

Chapter-VI

Conclusion and Suggestions

The present study is concerned with exploring the educational status of Muslim women in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir in order to understand and analyse nature of problems and constraints to women's education at different levels so that a comprehensive strategy can be evolved to remove such constraints for their educational advancement. The study came out with some interesting and useful findings which can be discussed as under.

An inter-generational analysis in terms of educational level and attainment of the respondents reveals that educational level of younger generation is higher in comparison to older generation. Younger generations of Muslim women had better levels of education than the older generation as the younger generation was found to have better educational opportunities and consciousness about value of women's education whereas older generation either did not get these opportunities or was not conscious of importance of education for women. Progress is gradually being made from illiteracy to literacy and higher educational achievement gradually with increasing concern towards gender equality in matters related to education. This trend is evident from case studies and perception of educated male and female respondents on women's education.

Parents' education was found to influence children's education, as the higher the educational level of the parents, the greater was the participation of their daughters in educational pursuit. Educated parents are likely to guide, motivate and inspire their daughters for getting educated after realising the importance of education for their daughters and to maintain the tradition of literacy and education in their families. Daughters of highly educated mothers were also found in a relatively better position and are more likely to go for higher education as compared to uneducated mothers. Economic status of the parents seems to be another factor which influences their children's accessibility to educational opportunities in the most significant way as it was found that parents with higher levels of income were in a better economic position to bear expenses involved in the education of their children irrespective of the gender of their children. They were found less likely to discriminate between sons and daughters in matters of education on economic grounds. Parents who were economically well off were also in better position to place their children including daughters in a better educational institution to provide them with good quality

education as compared to poor parents. Poor economic conditions of parents badly affect the educational status of their children particularly their daughters who are withdrawn from their educational pursuit due to economic constraints. In some cases, however, sons are allowed to continue their educational pursuit upto a certain level and available limited resources are utilised for potential bread winner for the family.

The present study also finds out a significant relationship between respondents' and their husbands' educational status. The general observation that educated men are likely to prefer educated wives was found almost true in the present study. It was also observed that with increase in the educational level of respondents, their age at marriage also increases. But, as only few respondents were highly educated, majority of them got married at an early age i.e. at about seventeen years of age. The average age at which these respondents entered school was six to seven years. The main cause for their late entry to school was lack of easily accessible schools and mountainous and difficult topography of the district. It is to be noted that the average distance between educational institutions and home was eight to nine kms. These respondents either stayed near educational institutions in rented rooms or used to cover part of the distance on foot and partly by public convergence, usually a bus, due to which they faced lots of difficulties. Such hurdles never allowed some of the respondents to even get admitted in a school and, hence, they remained illiterate.

The study further revealed that none of the illiterate respondents was in favour of co-education system. Majority among semi-educated Muslim women also do not favour co-education and want to maintain a clear-cut distance between female and male students whereas most of the highly educated women favour co-education and do not see any harm in girls sitting with boys in classrooms. Infact, they believe that such an atmosphere will facilitate better adjustment and understanding between male and female students leading to better adjustment in their adult social life. So, educational level of the respondents along with their exposure to co-educational institutions or lack of it significantly affected their response in respect to co-education.

During the course of study, it was commonly observed that, in matters of education, Muslim women as mothers do not treat their daughters and sons equally. Majority of them accord more importance to education of their sons. For,

notwithstanding their own educational level, they want to provide their sons with all the facilities for education. With regards to their daughters' education, such eagerness and concern do not exist among them. Infact, in view of the heavy expenses supposed to be incurred on dowry at the time of the marriage of their daughter many of the respondents believed it inappropriate to invest on their education. Therefore, they considered it wise to cut funds on education of their daughters in order that a decent looking dowry could be managed. They seem to realise that women's education is not necessarily linked to employment. Even in the case of their employment no financial benefits accrue to their parental family. Moreover, not sending a girl to educational institutions benefits the parental family in many ways. For instance, at home they perform not only the task of household chores, but besides looking after younger siblings and cattle, they also perform Sundry task in agricultural fields.

An analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data collected through present study show that the issue of Muslim women's education and development is linked to a complex of factors which may facilitate or hinder their educational advancement. Gradual and positive changes in the attitudes of people towards Muslim women's education are evident in increasing interest and concern among young girls and their parents for their education. Much needs to be done to improve their educational status by indentifying factors which work against their educational advancement. The prospects of Muslim women's educational advancement largely depend on sincere and concrete efforts at local, familial and national level which can play an instrumental role in minimising the negative effects and maximising the positive role of socio-economic, cultural and institutional factors affecting Muslim women's education in multiple ways. The study has identified and analysed the role of various socio-economic, demographic and cultural factors which retard the educational progress of Muslim women in the study area. Keeping in view multidimensional effects of these factors on women and slow progress of Muslim women's education, there an urgent need of adopting measures of varied nature. Some of these measures along with associated problems have been discussed below.

The study clearly reveals that majority of the respondents, who never attended schools or dropped-out from the schools, stated poverty to be the major cause of their educational backwardness in spite of the financial assistance and fee concessions

provided by the government. Their educational backwardness may be because either they are unaware of these facilities or these financial assistance or concessions are not adequate enough. Though laudable, financial help provided by the government is not adequate enough to mitigate financial burden on their families. For, it also involves extra expenditure on buying books, stationary and other items required by educational institutions from time to time. These factors put together compel parents to withdraw daughters from their educational pursuit. Some time they are not allowed to go to school at all. Therefore, in the face of poverty and other financial considerations women's education is not considered as a priority area. However, in those cases where economic conditions allow parents to send a limited number of children to schools, sons' education is given preference over daughters' education and daughters are held back. Therefore, our study finds that gender discrimination is also one of the key factors that impede women's education significantly. This dismal picture requires state and community intervention in the form of financial assistance to children from poor families. What is more important is that special schemes for financial assistance and attractive incentives may be introduced by the state for those parents who take active and sincere interest in the promotion of their daughters' education and intensive campaigns for generating awareness regarding such assistance and programmes for promotion of women's education at large scale may be initiated by community leaders and NGO's.

Equally important factor which creates problems in the way of women's education is their involvement in domestic work which does not allow them to get education. Most of the fathers have no regular employment and they depend largely on agricultural activities or work as labour and daily wager to earn their living. The girls along with their mothers are engaged in household activities. Due to the shortage of water in most of the areas of Poonch, it is, primarily, the responsibility of the females to fetch water. Besides, they also provide a helping hand in agricultural and allied activities. Thus, their involvements in household chores leave them with no time to pursue education. What is more important to note is that their education is not considered as useful as it is generally believed that women's primary role is child bearing and rearing and to look after the household affairs. To overcome such constraints and problems parents need to be counselled and convinced about the value and importance of children education, especially those of the daughters. Evening

schools should be established to impart education to these children. Non-formal education and distance education especially at higher level can also play an important role in this regard.

Practice of early marriage which is widespread among Muslims in Poonch district is found to be another major factor that prevents women from continuing their education. Due to such practices they are left with limited educational opportunities, that too, for a certain period of time only. Ignorance and illiteracy of parents and the prevalent cultural practices in the study area prompt them to marry off their daughters at an early age. It also came out in open during the course of study that parents marry their daughters off in order to guard their family honour. It is suspected that interaction between boys and girls may lead some of them to enter into matrimonial alliances without the permission of their parents. Their suspicion got credence when a few girls disregarding their parents' wishes, chosen their life partner themselves and married them. In a society, like this, such type of relationship is not only looked down upon, but also ridiculed, rebuked and criticised. Parents of these girls are held responsible for their daughters' behaviour. In effect, they are stigmatised and at times, ostracised from society. To circumvent any such possibility which might occur in future and to protect their family reputation and honour, parents marry off their daughters when they are quite young. Consequently, their educational journey is cut short.

Although, child marriage is outlawed in India, it is still prevalent in many parts of India including our study area. Keeping in view the limitations of law, there is an urgent need that parents are to be informed about ill-effects of child marriage. In particular, they should be made aware and conscious about the adverse physical, psychological, educational, economic and social disadvantages of child marriage. For this, services of both governmental and non-governmental agencies may be roped in to provide them with better counselling.

The study found that majority of the Muslim women considered lack of infrastructural facilities as one of the major hurdles in meeting their educational needs. For instance, the problem of easy access to school was found as one of the biggest problems. Lack of infrastructural facilities in the schools such as school building with a proper boundary wall, basic amenities like drinking water, separate

toilets for girls, libraries and hostel accommodation were also found to be the major problems in the way of women's education and lead to high drop-out rate specially at secondary level the stage when girls usually reach puberty. Lack of separate toilets facilities for girls in schools at this stage becomes a very strong reason for their drop-out. Most of the schools are far away from their homes without facilities for accommodation. Even if accommodation is available parents cannot afford it due to economic constraints. Transport facilities in most of the areas of the district are totally absent or insufficient. Due to the poor transportation facilities they could not reach school at right time or face difficulties. Parents' unwillingness to allow their daughters travel long distances and use poor transport facilities to reach school is a major reason for high drop-out at secondary and higher secondary level. This problem was more serious for those women who belonged to border and hilly areas. Better transport facilities and opening of more and more school and colleges for girls in close proximity may contribute significantly in improving their educational status. The need for providing better and greater access to educational opportunities at all levels to this geographically disadvantaged section is to be addressed through state intervention on priority basis.

Another problem shared and confided by the respondents was not only lack of separate schools and colleges for girls but lack of female teachers also especially at high and higher secondary level. In the context of rural environment parents were found more interested in sending their daughters to those schools where most of the teachers are female as they feel more secure and confident with regards to their daughters' safety in the presence and under the supervision of female teachers. They are reluctant to send their daughter in schools where majority of the teachers are male.

Such problems may be taken care of by significant increase in the number of female teachers both in girls schools and colleges and co-educational institutions. Drives towards increasing the number of females teachers will not only lead to high enrolment and low dropout rate among girls but will also give an opportunity to large number of educated women to utilise their educational qualifications for their self fulfilment in a socially productive way. Since lack of separate girls' schools and colleges is an important reason for limited access of girls to educational institution,

the number of separate educational institutions especially at secondary and higher secondary level may be increased.

It is to be pointed out here that the need for segregated schools is not confined to Muslim parents only but in the existing social milieu, similar demands were made earlier also. For example, in early nineties of the last century large number of non-Muslim parents of girl students studying in government co-educational secondary schools of Delhi appealed to Delhi government to make separate arrangements for education of their daughters on account of some serious human relations and other problems that were faced by their daughters in co-educational institutions. The appeal was accepted to and thereafter most of the Delhi government run co-educational secondary schools were bifurcated into boys and girls schools by the government of Delhi by converting the existing single shift co-educational secondary schools into double shift universe schools (Siddiqui, 2004). Similar efforts depending upon the current requirements may be helpful in promotion of women's education particularly Muslim women's education in the study area.

The educational set up in some of the primary schools in rural areas of Poonch has been adversely affected due to militancy because the teaching staff posted there is reluctant to perform their duties regularly due to the insecurity arising out of militancy. The state government has introduced Rehber-e-Taleem (RET) Scheme and posted local staff in rural areas to meet this challenge. However, this scheme has degraded the education standard because the staffs are generally raw and untrained. So students do not get good quality of education and girls suffer the most. They are not allowed to join coaching centre outside the areas and the result is that they could not pass the board exam even after two or three attempts and finally they are compelled to discontinue their studies at an early age. The scheme (RET) may be reviewed and improved by taking into consideration the shortcoming and should be implemented with due emphasis on quality education.

Feeling of insecurity was an important dimension to be explored particularly in the context of high drop-out rates of Muslim girls residing in border area. They suffer this discrimination both as residents of border areas and as women. People generally feel insecure in the border areas because of the uncertainty of the circumstances. They need to face various risks including drifting bullets and shells

coming from across the line of control or mine related accidents. Every war or war-like circumstance leads to the mining of large areas. The presence of armed forces puts limitations not only on the movement of civilian but it also affects the normal functioning of civil administration. In such an insecure atmosphere it is the women who not only suffer the most but are also asked to stay indoors. Such issues may seriously be taken up by administrators as it adversely affects women's education and their everyday life.

Muslim women's education was also directly or indirectly influenced by the location of the household. It was observed that women living in the plain areas with better amenities of life were more educated than the women living in hilly areas with scarcity of these amenities. Thus, it was found that the socio-economic developments of the area positively influenced the Muslim women's education. These observations get further credence from various case studies. Such intra-regional variations may be addressed through comprehensive strategies and plans to improve access to educational and other opportunities by providing better communication and transport facilities.

This is to be highlighted here that prevalence of dowry make parents calculative and worried about monetary pressure and cost involved in daughters' education and marriage. The custom of giving dowry to the daughters is so widespread that parents, willingly or unwillingly, spend heavily on dowry under social pressure. Thus, social environment works in two significant ways against women's education. First, it convinces parents to underestimate the value of girls' education and second, it forces them to spend on daughters' marriage in the form of dowry in place of their education. Some parents seem convinced with their decisions against their daughters' education thinking that even their sons, as bread winners for their families, do not get the benefit of their educational qualifications in the absence of suitable employment opportunities, therefore, education of daughters is simply a wastage of time and resources. Such concerns limit girl's educational opportunities and reinforce the traditional patriarchal ideology indicating the need for the creation of social environment favourable to women's education. It calls for the participation of highly committed community leaders in awareness campaigns for making parents realise the benefit and contribution of women's education for themselves, family and

larger society. Through these campaigns parents must be motivated not to evaluate their daughters' education in monetary terms but to realise its long term benefits for their personal as well as overall advancement of society.

The study observed that socio-cultural practices, patriarchal values and prejudice against women restricted their access to institutions of learning. Many of the respondents disclosed that it was more because of their grandparents' opposition, who had a significant say in decision making, than that of their parents' that they were deprived of the chance of being educated. Majority of these grandparents were illiterates. Their illiteracy and ignorance especially those of grandfathers who had final say in decision making negatively affected their granddaughters' education. Thus, efforts at community level need to be oriented towards both male and female education as educated male will significantly improve the educational status of future generation of their families. The demand for educated girls would rise in future. As brought out by the present study and other empirical studies that educated males are more likely to marry educated girls, than uneducated ones. Moreover, educated young males will be in a better position to get parents and grandparents convinced about the importance of female education because, after all, whether they are young or old, males have a significant say in decision making.

There is a general perception that one important reason for the educational backwardness of Muslim women is that their religious education is given preference over modern secular education. Firstly, because getting religious education is considered a necessity for them and secondly, they can get religious education at home only and do not need to go anywhere unlike formal education for which they have to move outside home to reach schools and colleges and remain there for many hours a day. Getting religious education at home is consistent with the practice of purdah which allows restricted movement of women outside their home with male escort. It is also assumed that in deference to their religious edicts Muslim women wear *burqa* whenever they go outside home, remain segregated and their freedom of movement is checked. These restrictions place Muslim women at educationally disadvantaged position. These common assumptions and observations may somewhat be true at some places but not always. In the present study, most of the respondents had only elementary knowledge about their religious faith and performance of

religious rituals. Not all of them could read Qur'an. Whatever religious knowledge they had, they acquired it mostly through their family members. So far as *purdah* observance and their movement outside home is concerned, it was clearly observed during the study that most of them simply cover their head with a long cloth known as *dupatta* and usually move about to participate in different agricultural activities, fetching of water and timber etc. They require a male escort only under difficult hilly terrain and the scourge of militancy. Thus, the present study does not support the popular belief that compulsion and acquisition of religious education and restrictions in the form of *purdah* do not allow Muslim women to avail educational opportunities for modern formal education.

The efforts made by the central as well as state government and various NGO's through various means have not completely succeeded in satisfying the special expectations and aspirations of women in the state due to many constraints discussed earlier. To promote the education of women at all levels and reduce the gender disparity in providing knowledge and education, a strong need based and committed state and community intervention is required to raise the educational status of women particularly Muslim women. There is urgent need to change the mindset of the people in general and community leaders in particular. To generate awareness and attitudinal changes among the masses regarding women's education, NGOs and media can play a vital role as agent of social change by highlighting and discussing issues concerning Muslim women's education at different platforms and motivating women to organise themselves into groups through which they can highlight their problems.

Little has been achieved by both government as well as civil society in the area of empowerment of Muslim women through educational advancement. So, much more needs to be done on this count. More and more policy initiatives and proper implementation of programmes by the government combined with community leaders' interest and sincere efforts for their educational advancement is the need of the hour. Existing programmes need to be reviewed as per current requirements. This requires serious attention from policy makers, administrators and community leaders.

Suggestion for Further Research

The present study has depicted some of the educational problems faced by Muslim women in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir. The status of Muslim women in the state of Jammu and Kashmir needs to be examined further. Planned and systematic sociological studies of comprehensive nature at large scale are needed to assess the educational status of Muslim women in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

A comparative study of Muslim and non-Muslim women is also recommended as it will bring into open some useful insights related to women's education in general. An investigation into disparity between the education of men and women in Jammu and Kashmir needs to be undertaken to have a better and in-depth understanding of the issue. Studies aimed at exploring problems and prospects of education of women in general and Muslim women in particular may also be undertaken in different regions of country.

Contribution and Limitation of the Study

The study is limited in its scope as sample for the present study is small. The specific results obtained may not be applicable for the whole of the State of Jammu and Kashmir to make policies and programmes because of the difference in socio-economic and cultural background of the people in Poonch and rest of the State. Besides, some of the respondents were reluctant to give information on income, wealth, education and other issues which they considered as personal and did not want to talk about in detail. The study is also handicapped due to inadequate availability of reliable secondary data related to the number of schools, especially primary schools for girls in Poonch district. However, the general results emerging from this study will be useful for educational planning and policy formulation relating to women's education particularly Muslim women's education at local, state and national level.