeable girls would not adhere to appropriate behavioural norms or they are unable to adjust to marriage which may lead to divorce.

"On the contrary, few parents desperately decided against the culture and society but unfortunately it did not turn out well. Neither are they well settled in their career or marriage. These examples scare them a lot." [Teacher, All Saints High School]

Overprotection of girls safeguards family's Reputation: From the responses of the participants, it is noted that parents' decision to the early marriage of their daughters is due to social pressure and criticism. The participants indicated that the parents, especially fathers, show their eagerness toward their daughters' studies but their mind tends to change with time due to social pressure. In the society where they live it is tough to find a suitable groom for highly educated girls. Most of the males wish to marry less educated and low-aged girls. Highly educated girls are not wished for by anyone due to their high age. Therefore, parents do not allow their daughters to attain higher education as it makes them unmarriageable. Additionally, parents are always worried about their daughters' indulgence in love and affairs at a young age. To the parents, it is a great fear. A small mistake by a girl at a young age makes her ineligible for marriage as well as ruining the family's reputation. Thus, girls are seldom allowed to interact with the outside world for fear of involvement in pre-marital sex or engagement in a relationship. Overprotection of girls saves the family from getting stigmatized by society.

"Parents are afraid of criticism from others and are not ready to make changes. No parent wants to take the risk of allowing their daughter to pursue further education. If the girls make a mistake; or if their parents fail to find a suitable boy, ultimately the blame will come to the parents." [Teacher, Birla Bharati]

"If daughters are highly educated, then it is easy to guess the age of a girl. Above 20 years it is tough to get married. That's why parents don't send their daughters to school or college after X or XII." [Principal, IQRA Educational Institution]

The social norms and culture are not only applicable to unmarried girls, after marriage, but the restriction and rules also remain the same for married females. Women feel vulnerable in going out at any age due to insecurity and social prejudices. The mothers of Muslim daughters have no voice for them as well as for their daughters. The male-dominated society creates the norms and disregards women's emancipation for their own rule to keep women suppressed.

“You know, in our area- I don’t see mothers coming and dropping their children at school. They are not allowed to come.” [Principal, All Saints High School]

THEME 4: SIGNIFICANT ATTITUDINAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MUSLIM AND NON-MUSLIM GIRLS AND THEIR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

The study focuses on the Muslim-majority area but the non-Muslim population does co-exist in the locality. According to the participants, a smaller number of non-Muslim students get enrolled due to the Muslim majority. Though there is a large gap between the number of Muslim and non-Muslim students, the academic performance gap is not too wide at the junior level.

“There is no such difference between the performance of Muslim and non-Muslim girls. Especially in junior classes, there is no gap but from class V onwards you can see that many Muslim students start deteriorating (not all).” [Principal, All Saints High School]

“It is hard to find the difference between the performance of Muslim and non-Muslim girls at a young age. The difference forms from class VII or VIII. Even very good students lack motivation.” [Teacher, JD ENGLISH MEDIUM SCHOOL]

Negative Attitude of Muslim Girls towards Higher Education: The participants reported that most of the Muslim girls’ performance starts declining in higher classes. In the board exam (Class X), among the topper list, a smaller number of Muslim students’ names appear on the list. According to the participants, the maximum educational qualification for the girls is Class X or XII set by their family. To attain the maximum qualification (X or XII), Muslim girls continue their education without any aim for higher studies or any goal. A girl with secondary education can teach her child/children at the junior level. Therefore, a girl with secondary education is highly desired in the marriage market, and good grades establish girls’ reputations as intelligent with their in-laws. With this motivation, Muslim girls tend to focus on their studies, leading to good grades; therefore, the gap in academic scores till class X between Muslim and non-Muslim girls is not as evident. Even though few girls divert from their aim of scoring good grades in senior classes, there is still stiff competition between students in junior classes regardless of caste and religion. Most Muslim girls are not intrigued to excel in academics after class XII. However, they pass class X or XII for the sake of a degree or certificate. Academic excellence is inapplicable in their future life; thus, they develop a negative attitude toward higher studies. According to the participants, many of the girls are unaware of their potential. Additionally, the girls and their families will become the object of criticism if the girls get the exposure to unleash their potential. Moreover, their negative mindset toward higher education helps them to fit into society and save them from social alienation.

“Academic differences are not as such. Muslim girls are very talented. Their academic performances are no less than others. Due to a lack of guidance and support, their result deteriorates in higher classes.” [Teacher, IQRA Educational Institution]

“From class VII or VIII, they are mentally prepared to get married. They come and show pictures of their engagement dress, jewelry, and many more. They also develop a negative attitude towards education.” [JD English Medium School]

“No, we cannot find that much difference in the academic performance of Muslim and non-Muslim girls but yes non-Muslim girls are more inclined towards studies than Muslim girls. Few Muslim girls are very bright in studies they score very good marks but they have no intention of further studies nor do they have any aim in life.” [Teacher, All Saints High School]

Family Discouragement Disables Muslim Girls to Unleash Their Potentiality: As compared with non-Muslim girls, Muslim girls' performances deteriorate, and family discouragement is implicated as a factor. Muslims indoctrinate their daughters from an early age to keep themselves within four walls to preserve the honor of the family. The family members never associate the potentiality of the girls with any profession. The disassociation of the academic degrees of the girls with profession leads to a lack of self-efficacy in Muslim girls. The primary hindrance from family discourages them to unleash their capability and potentiality. On the contrary, for education, non-Muslim girls mostly receive consistent family support. Therefore, it appears that family de-motivation impacts the performance of Muslim and non-Muslim girls differently in the field of education. Even the teachers' effort to unfold their potential is thus totally rejected by the Muslim girls. Therefore, educationists and teachers are mere spectators of their current situation.

“Not too significant differences are found but Muslim girls’ performance can be improved with proper guidance and counselling. Girls know that they will be married after class X or XII. They have no confidence in them.” [Teacher, Birla Bharati]

“They do not know about their potential. Girls also say “What will we do by getting a higher education? We have to cook and look after the family. It is useless of having so many degrees. X or XII is enough for us. Few exceptions are there. But I am talking about the majority.” [Teacher, Birla Bharati]

THEME 5: EARLY MARRIAGE AND DISAPPROVAL OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN MUSLIM SOCIETY

The marriage age of girls is associated with adverse health and social outcomes (Akanksha A. Marphatia, 2017). To maintain a healthy and balanced society, early marriage should not be promoted or encouraged. Marriage is a legal act that requires girls to be at least 18 years old. To stop the prevalent practice of early marriage, a minimum age limit has been set. The responses of the participants indicate that early marriage is associated with the academic achievement of Muslim girls in the area.

Religious Obligation and early Marriage of Girls: Though the Government has set a standard age of marriage for girls in India, many of the Muslim girls in the area get married before they turn 18 years. It is clear from the recorded views that early marriage is prevalent, and parents, despite being aware of the law, have little concern over it. Parents encounter their act with a religious obligation. Participants expressed their opinion towards ascertainment of the religious ideology before religious obligation. The responses indicate parents’ concern towards the early marriage of girls is to safeguard family honour. To find a suitable boy for their daughters, parents determine certain criteria for a groom. At a young age, daughters are not too judgmental.

After a certain age, girls develop their preference in choosing a groom that becomes heavy for the parents to handle or manage. Parents-daughters conflict may arise in choosing a groom. According to the perception of the participants, parents feel girls face adjustment issues after marriage if they get married at an older age (after 18 years). The parents prefer early marriage for girls to avoid all the hassles and want their daughters to get settled in relationships easily. However, these motives are defended by the parents with the religious obligation. To make the young daughters obliged towards their parents, they take the help of religion and daughters are acquiescent towards religion. Religious fundamentals are indoctrinated into the daughters from childhood, which they find hard to disregard.

“They never think of doing anything by themselves because they have never seen any girl of this area achieve something great in life but getting married to a rich fellow and happily leading a marriage are common instances in this place and they are happy to accept it. The girls do not think life beyond it.” [Teacher of All Saints High School]

“Parents are insecure to keep their daughters unmarried after 18 years. Matured girls become too concerned about choosing a husband for them. Girls face more problems in adjustment; once they are mature enough. At a young age, girls can be moulded easily in a new environment, which becomes tough for mature girls.” [Teacher, IQRA Educational Institution]

Requirement of enforcement of the Indian Marriage Act on Muslims: Although early marriages are declining globally (UNICEF 2018), Muslim families in the area hold on to their ancestral practices with no desire to change. Muslim girls should be married under Indian Law instead of Sharia Law, according to respondents, so that everyone is subject to the same rules regardless of religion. The law can serve as a safeguard against the early marriage of Muslim girls to achieve their careers and future.

“Yes, definitely the marriage age of Muslim girls should be increased from 16 years to 18 years to stop early marriage as well for the betterment of the Muslim girls.” [Principal, All Saints High School]

“The shocking fact is that many girls in our school get married in class VIII, and some get married in IX though the number is not much. Many drop class X before writing the board examination due to marriage. Few girls write class X exams after marriage.” [Teacher, IQRA EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION]

“Marriage after class X is very common. Most of the girls get married just after class X. Secondary education is the target to be eligible for marriage.” [Teacher, All Saints High School]

“Marriage age plays a vital role in society. If the marriage age of Muslim girls is increased, I do not know if the status of girls will be changed or not but the academic degrees can be increased from X to XII. I guess that progress is expected.” [Principal, IQRA Educational Institution]

Parents Disregard Daughters’ Financial Independence: Muslim girls of privileged families are facilitated with extra care and protection. Males are subject to provide all the requirements of the girls, in monetary terms. The males must maintain the necessary provision for their women in the family so that the women do not need to move out to earn money. They must have surplus availability of everything (articles or things). Even males of the families ensure the availability of servants to carry out the instruction of the women at home. ‘Rich families’ ladies do not go out alone - with this connotation parents disregard the financial independence of women or girls.

“It is very rare for mothers to drop their children at school. Mostly children are dropped off by the male members of the families or by the drivers. Mothers are suppressed by the male members. Financial independence is far off, merely they are allowed to come out from their golden cage.” [Teacher of All Saints High School]

“But fathers are not in support of women empowerment as they think themselves as superior.” [Principal, All Saints High School]

“They are brought up in the mindset that getting a rich guy for marriage is the ultimate target and aim of life. If that is the goal, marriage is the ultimate destination.” [Principal, All Saints High School]

DISCUSSION

The negative attitude reveals the existence of some major factors that act as a hindrance to the educational attainment of girls. Thus, the opinion, observations, and experiences of the teachers, Principals, and educators of English Medium private schools in the area are of great significance to this study. The direct interaction with parents and students gives them (teachers and educators) insight and knowledge of their culture, tradition, norms, prejudices, and religious practices. Based on our analysis, we highlight the major factors and ulterior motives of parents impeding girls' education and resulting in low academic achievement among Muslim girls.

The Ulterior Motive of Parents

Muslim Society devalues the education system with the support of religious misinterpretation reinforced by social prejudices, norms, culture, and tradition. Overprotection of girls in male-dominated societies results in their low academic achievement. The study indicates the fear of the parents of their daughter's engagement in pre-marital sex or involvement in any relationship which may bring dishonour to the society or community. As a consequence, overprotecting family, society, and community deprive girls of their educational rights. Too much liberty will mislead the girls toward the outer world, which may encourage the girls likely to be defiant toward their parents and resistant to the marriage. Highly educated girls will be mid-twenties or late twenties, at that age girls are less likely to be selected or may have fewer options for a good marriage proposal. If higher education is the main obstacle to the marriage of girls, education should be dropped to get a higher value in the marriage market. In addition, girls' inferiority over males; restricts girls from attending further studies for career achievement.

Beyond these social and cultural norms restricting girls from achieving higher education, some religious factors eschew girls' educational attainment. In this context, the prevalent religious practices and beliefs have been identified which constrain female education. Maintaining male escorts after puberty of girls to send them to school or college is a major concern for the family. Due to the lack of escort, discontinuations of schooling of girls are common practice in the area. From a religious perspective, it is believed that Islam does not allow women to go out alone, if goes; a male escort is mandatory. To Muslim parents, sending daughters to school alone after puberty constitutes a denial of religion. The importance of following religious commands over formal education is paramount to most Muslim parents in the area. Thus, Muslim privileged parents show little emphasis on girls' formal education after puberty. The only desire of every Muslim parent is for their daughters to have a minimum education that makes them able to read and write, along with fluency in the English language.

Fathers believe that daughters' marriage is Sunnah (following the Prophet Muhammad's lifestyle) and are obligated to fulfill this responsibility. To achieve Jannah (Paradise), fathers must complete their duties toward their daughters' marriage. The discontinuation of daughters' education is reinforced by the religious interpretation of the early marriage of girls.

Limitation

The current study offers important insight into the factors responsible for the low educational attainment of Muslim girls from economically privileged families. The study employed thematic analysis of the transcript obtained from teachers and principals of various English Medium schools in the area to perceive the religious thought of the parents that deprive girls of higher studies as well as the existing sociocultural factors obstructing the path of women empowerment and female higher education in Muslim privileged society. The result may not be generalizable beyond the sample. A large sample was not possible due to the strictness of a certain group of the community, apathetic respondents, and strict timeframes. Due to the

feasibility, a high fee-structure school in the area was chosen as it is the first preference of the rich parents, but it does not represent the entire population of the community. The data may reflect biases of the responses as it is completely based on their apprehension. According to the responses, the existence of religious factors has been identified. To verify the interpretation of the statement further qualitative study is required with Ulemas (Religious Leaders) for more insight description. Further, self-reported interviews conducted with an interviewer may be subject to reporting bias, particularly when discussing subjects like female education in a particular community. To decrease the reporting bias the questionnaires were verified by the experts. Subsequent to this study, the non-academic performance of Muslim girls is subject to investigation. The present study is designed on academic performance. Therefore, the view of the participants concerning the non-academic performance of the girls is completely overlooked. The current study examines the academic achievement of Muslim girls from economically privileged families, where poverty is not the reason for their drop-out. In this study, a unique perspective is provided into the factors other than poverty, providing valuable insight that may provide some solutions for increasing the literacy rate of the community by understanding the major factors and hindrances.

CONCLUSION

Findings from this qualitative study of teachers and principals who are dealing with a majority of Muslim students demonstrate their view in the context of the high drop-out of Muslim girls in higher classes. The participants recognized socio-cultural factors that discourage girls' higher education and encourage the early marriage of girls with the intervention of religion. Social norms and prejudices force everyone to stick to their traditional practices. Those who do not adhere to the persistent norms tend to get stigmatized which may result in a backlash in the form of social alienation. Such norms directly impede the value of education in the region. The result shows that the social norms are supported as well as reinforced by a religious misinterpretation by parents and society which has a negative impact on girls' education in Muslim privileged society. The findings indicate the reluctance of the parents towards any change in their attitude. Motivating the students through education rarely results in a change in behaviour or mindset towards women empowerment, career orientation, and delaying marriages. From the data, it is clear that the Muslim privileged society of the area has upgraded itself in every aspect of life in terms of adaptation except education. Our results suggest that the promotion of girls' education and career opportunities is inadequate without shifting the belief and norms of society. Real change can be brought with the help of religious interpretation, as most of the norms and prejudices are prevalent due to the misinterpretation of religious philosophy. The orthodoxy regarding girls' dos and don'ts must be removed in order to convey the meaning and value of women's empowerment to parents and students. The realization of the difference between self-efficacy in order to achieve women's empowerment and being caged with all facilities under superiority is the need of the hour. If religion does not forbid girls from achieving a career, it must be promoted through religion to remove the myth. The above-mentioned suggestions may help to promote higher education for Muslim girls where poverty is not the factor behind the low educational attainment of Muslim girls.

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