

Education as a powerful weapon for empowering Muslim women in West Bengal

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Abstract

Empowered women in any society is a mirror which reflects the prevailing gender equality in the society and a will for building an environment for total development of its inhabitants irrespective of their gender. It is universally acknowledged fact that women have been suppressed in socio-economic representation, in every part of the world, tragically and unfortunately Muslim women are exceptional sufferer in this patriarchal society. Embedded poverty, illiteracy, orthodoxy, increasing insecurity and lack of welfare scheme are the prominent and main reason behind the ramification of Muslim women's disempowerment. Can education brings empowerment to women of Muslim community Present paper made an attempt to find out spatial pattern and various reasons behinds perpetual disempowerment of Muslim women in West Bengal? Essentials of the present paper lies on social justice measure which depends on proper utilization of human capital inclusive development, sustain growth and the title of good governance. In spite of West Bengal being third largest Muslim populated state in India the deplorable condition of Muslim women points out their marginalization and negligence from main stream. The study reveals that an immediate attention call on muslim dominated district of West Bengal which faces greater lacuna in education and employment index because the condition of women in these districts are more deplorable than the districts having less muslim women population.

Keywords: Muslim women, empowerment, West Bengal

Introduction

'Women' – a word, a manifestation, a creation connoting itself into a multitude forms, roles and expression. She is refined, pious, serene yet strong and magnificent conception of Mother Nature. She is the generator, the nurturer and the destroyer. The producer of new generations, molder of novices into adroit being, transformer of the societies and destroyer of vils, sins and vices of communities – Women is the axle of the mankind. She is the builder of homes, societies and nations. Sarvepali Radhakrishnan is his outstanding contribution to the world of literature, a book, Religion and Society, speaks about the creative cosmic energy that operates through women. This cosmic energy was celebrated by the Indians a Shakti – the divine mother. A poem of Swami Vivekananda shows us that women in general in India came to be considered as the embodiment of Shakti rather an instrument of feminine cosmic energy.

But on the contrary and in true sense of words women are always treated as second class citizens of this planet in this patriarchal society. Gender inequality is a global phenomenon, only the manifestations vary in form and degree in different cultures. According to UN Report, 1997 of the world's 1.3 billion poor people, it is estimated that nearly 70 percent are women. Between 75 and 80 percent of the world's 27 million refugees are women and children. Women hold 11.7 percent of the seats in the world's parliaments. Of the world's nearly one billion illiterate adults, two-thirds are women. Two-thirds of the 130 million children worldwide who are not in school are girls. Women are becoming increasingly affected by HIV. From this statistical data it is evident that the women comprising half of the world's population are not entitled to experience both good and bad at a 50% rate. They do not share

equal human rights with their counterparts. The human rights are the rights endowed to the humankind right from their birth yet women have to hold protests, seminars, discussions, conferences, legislative bills debates and meeting to attain their inherent rights. The rejuvenation of powerless with power to political, economic, judicial, social and health resources is termed as 'empowerment' and when the terminology is applied with context to women it is called as 'Women empowerment'.

The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. From equal status with men in ancient times, through the low points of the medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been eventful. In modern India, women have held high offices in India including that of the President, Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Leader of the Opposition. However, women in India continue to face atrocities such as rape, acid throwing, dowry killings, and the forced prostitution of young girls. Throughout India's history, religion has been an important part of the country's culture. Religious diversity and religious tolerance are both established in the country by the law and custom; the Constitution of India has declared the right to freedom of religion to be a fundamental right.

In India religion has always been the most important factor in defining and determining social relations. Muslim constitute the second largest religion and thus the largest minority. Women since ages have been a victim of these outrageous practices wherein India being a multi-religious society, every community has its own personal laws because of which the women of that community suffer the most. The women belonging to the Muslim community have been brought to the

mainstream a number of times be it because of unequal treatment from birth. Now we have come out of those days of oppression of women, there is a need for strong movement to fight for the rights of women and to ensure that they get all the rights which men have or in other words a movement for the empowerment of women. Equality and empowerment of women are necessary to bring about an egalitarian human society.

India has the third highest concentration of Muslim world wide after Indonesia and Pakistan. The Muslim population was 138 million out of a total population of 1028 million in 2001. On the other hand, Muslim constitutes the second largest religious minority. No Country can afford development without considering woman who constitute about half of the population women's empowerment encompasses their enhanced status in social; political and economic spheres. Empowerment of Muslim women is imperative as Muslim women continue to be the victims of traditional social structure of the community. Education is the birth right of every Muslim. Islam puts considerable emphasis on its followers to acquire knowledge. Investment in education is the best investment one can take, because it eventually leads to intellectual property.

Review of Literature

The Cultivation of Knowledge and Learning in Islam (with Special Reference to the Education of Muslim Women). The major objective of this book is to provide a fair evaluation of what Islam contributed towards the restoration of education in general and the education of Muslim women in particular. In the field of education, as in other constructive endeavors, Islam neither confined nor restricted its space to a particular gender. Nor did it sanction its monopolisation or marginalisation of women.

Kari T. Babasahab (2014), Muslim Women: Challenges and Opportunities

The study was conducted to assess the situation of Muslim women and the problems they faced by Muslim women and the problems they faced by Muslim communities at large, specially their status as religious minorities in India. There was a dominance of patriarchy played a major role in relation to issues of Muslim women.

A Study on the Growth and Development of Madrasa Education in West Bengal and Its Impact on the Muslim Community. This thesis is discussed on the functions of Madrasa education and its importance on minority welfare. Researcher pointed out that the constitution of free India attempts for the well being of the minority group, but sixty five years of independence. Muslim community still a backward class in Indian society. Education of Muslim community in our country has for centuries centered on the Madrasah system. Education becomes a very effective and in many ways the principal mirror through which the growth pattern of the community is reflected.

Objective of the Study

The following objectives are laid down for the study:

1. To analyse the status of Muslim women in society in West Bengal.
2. To estimate the socio-cultural position of Muslim women in society.

3. To find out the religious role on education of women in West Bengal.
4. To estimate the empowerment of Muslim women in West Bengal.
5. To estimate the growth and population of Muslim family and role of women.

Materials and Methods

The study was carried out through descriptive survey method. The present study is based on mainly primary and partially secondary sources of date which was collected with the help of questionnaire & interviews from the Muslim women in all 23 Districts of West Bengal.

Variables

In the present study the following variables was consider and this variables was divided into two categories.

1. Independent variables.
2. Dependent variables.

Independent Variables

In the present study the following are independent variables.

Educational level

1. Illiterate.
2. Primary.
3. Secondary.
4. Graduate.
5. Higher Education.

Dependent Variable

Empowerment is the only 'Dependent variable.

Tools and Techniques

The following tools were used for collection of date for the study:

1. Structure of proforma to estimate the educational status of Muslim women.
2. Socio-economic status scale.
3. Questionnaire for participation of Muslim women in various profession (Teacher, social workers, labour class, political leaders, Govt. employees and others).
4. Interview of all sections of Muslim women including students

Construction of Tools

All the tools were constructed with the help of experts, resource persons and available variables. Following general steps were adopted for the construction of tools.

Step I: In the first step lists, items, and statements were collected from various sources and these were classified and systematized after a through discussion with the experts.

Step II: Necessary modifications of statements were made on the basis of expert's suggestions and the tools were made ready for try out.

Step III: First try out was made on one block and on a small group parallel to the sample. On the basis of try out results further modifications were made where necessary.

Step IV: For more sophistication, the tools were again administered on a parallel group of Gen., SC and ST women of other block and data were collected and the limitations of the tools were pointed out.

Step V: Tried and sophisticated form of the tools were finalized after removing the limitations of the fourth step and the tools were ready for final administration.

A detailed description of tools and their construction procedure is stated hereunder.

Construction of Questionnaire

Three different sets of questionnaires were constructed for collection of necessary data.

Step I: a set of items and statements were collected from various sources and these were classified according to the nature of statement.

Step II: statements were scrutinized and modified with reference to the area of the data.

Step III: the set of items were presented before the experts to estimate the rationality of the items. On the basis of experts' suggestion, the items were modified or altered for finalization of the questionnaires.

Step IV: tryout of the questionnaire was made on a small group of women parallel to the sample. On the basis of tryout results further modification were made where necessary.

Step V: tried and sophisticated questionnaires were again presented before the experts so give the final form. As such the questionnaire was made for final administration.

Socio-Economic Status Scale

Realizing the importance of Socio-economic status, the quantification and rationalization in social sciences had led the formulation of scales for the measurement of social sciences had led the formulation of scales for the measurement of social phenomena. Among other variables of social phenomena, the quantification of socio-economic status is an important one. Many variables have been identified in relation to social status. In India social status is attached to the amount of income as well as the source of income.

Population and Sample

Women of all categories, i.e. professional, home maker, political leaders under all socio-economic status group, labour class, student, and participatory of different political and social organisation were included as sample.

Sample Size

More than 500 Muslim women have participated in the present study.

Sample Character

Muslim women of different sectors of Howrah and Burdwandistricts.

Action Plan

It is a survey type research. The survey made during the study comes to supplement the facts known through different sources. The step to carry out the study were as follows:

1. Selection of State.
2. Selection of Districts.
3. Selection of Samples.
4. Preparation of Tools.
5. Standardization of Tools.
6. Administration of Tools.
7. Collection of Data.
8. Analysis of Data.

Conclusion

Empowerment is one of the major concern while discussing and addressing human rights and development. Women empowerment includes the capacity of decision making about their life, participation in house hold decision and making choices for oneself. At the same time social empowerment includes equality of treatment, equality of respect, equality of opportunity, equality of recognition and above all equality of status. The present study deals with rational measurements for empowering Muslim women of India conducted over randomly chosen sample from 23 districts of West Bengal with the help of education. It may be concluded that empowering women is not at all an easy task, rather a difficult one because most of the Muslim women are unaware of their rights identity and self esteem. The poverty, illiteracy, orthodoxy, traditional beliefs are major reasons responsible for deplorable condition of Muslim women. Economic independence is the mother of every other independence especially for women in general and Muslim women in particular. Muslim women due to lack of economic independence cause by illiteracy have to depend on their father before marriage and after on their husband. Muslim women do not enjoy freedom of exercise regarding their notion about vote, freedom of movement away from home without the permission of male bread earner member of the family, daily house hold expense, child health care. Both central and West Bengal Government have taken initiative regarding education and trying to empower Muslim women.

The present study reveals that education, literacy is the sole tool, weapon for giving power to female to making their life easier and giving them the power required for making decision about their own life simultaneously about things and people related to her life.

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