Education and Muslim Women:

A Qualitative Study of a Muslim Habitation in Seelampur, North East Delhi.

Thesis

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8.1. Introduction

The neo-liberal agenda of capitalism has curbed the powers of democratic and public institutions including 'schools' and 'communities'. This study examined school's role as a State institution and the role of family as the social institution role in shaping Muslim girls' understanding on their education of Shahbadpur, an urban ghetto in North East Delhi. This enabled the researcher to study the link between education and Muslim women of *Shahbadpur* in the present neo-liberal era.

The chapter is divided into eight sections. Following this first section on the introduction of this chapter, **second** section reflects at the community perspective over the education of their daughters amidst poverty and educational backwardness of the inhabitants of the studied landscape. **Third** section elaborates on the 'school choice' for the community in terms of availability and the factors contributing to their choice for 'good school'. The issue of access to school education was defined by ghettoization with proliferation of low cost schooling in and around the habitation, since late 90s. This has influenced the Parents' choice to school their children up to primary level in private schools that too in favor of sons. Apart from that the positive impact of the State's financial assistance (see appendix XIV) in school education is observed among the community members but more favoring for their daughters' education.

Fourth section addresses second, third and fourth specific research questions on girls' understanding, participation in classroom and school practices and the formation of school spaces, under the broader research question on the influence of School as a State institution in these aspects. The section elaborates on how school culture influences girl students' notions over their education and its relevance to their lives. This section takes

on school's perspective followed by family's perspective on the purpose of educating daughters. The section will delve on the common thread (School-family) on preparing adolescent girls for adulthood (Chapter-6). **Fifth** section addresses fifth and sixth specific research question on girl students' associations and dissociations with school after completing school education and how do they view their aspirations in the light of support from parents especially mothers. **Sixth** section concludes the discussion and **seventh** section presents the implications of the study followed by the last **eighth** section on future scope of research.

8.2. Community Perspective on Schooling of the girls

It addresses first specific research question in the light of first specific research question. In the backdrop of the historical discourse that influenced the relation between education and women (Chaper-2), the contemporary discourse shows increased orientation among parents on facilitating daughters for school education. At the same time, the community's poor socio-economic status with poor employment scenario (Chapter-4), works always in the background while accessing the type of school (Chapter- 5). The parents in the community however expressed their apprehension in sending daughters for higher education. The poor economic status of the community compelled sons to withdraw from school education to take up some occupation for livelihood. As evident in chapter 4 the data on employment, the boys opted for cheap skill based jobs. It is paradoxical that in the conditions where jobs were of frugal nature even for boys and girls mobility contrived, girls were sent to schools. This could mean two things, one they really looked positively

up to school. Second, they saw it as prospect for good marriage, which wasn't emphatically mentioned but stated.

The mothers' responses on the relevance of education of sons and daughters confirmed Robinson (2007) argument by as the community finds no correlation between education and employment. But at the same time, education held importance in relation to the girls' future lives, this is viewed as the 'generational change' by the mothers as when they compare with their own times. The improved girls' enrolment at senior secondary level is surpassing boys' enrolment at the same stage (GOI, 2011) was reflected in GGS enrolment pattern (Chapter-4). The community members welcome State's initiative of offering financial incentive to their daughters.

The geographic marginality (Tarlo, 2003) of the site shares the stigma of being called 'mini-Pakistan', by non-Muslim members of the community (chapter-4). The poor educational and economic status of the community members are the stigmatizing features of the community. This study confirms with the earlier studies (Nayar, 2007; Hasan, 2005; Vaishali 2012) about the raised motivation among Muslim parents to educate their children especially girls.

8.3. Parents' 'Choice' of a 'good school'

The ghettoization resulting of the community confines them to rely on neighbouring densely populated government and low cost private schools (Tooley and Dixon, 2005) in and around the habitation catering to poor class. State's initiatives in facilitating school education through introduction of financial schemes (see appendix

XIV) have helped poor Muslim parent living in metro city, who otherwise find hard to sustain livelihood.

The State's facilitation in terms of the availability of varying degree of quality in low cost private schools, aided schools and some government schools indicated at the changing nature of education, as a commodity. This is a part of a neo-liberal phenomenon, where parents were forced to choose the low cost private schools, offering limited quality, instead of public schools struggling with infrastructural crisis and teachers' shortage.

Shahbadpur is endowed with two Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) schools for primary education, one for all girls and another all boys. There was one senior secondary government school functioning in two shifts, girls and boys. Statistical figures (DISE, 2015) stated that the area had 218 private schools, mostly primary with some offering till elementary level of schooling. With reference to the thick population of the habitation, the single girls' higher secondary school is over-populated with strength more than five thousands.

During informal interaction with the parents in habitation, researcher observed that they welcomed the State's move of making elementary education free and also initiating fellowship schemes for the community girls, as reflected in the increased enrolment at all the levels of school education. Parents' response on favouring private schools in the neighbourhood for primary education of their children confirms with the low enrolment at primary education in government records (DISE, 2015). The parents, depending upon their affordability preferred private primary schools for their children, especially for sons (Chapter-4, pp. 98-99). For this, parents find, less home-school

distance, English medium education, well maintained toilets, drinking water, attractive classrooms, and availability of Muslim female teachers as the reasons to enroll their children in these private schools till primary level.

The process of education for girls in relation to their lives forms a vicious cycle. The cycle that kept the girls and the community entrapped in the status quo. The ghettoization and only two good schools had led to concentration of Muslim student population in the two schools as shown in the strengths (Chapter-5, pp. 98). The limited exposure or space to interact with the diverse cultures deprives the student population to understand other cultures (religion and class). This and unknowingly perpetuated the seclusion and isolation for the Muslim student population and thus keep alive that 'otherness' in heterogeneous society.

Thus, with the endowment of cultural inputs from the Muslim teachers and inclusion of *deeni-talim*, parents admitted their children in those low cost private schools up to primary level. However, during financial crises, parents chose for the nearest government school to educate their children.

The student population of GGS reflected at the community members' expectations from the school to educate their daughters. While in case of GAS girls'' schooling 'class' played an important role in the access of 'quality' (which parents associate more with private schools) education. The parents made 'choice' of schools by considering affordability, discipline, spatial access, and culture. Apart from that, the poor educational status and economic status confirms with Ecceles's (2005) study stating that parental education and occupation influence children's educational attainments. In addition to that, 'class' and 'gendered' outlook confirmed with Hossain (2012) argument

that revolved around the gendered discourse on the education of Muslim women in British India, with the community's preference for private school for sons and government to daughters.

8.4 School Culture

On correlating the parents' school choice with the school cultures of the school accessed played a critical role in influencing girl students' future aspirations related to education and work. The girls' responses indicated that despite being resisting school rules less than the boys, they complied with the authority and expectations of adults.

The two schools- GGS and GAS, one government and one government aided were claimed to be 'good school' as they both ensure 'discipline' and 'good result', by the community members as well as the school principals. The notions of 'good school' among parents had emerged from the *twin-logic* of market and identity that influence parents' school choice in this neo-liberal era. However, for girls, logic of identity dominated as it has gendered connotations, for which families 'notions' worked in consonance with the schools' notions of good girls. For girls, the logic of identity carries morality, attached to the cultural identity for the community women, as the base that is the gendered behavior to be displayed in public. Similarly, logic of market is better suited for boys' education, which shows more enrolment in subjects likes commerce at higher secondary level (Chapter-4) in GAS.

GGS, as State institution, carry a narrower outlook when it comes to community participation. The State has defined and made it mandatory to ensure community participation for the school till elementary level. State's consideration on offering

financial incentives in the form of fellowship schemes to ensure school participation is welcomed by the community but equally crucial for the State institution could have been to sustain that community participation in grades beyond elementary to make the community realize the relevance of the attained education to their life. This feature is advocated for elementary level, also need to be consistent at higher levels in school education. It is required to encourage and motivate community parents to facilitate in their children's education. To leave the discourse of education mid ways at elementary level or secondary level is to dissociate with good employment opportunities.

'Discipline' projects the morality base for the identity logic for parents in sending their children to school, that works more for daughters. Here, Saraswati's (1999) argument over the restrictive adolescence for girls, specifically belonging to poor strata, works in preparing them for their social roles (Saraswati, 1999; Chanana, 1999) in future. The seclusion practices in the habitation constitute the gendered behavior to be displayed in the neighbourhood, it means girls are socialized to maintain *purdah* (veil) from strangers, but not within homes.

School culture in both the schools however varied but there had been underlying gendered norm of socializing the adolescent girls through limited physical mobility reflected in school and classroom practices. This limitation was justified in Principals' and teachers' responses regarding their expectations from girls with respect to their career. The schools in this way were reaffirming or slyly supported the gendered values attached to girls like of submissiveness, less talkative, and obedience. This was owed to girls' intelligence (good academic performance) as their achievement which resulted in their status as monitor.

The school culture specific nuances carry control and supervision, which include monitoring peer relations, subservient student-teacher relations, girl students' ambivalent notions on teacher and teaching-learning process. Girl students in both the schools displayed more reliance on peer relations for assignment completion, for study notes, problem sharing, to name a few, due to no informal interaction with most of the teachers.

The teacher-students relationship that largely remained instruction directed and the passive teaching-learning process of the classrooms shapes girl students' perception of the same that is, the authoritarianism in relationship, not only between teacher-student but also between Principal- teacher- Student. The authoritarianism continued to home. Thus, it is the hierarchical structure in the teacher-student relationship that shape the girl students' notions on the schooling and teacher-student relationship.

In case of **teaching-learning process,** the schools focus on 'syllabus completion' and '100 percent passing result', as one of the aims of the schools, contributed little in ensuring their participation in teacher learning process among girl students. The most critical task perhaps could have been to make them critically think and link the content to their surroundings. This could be ensured by changing the pedagogical approach that at present heavily rely on filling up young minds with information. This is essential to give a push to girls' students' aspirations in life, which in the absence of proper guidance and direction from the school unable to take decisions as happened with many cases from GGS. The girl students' restricted scope (by schools, communities and families) to explore the available physical and social space, limit their scope further to develop relationship with the school as a whole rather to their classrooms. The process resulted in the reproduction of the gendered seclusion of the spaces by limiting the girls' activities to

classrooms in all girls' school and confining the girls' activities to the dedicated row for the girls in the classroom in a co-educational school, and keeping the values of '*adab'*(a cultured girl), which however was not pronounced for boy students. This was reflected in the overt behavior by girls' and boys' behaviour in the school. In the process, both the schools over-shadowed an important task of encouraging them to even to ask about their aspirations while to encourage them to pursue their aspirations after finishing the school became a distant dream or unimaginable in the given circumstances.

Thus, school becomes an extension to home that provides a 'secured' place where girls learn to be '*good girl*' in addition to passing exams. The researcher observed dyadic relationship (Sarangpani, 2003) between teacher and student in both the schools, which is multi-layered- adult-child, parent-offspring, *guru-shishya*. The relationship had a common element of authority to shape personality of student that is produce 'good girl'. This 'good girl' image further corresponds with the adult child continuum, which was more pronounced among girls (Saraswati, 1999). Schooling, through discipline, acts like a catalyst in preserving the parental expectations of educating daughters, who would utilize her education in adult life as and when required. For girls undergoing adolescence, this stage remains highly gendered in the light of socio-economic class (Saraswati, 1999). Teachers and the Principal's perspective on educating the community girls in confirmation with Winkelmann (2007) study on girls' Madarasa, schools directly in the aided school and indirectly in government school, stress on inculcation of '*adab*' (value education).

Further, in consonance with the same study, the schooling stressed on internalizing Muslim women-hood. Thus, the school culture was unable to build a trust

and confidence on one's potential among girls to firmly decide on whether they would be able to go for higher education or not.

8.5. Girl students' aspirations

The period of life after school for the girl students was marked by the fact they reported to miss their school. The school appeared to be an important educational activity in the habitation where college-going culture[61] was hardly visible. The reasons however are embedded within the school culture (Chapter-5) that left limited space for any constructive dialogue or coordination between school and family/parents. This 'dialogue is warranted especially when the State institution is aware of the disadvantaged status of community it is catering to.

The examination oriented academic ideals further maintains the gap between their life and education received in school. As, the socially attached meaning of being *dasvi aur barwin* paas'(Xth and XII passed) for the parents is important for future, most likely to get better prospects for marriage purposes. This expectation corresponds with schools' focus on passing examination. The stage was also characterized by rare interaction with school friends, though some of the girls were in touch with each other through virtual interaction.

At home, girls were not only adjusting with the new routine but were imagining the possibilities of pursuing their aspirations. In the case studies, the girls stressed on their righteousness, keeping good conduct by not hiding anything from their parents, and following cultural norms in the neighborhood and with relatives, make them '*sharif*

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[61] College-going Culture refers to the environment, attitudes, and practices in schools and communities that encourage students and their families to obtain the information, tools and perspective to enhance access to and success in post-secondary education. (College tools UC Berkeley, 2009)

ladki' (good girl). It was believed that by becoming *'sharif ladki'* facilitates in making their voices heard within the family. The process is then followed by negotiations to pursue further education.

The study confirmed that by following the cultural norms of maintaining *purdah* within the habitation (Chapter-7), these girls in a way were maintaining the demographic religious identity (Desai and Gheda, 2014) which they did not mind giving up when they move in areas beyond their habitation. This shows how physical spaces carried social meaning that is within the community and outside the habitation for the girls. These girls neither liked to disrespect their community nor felt the need to comply with everything written in '*Hadees*', rather wanted their own space to exercise their agency of being an integral human being.

In this way, home acted in consonance with school or vice versa in cultivating the gendered values by monitoring and directing girl students' aspirations as desired by the community's need. Confirming to Shaban's study (2016), this study confirms to the patriarchal attitudes of the family members that compel girls to restructure or be ignorant on their educational, personal and overall development.

However even within this limiting environment, there were some girl students who were trying to redefine the socio-cultural restrictions by bargaining with the family members, like Amira, Tuba, Amyra. Apart from that, there were cases like Najima, Nahid, Anam and Iram, who had full support from their mothers to move forward with the aspirations, however, the case of Nahid and Najima differ due to their compelling family economic crisis that pushed them to enter job market. Here, the girls were not relying on the skill they learned in their school, that is of beauty culture, rather girls from

vocational stream, were looking for either doing computer course, or if done then applying for a job accordingly. The school education however had made them eligible for the posts like- receptionist, office attendant, sales girl, as shared by one of the girl interviewees. The phase included adolescent girls' slight conflict with self and family to bargain for their aspirations as the girls reported during the visits.

This conflict led some of them to reinterpret the cultural hurdles as prescribed by the community through bargaining and resisting to achieve their aspirations in life. This in turn has resulted in girls' making efforts to strategize and negotiate for their right to exercise their agency in education, work and marriage. Further, improved access and mobility in public spaces would automatically contribute in her experiential learning and acquired consciousness to venture the unexplored arenas of life beyond home.

8.5.1. Resisting for or reconstructing aspirations

Researcher also observed uncertainty among many girls while resistance among few girls, who displayed willingness to join college after higher education after school, but during home visits they were making efforts or waiting for parents' response on the decision. The girls interviewed showed their aspirations to be self-reliant through education and worked but had to give up due to parental disapproval.

Thus, the study showed for poor the dream is still education but the poverty driven vicious cycle for the community girls keep them entrapped as a barrier in exploring life beyond home through education. Few girls who were resisting in schools kept their aspirations high even after completing school education and bargained with family for the same. At the same time, other girls were left to withdraw from education

and reconstruct their aspirations related to education and work. Especially, girls from vocational stream, who learned and got training in a skill, that is 'Beauty Culture and Health' (vocational stream), had to withdraw from regular mode of education system. This showed that the State's efforts on exploring the possibilities of developing skill among Muslim girl students are ultimately lending them to opt for home based work, that too if required (according to parents).

The network of state, marginalization, schooling and gender reproduced the established notion and data that Muslim women are largely engaged in unorganized home based sector. So, ultimately their economic class determined their subjective realities related to education and work.

The data indicated that the mother's agential role in facilitating daughter's education reflected at the generational change in the attitude towards education and employment. Thus, the mothers, irrespective of their educational status, were supporting their daughter's aspirations and so try to convince fathers to decide on daughters' education and work.

8.6. Concluding Remarks

The study revealed that school as a State institution offered a socializing space beyond home to Muslim girls, where they learnt and shared with peers and structure their aspirations. Schooling offered them an experiential learning while affirming with the normative notions on school, teacher, and teaching learning process and also 'good girl'.

Everyday interactions in school with teachers and peers differed a lot from the everyday interaction with family at home and so the disconnect between these two core

stakeholders persists.   The schools function in ritualistic manner (Maclern, 1986) as reflected in its school culture and fulfills the gendered expectations of the family for girls through discipline.   Thus, the everyday nuances in school and home continue to perpetuate the broader social realities- authority structure in school and home in relation to their education and career aspirations for Muslim girls in Shahbadpur.

Only 'good' girls used the space to make their voices heard not only in school but also at home but many girls complied with the expectations of school as well as family. The girls underwent the struggle of pursuing aspirations or reconstructing from the parents' perspective, which they expressed in their expectations from parents.

The politics of marginalization and neo liberal agenda of poor education and poor employment opportunities for the marginalized is operative in the field. The girls have not given up and 'hope' is there that they would 'negotiate' not resist (which they slyly did in classrooms) but the world of employment further delimits their hope. Work place would most likely be another oppressive place (as a mother stated that beauticians were under paid and harassed)

8.7. Implications of the Study

This study was confined to two major schools of a habitation in North East Delhi, but threw light on the ongoing schooling of children coming from more than 70 percent Muslim dominated habitation (GOI, 2008; GOI, 2011).

▪ The unavailability of a girls' college in the close vicinity poses challenge for the community girls in seeking higher education. The State's apathy towards the need of girls' college in the area but sincerity in the facilitation of vocational centers to learn

computer, beautician, tailoring, and designing will further deprive the population from achieving higher education. However, this attitude may well go with the current ruling government (GOI, 2015) focus on Skill development initiative but poses hindrance for the aspiring girls seeking higher learning. Similarly, there has been least attention paid to create awareness in the community towards the available government financial schemes for minority students seeking education after school.

- Looking at the teaching learning process in schools, it was observed that State should focus more on sensitizing teachers to re-visit the pedagogy used in classroom by having intensive in-service programmes on the need of inculcating critical thinking to produce reflective citizens. In order to break this ice, it necessitates greater thrust on promoting greater and meaningful teacher-pupil interaction to encourage girls to question what is taught and why it is taught. It will better equip them for life.

- For educators, such studies could be insightful that minority, class and gender work in building aspirations in life for adolescents. Along with this, in the teaching-learning process, how the absence of any critical pedagogical efforts by the teacher leads to perpetuating the existing delink between education and their lived world. Educators as researchers also get to understand how pedagogy can produce submissiveness in the students' personalities.

8.8. Further scope of research

The study raises questions on the existing pattern of efforts which need to show greater sensitivity towards the issue of marginalized position of Muslim girls' education. The aspiring researchers may take up research in the following areas-

- An ethnography that further enhance the micro-narratives and gives a longer duration to study the transition of girls at various level of education.

- The perspectives of fathers and brothers could be included, which might also throw light on the poor prospects of education for boys due to financial crisis at home.

- Specific impact of government's scheme (*Nai Roshni*) to understand the extent of utilization of the available prospects.

- The girls experience with work and career aspirations could also be studied.