

Mainstreaming Muslim Women

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n

- Indian Muslim women evidently live in a maze of stereotypes that in turn perpetrate socioeconomic inequalities.

\n

- Concerted efforts on educational and economic advancement are crucial for liberating Muslim women from ignorance and backwardness.

\n

\n\n

What are the notable injustices?

\n\n

\n

- **Recognising Disparity** - Sadly, to the disadvantage of many, there is often lack of recognition of the obvious divisions between Muslim men and women and between upper-class and other Muslim women.

\n

- By equating the needs of poorer women with privileged Muslim women, a great disservice is done to the former.

\n

- This brings into light the issue of educational under-representation and low political participation rates among disadvantaged Muslim women.

\n

- It applies particularly to those belonging to the lower castes and classes.

\n

- **Education** - As per the 2011 Census, around 50% of Muslim women were illiterate and only 3% were graduates.

\n

- Parents now are increasingly considering it important to send their daughters to mainstream schools.

\n

- However, this effort is largely limited to the privileged upper class Muslim women.

\n

- Lack of resources, discriminatory attitudes in schools, and the declining faith

in the public schooling system have left poorer Muslim women excluded from the mainstream.

\n

- Such issues have brought girls closer to locally available, niche schooling options like nearby madrasas that are limited to a religious curriculum.

\n

- The government commissioned study in 2007 with an aim to frame a 'National Plan of Action for Advancement of Muslim Women's Education in India' is yet to see the light of the day.

\n

- **Representation** - There has been a considerable decline in active civil society engagement of Muslims post-Independence.

\n

- Bodies like the All India Muslim Personal Law Board or the Ulema have stepped in, claiming to be the spokespersons for Muslim women.

\n

- On the other hand, feminist groups like the Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan have tended to get silenced in addressing issues that concern Muslim women.

\n

- The representation of Muslim women has been abysmal across political institutions.

\n

- Evidently, the Lok Sabha has had only 13 Muslim women MPs since Independence.

\n

- And there has been only one Muslim woman in the Union Council of Ministers in the last 25 years.

\n

\n\n

How do private Islamic schools come in aid?

\n\n

\n

- There is an emerging trend of private Islamic schools within less privileged Muslim society.

\n

- Such schools not only offer training in Islamic subjects, such as value-oriented literature, but also follow the CBSE curriculum.

\n

- Combining both modern and religious curriculum, these hybrid schools offer new educational opportunities for many marginalised adolescent Muslim girls.

- \n
- The entry of girls into these schools is a bold step towards mainstreaming.
- \n
- Graduates from these schools are increasingly opting for higher education in central universities like Jamia Millia Islamia.
- \n
- The model conveys the idea that education policy must account for such community efforts.
- \n

\n\n

What lies ahead?

\n\n

- \n
- Private Islamic schools are a great help, but mainstreaming Muslim girls will require more.
- \n
- For Muslim women to change their socio-political circumstances, political representation and civil society participation is a must.
- \n
- Policy measures should aim at improving the presence of Muslim women in deliberative bodies like the National Commission for Women and the National Commission for Minorities.
- \n
- Affirmative action through parliamentary laws to bring into force the pending Bills seeking to reserve half the seats in rural and urban local bodies for women can give better representation.
- \n
- For a vision of 'new India' to be successful, the questions of inclusion and equality of Muslim women should have to be given due focus.
- \n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n