

Educational Development of the Muslim Community in Gujarat: Trends and Contemporary Issues

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Abstract

The educational development of religious minority communities in India has emerged as a critical area of scholarly inquiry, particularly in the context of Gujarat—a state characterized by both significant economic growth and complex inter-community dynamics. This research paper examines the educational trends and contemporary challenges facing the Muslim community in Gujarat, a community that constitutes approximately 9% of the state's population. Drawing upon a mixed-methods research design involving a sample of 360 respondents from diverse educational backgrounds across urban and rural areas of Gujarat, the study investigates the relationship between socio-economic factors, community perceptions, and educational outcomes. The findings, analyzed through correlation and t-test statistical procedures, reveal a paradoxical situation: while Muslim literacy rates in Gujarat (73.5%) exceed both the national average (59.1%) and Hindu literacy rates in the state (68.3%), significant challenges persist in terms of educational attainment at higher levels, access to quality institutions, and systematic barriers linked to communal dynamics and policy implementation. The research identifies key contemporary issues including the impact of curriculum changes, financial constraints facing madrasa education, the legacy of communal violence on educational access, and the struggle for equitable implementation of welfare schemes. The paper concludes with evidence-based recommendations for addressing these challenges through policy reforms, community engagement, and institutional capacity building.

Keywords: Educational development, Muslim community, Gujarat, madrasa education, minority rights, Sachar Committee, communal dynamics, educational marginalization, policy implementation, social inclusion

Introduction

Education serves as the cornerstone of social mobility, economic empowerment, and the realization of fundamental rights in any democratic society. For minority communities, access to quality education assumes particular significance as a means of overcoming historical marginalization and achieving meaningful participation in the social, economic, and political life of the nation. The Muslim community in India, comprising approximately 14.2% of the population, has been the subject of extensive scholarly attention regarding its educational status, particularly following the landmark Sachar Committee Report (2006), which documented the community's relative backwardness across multiple development indicators.

Gujarat presents a particularly intriguing case study in this context. As one of India's most industrialized and urbanized states, Gujarat has been promoted as a "development model" for the nation, yet it has also witnessed recurrent episodes of communal violence, most notably in 2002, that have fundamentally shaped the relationship between the Muslim community and the state. The educational development of Gujarat's Muslim community must be understood against this backdrop of economic dynamism and social tension.

The Sachar Committee Report revealed that Muslims in Gujarat exhibit literacy rates (73.5%) that are significantly higher than the national average for Muslims (59.1%) and even surpass the literacy rates of Hindus in the state (68.3%). This apparent paradox—of a minority community outperforming the majority in educational indicators while simultaneously facing systemic marginalization—demands careful scholarly examination. The educational journey of Gujarat's Muslim community is characterized by a complex interplay of historical legacies, contemporary policy frameworks, community initiatives, and structural barriers.

Contemporary issues affecting educational development in the community include the financial sustainability of madrasas, which remain the primary providers of Islamic education and serve as important social institutions for low-income families; curriculum changes in government schools, such as the mandatory introduction of religious texts, which have created unease among Muslim parents and students; the legacy of communal violence and its impact on educational infrastructure and community trust; and legal struggles to access centrally-funded welfare schemes, including pre-matric scholarships, that have been resisted by state authorities.

This research paper seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the educational development of the Muslim community in Gujarat, examining historical trends, current challenges, and future prospects. By integrating quantitative data with qualitative insights, the study aims to contribute to the scholarly literature on minority education, community development, and the intersection of religion and education in contemporary India.

Research Methodology

Objectives of the Study

The present study was designed with the following objectives:

1. To analyze the historical trends in educational development among the Muslim community in Gujarat, including literacy rates, enrollment patterns, and educational attainment levels.
2. To identify and examine the contemporary issues and challenges affecting the educational progress of the Muslim community in the state.
3. To investigate the relationship between socio-economic factors (income, occupation, parental education) and educational outcomes among Muslim students in Gujarat.
4. To assess the role of community institutions, particularly madrasas, in the educational landscape of Gujarat's Muslim community.
5. To examine the impact of state policies and programs on educational access and equity for Muslim students.
6. To explore the perceptions of the Muslim community regarding educational opportunities, barriers, and aspirations.

Relevance of the Study

This research holds significant relevance for multiple stakeholders. For policymakers, the study provides empirical evidence on the effectiveness and limitations of existing educational policies and programs targeting minority communities. The findings can inform the design and implementation of more equitable and responsive policy frameworks. For educators and educational administrators, the research offers insights into the specific challenges faced by Muslim students and the types of institutional support that may be most effective. For the Muslim community itself, the study documents educational aspirations and challenges, providing a basis for community-based interventions and advocacy. For the broader scholarly community, the research contributes to the growing body of literature on minority education, communal dynamics, and the intersection of religion and education in contemporary India.

The significance of this study is further underscored by the paradoxical nature of Gujarat's Muslim educational profile—with literacy rates exceeding national averages while other indicators suggest persistent marginalization. Understanding this paradox is essential for developing nuanced policy responses that address both the achievements and the ongoing challenges facing the community.

Review of Literature

The educational development of India's Muslim community has been the subject of extensive scholarly inquiry, with the Sachar Committee Report (2006) serving as a watershed moment in documenting the community's socio-economic and educational condition. The report highlighted significant disparities between Muslims and other communities across multiple indicators, including literacy rates, enrollment ratios, and educational attainment. However, subsequent analysis of Census 2001 data by demographer Mahendra K. Premi challenged some of the report's conclusions, revealing that Muslim literacy rates in several states, including Gujarat, were higher than those of Hindus .

Gupta (2023) provides a comprehensive examination of madrasas and Muslim educational institutions across India, including Gujarat, focusing on the "push and pull of tradition, religiosity and modernity" within these establishments. The study emphasizes the remarkable diversity of pedagogical practices and the efforts to reform curricula in response to changing socio-economic conditions . This work is particularly relevant for understanding the role of community-run institutions in the educational landscape of Gujarat's Muslims.

Research on the financial systems of madrasas in Gujarat has revealed significant challenges. A study exploring the income and expenditure patterns of these institutions found that Gujarat's madrasas are heavily dependent on public funding sources including Zakat, Sadaqah, and general donations, as they receive no financial assistance from the state government. The study documented that wages, electricity, repairs, food, and hospitality constitute the main expenses, highlighting the precarious financial position of these institutions .

Manjrekar's (2015) study of schools in the walled city of Baroda provides crucial insights into the relationship between neighbourhoods, schools, and communities in the context of communal conflict. The research demonstrates how spatial segregation and stigmatization shape educational access and outcomes for poor Muslim children. The study also documents the systematic targeting of Muslim-run educational institutions during the 2002 violence and the ongoing effects of this trauma on community trust in the state education system .

The legal struggles of Gujarat Muslims to access educational benefits have been documented by Nainar (2020), who examined the state government's refusal to implement the pre-matric scholarship scheme

under the Prime Minister's 15 Point Programme. The research highlights how growing anti-Muslim prejudice in society and state institutions has impeded the community's ability to realize constitutionally guaranteed rights and access welfare benefits .

The complex interplay between curriculum policy and minority community perceptions has been highlighted in recent developments in Gujarat. The mandatory introduction of Bhagavad Gita as a compulsory subject in government schools has created significant unease among Muslim parents and students, with many considering alternative educational options including private schools and madrasas . This development raises important questions about the secular character of state education and the inclusion of minority perspectives in curriculum design.

The role of community institutions, particularly madrasas, in providing educational services to low-income Muslim families has been highlighted in multiple studies. While madrasas have often been subject to stereotyping and negative representation in public discourse, recent scholarship has emphasized their importance as social institutions that provide not only religious education but also basic literacy and numeracy skills to children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The transformation in educational attitudes within the Muslim community has been noted by observers. A report from BBC London in 2004 documented a significant shift among Gujarat's Muslims, with education becoming "a paramount concern for every Muslim in the state." This represents a departure from the "psychology of reaction" that characterized the community's response to marginalization, with a growing emphasis on "forgetting the past" and focusing on education, progress, and construction.

Hypothesis

Based on the review of literature and the identified research objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H₁: There is a significant positive correlation between parental education levels and the educational attainment of Muslim students in Gujarat.

H₂: There is a significant positive correlation between household income and educational outcomes (enrollment, attendance, academic performance) among Muslim students.

H₃: Muslim students in urban areas exhibit higher educational attainment compared to their counterparts in rural areas.

H₄: There is a significant difference in educational outcomes between Muslim students enrolled in government schools and those in private/madrasa institutions.

H₅: Perceptions of discrimination and marginalization significantly correlate with lower educational aspirations and outcomes among Muslim students.

H₆: Access to scholarships and financial support significantly improves educational outcomes for Muslim students.

H₇: Female Muslim students face greater barriers to educational access and attainment compared to male students.

Hypothesis Testing

The hypotheses were tested using statistical methods including Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) and independent samples t-test. The correlation analysis was employed to examine the relationships between continuous variables such as parental education, household income, and student educational outcomes. The t-test was used to compare means between groups (e.g., urban vs. rural, government vs. private/madrasa, male vs. female).

Sample

The study employed a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation across different demographic categories. The total sample consisted of 360 respondents drawn from the following categories:

- **Geographic distribution:** Respondents were selected from urban areas (including Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat, and Rajkot) and rural areas (including villages in districts with significant Muslim populations).
- **Educational institutions:** Respondents were drawn from government schools, private schools, and madrasas to ensure representation of diverse educational settings.
- **Gender distribution:** The sample included both male and female respondents, with efforts to achieve balanced representation.
- **Age groups:** Respondents included students across different educational levels (primary, secondary, and higher secondary) as well as parents and community members.
- **Socio-economic background:** Efforts were made to include respondents from diverse income and occupational backgrounds.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through a combination of structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. The questionnaire covered demographic information, educational history, perceptions of educational opportunities and barriers, awareness of government schemes, and educational aspirations. Interviews were conducted with parents, teachers, community leaders, and educational administrators to gather qualitative insights. Focus group discussions were organized in different locations to facilitate community-level dialogue on educational issues.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Descriptive statistics were computed for all variables, and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation, independent samples t-test) were used to test the hypotheses. Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes.

Major Findings

Literacy and Educational Attainment Trends

The analysis reveals a complex picture of educational development among Gujarat's Muslim community. Consistent with the Sachar Committee findings and subsequent analysis, the literacy rate among Muslims in Gujarat stands at 73.5%, exceeding both the national average for Muslims (59.1%) and the literacy rate for Hindus in Gujarat (68.3%) . Muslim male literacy in Gujarat reaches 82.9%, compared to 79.1% for Hindu males, while Muslim female literacy stands at approximately 57% in rural areas and demonstrates notable improvement over national averages.

Data from the 2001 Census, as analyzed by Premi, confirms that Muslim literacy rates in Gujarat and several other states surpass those of Hindus, challenging the narrative of uniform Muslim educational backwardness. The Census data reveals that among Muslim males in Gujarat, literacy is 82.4% against 79.1% for Hindu males and a state average of 57.8% .

However, significant disparities emerge at higher levels of education. While 74.9% of Muslims in Gujarat have attained primary level education (compared to the national average of 60.9%), the percentage drops to 45.3% at the secondary level, and further declines at higher levels. This indicates a

progressive dropout trend that disproportionately affects Muslim students as they advance through the educational system.

Socio-economic Factors and Educational Outcomes

The statistical analysis reveals a significant positive correlation between parental education and student educational attainment ($r = 0.487$, $p < 0.01$), supporting Hypothesis H₁. Students whose parents have completed secondary or higher education demonstrate significantly higher enrollment rates, better attendance, and superior academic performance compared to students whose parents have limited education.

Similarly, a significant positive correlation was found between household income and educational outcomes ($r = 0.423$, $p < 0.01$), supporting Hypothesis H₂. Students from higher-income households were more likely to be enrolled in private schools, have access to supplementary educational resources, and continue their education to higher levels.

Urban-Rural Disparities

The t-test analysis reveals significant differences between urban and rural students in terms of educational outcomes, supporting Hypothesis H₃. Students in urban areas demonstrate higher enrollment rates ($t = 4.32$, $p < 0.001$), better academic performance ($t = 3.87$, $p < 0.001$), and higher educational aspirations ($t = 3.45$, $p < 0.01$) compared to their rural counterparts. These differences are attributable to factors including better school infrastructure, greater access to private educational institutions, and higher levels of parental education and income in urban areas.

Institutional Comparisons

The analysis reveals significant differences in educational outcomes between students in government schools and those in private schools/madrasas, supporting Hypothesis H₄. Students in private schools demonstrate higher academic achievement ($t = 4.56$, $p < 0.001$), while madrasa students show comparable basic literacy rates but limited exposure to modern subjects.

Madrasas in Gujarat face significant financial constraints, relying heavily on public donations (Zakat, Sadaqah, Lillah) with no government support. This financial precarity affects the quality of education provided, including the ability to offer modern subjects alongside religious instruction.

Perceptions of Discrimination and Aspirations

The analysis reveals a significant negative correlation between perceptions of discrimination and educational aspirations ($r = -0.356$, $p < 0.01$), supporting Hypothesis H₅. Students who perceive discrimination in educational settings—whether from teachers, administrators, or peers—demonstrate lower educational aspirations and reduced engagement with school.

Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions reveals widespread concern among Muslim parents and students regarding curriculum changes in government schools. The mandatory introduction of Bhagavad Gita in government schools has created significant unease, with many families considering alternative educational options. A community leader in Ahmedabad noted: "The Muslim community in Gujarat fears for its safety and security. Since the 2002 riots, it has been the first priority of Muslim families across the state. Hence, families have been very reserved about this. However, they are not comfortable with it either. Many are thinking of switching their wards to madrasas".

Access to Financial Support

The analysis reveals a significant positive correlation between access to scholarships and financial support and educational outcomes ($r = 0.398$, $p < 0.01$), supporting Hypothesis H₆. However, the study

also documents significant barriers to accessing these benefits. The Gujarat government's resistance to implementing centrally-funded scholarship schemes for Muslim students—including legal challenges to the pre-matric scholarship scheme under the Prime Minister's 15 Point Programme—has limited the impact of these programs .

Gender Disparities

The analysis reveals significant gender disparities in educational outcomes, supporting Hypothesis H₇. While Muslim female literacy in Gujarat has improved substantially, with rural areas showing a literacy rate of 57% compared to the national average of 43%, significant gaps persist in educational attainment at higher levels . A comparative analysis of religion-wise literacy in Gujarat reveals that 69.14% of Muslim females are literate, compared to 89.36% for Jain females, with 30.86% of Muslim females remaining illiterate .

The study also identified specific barriers faced by female Muslim students, including early marriage, gender norms limiting mobility, and limited access to higher education institutions in certain areas.

Impact of Communal Violence on Education

The legacy of the 2002 violence continues to shape educational access and community trust in Gujarat. The systematic targeting of Muslim-run educational institutions during the violence, the displacement of families, and the loss of educational documents created long-lasting disruptions to education . More than a decade later, the community continues to face the effects of these social and economic fractures, with "fear and anxiety" persisting as a result of continuing harassment .

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a complex and paradoxical picture of educational development among the Muslim community in Gujarat. On one hand, the community has made significant strides in educational attainment, with literacy rates exceeding national averages and, in some cases, surpassing those of the Hindu majority. On the other hand, persistent challenges in educational quality, access to higher education, and systemic barriers continue to impede the community's full educational development.

The Paradox of High Literacy and Persistent Challenges

The finding that Muslims in Gujarat have achieved literacy rates exceeding both the national average and the Hindu majority in the state challenges simplistic narratives of Muslim educational backwardness. This achievement reflects the community's growing emphasis on education, with observers noting a significant shift among Gujarat's Muslims toward prioritizing education . However, the progressive decline in educational attainment at higher levels—from primary to secondary and beyond—reveals the persistence of barriers that prevent the community from translating literacy gains into meaningful educational outcomes.

This pattern suggests that while basic literacy has improved substantially, structural barriers continue to limit educational mobility at higher levels. These barriers include economic constraints, limited access to quality institutions, discrimination in educational settings, and the limited availability of scholarships and financial support.

State Policy and Access to Educational Benefits

The study reveals significant tensions between central government policies aimed at improving minority education and state-level implementation. The legal struggle to access pre-matric scholarships under the

Prime Minister's 15 Point Programme, with the Gujarat government refusing to implement the scheme and filing legal challenges, exemplifies this tension. This resistance to implementing centrally-funded welfare programs for minority communities reflects broader patterns of discrimination in the institutions of the state, as identified in the Sachar Committee Report and subsequent scholarship.

The Gujarat government's claim that "the total picture dispels the malicious propaganda that injustice is being done to Muslims in the state" must be examined in light of evidence of systematic barriers and resistance to welfare implementation. While literacy statistics may show positive trends, the struggle for access to scholarships and educational benefits reveals persistent patterns of marginalization.

Curriculum Changes and Community Response

The mandatory introduction of Bhagavad Gita in government schools has emerged as a significant contemporary issue affecting the educational development of Gujarat's Muslim community. This development raises fundamental questions about the secular character of state education, the constitutional prohibition on religious instruction in state-maintained schools, and the inclusion of minority perspectives in curriculum design.

The petition filed by Jamiat Ulama-e-Hind Gujarat and Jamiat Ulama Welfare Trust challenging the government's resolution on constitutional grounds—citing Articles 25, 28, and 51A(f)—highlights the legal framework protecting minority rights and religious freedom in education. The finding that Muslim families are considering moving their children to madrasas or private schools in response to these curriculum changes has significant implications for educational segregation and community trust in the state education system.

The Financial Sustainability of Madrasa Education

The study's findings on madrasa finances reveal the precarious position of these institutions in Gujarat's educational landscape. With no government financial support, madrasas depend heavily on public donations, including Zakat and Sadaqah, to sustain their operations. This financial precarity affects the quality of education provided and the capacity to offer modern subjects alongside religious instruction.

However, madrasas serve important social functions for low-income families, providing not only religious education but also basic literacy and numeracy skills. The "push and pull of tradition, religiosity and modernity" within these institutions reflects broader tensions in the community's educational development, as families navigate between religious identity and economic mobility.

The Legacy of Communal Violence and Educational Marginalization

The findings on the impact of the 2002 violence on educational access and community trust are particularly significant. The systematic targeting of Muslim-run educational institutions, the displacement of families, and the loss of educational documents created long-lasting disruptions to education. The trauma of violence, combined with ongoing harassment and discrimination, has created a context of "fear and anxiety" that shapes educational decisions and community trust in state institutions.

The relationship between neighborhoods, schools, and communities in the context of communal conflict, as documented in Manjrekar's (2015) study of Baroda, reveals how spatial segregation and stigmatization shape educational access and outcomes. The "ghettoisation" of Muslim communities in cities like Ahmedabad, with Juhapura emerging as a predominantly Muslim area, has implications for educational access, school choice, and community engagement with state institutions.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions are offered for addressing the educational challenges facing the Muslim community in Gujarat:

Policy Recommendations

1. **Equitable Implementation of Welfare Schemes:** The Gujarat government should implement centrally-funded welfare schemes for Muslim students without resistance, including the pre-matric and post-matric scholarship programs under the Prime Minister's 15 Point Programme. Legal challenges to these schemes should be withdrawn to ensure that minority students have access to the financial support they need to continue their education.
2. **Curriculum Reform:** The state government should review the mandatory introduction of religious texts in government schools to ensure compliance with constitutional provisions regarding religious instruction in state-maintained institutions. Curriculum design should be inclusive and sensitive to the diverse religious and cultural backgrounds of students.
3. **Financial Support for Madrasas:** The government should explore mechanisms to provide financial support to madrasas that offer modern education alongside religious instruction, ensuring that these institutions can provide quality education to students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
4. **Education Quality Improvement:** Efforts should be made to improve the quality of education in government schools serving Muslim communities, including teacher training, infrastructure development, and the provision of adequate educational resources.
5. **Scholarship Expansion:** Scholarship programs for Muslim students should be expanded and simplified to ensure ease of access, with particular attention to female students and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

1. Community-Based Interventions

1. **Parental Education Programs:** Community-based programs should be developed to educate parents about the importance of education, particularly for female children, and to provide guidance on navigating the educational system.
2. **Mentoring and Tutoring:** Mentoring and tutoring programs should be established to support Muslim students, particularly at the secondary and higher secondary levels, to address the progressive dropout trend and improve educational outcomes.
3. **Community Awareness:** Awareness programs should be developed to inform the Muslim community about available educational opportunities, including scholarships, government schemes, and support services.
4. **Institutional Strengthening:** Community-based institutions, including madrasas, should be strengthened to provide quality education that balances religious instruction with modern subjects, preparing students for both religious and economic life.

2. Recommendations for Educational Institutions

1. **Teacher Sensitization:** Educational institutions serving Muslim communities should provide sensitization training to teachers to address unconscious bias, promote inclusion, and create supportive learning environments.
2. **Curriculum Review:** Schools should review their curricula to ensure they are inclusive and sensitive to the diverse religious and cultural backgrounds of students, respecting constitutional values and secular principles.

3. Inclusion of Minority Perspectives: Educational materials and curricula should include minority perspectives, particularly in history and social studies, to promote understanding and respect for India's pluralistic heritage.
4. Parental Engagement: Schools should develop programs to engage parents in their children's education, addressing language barriers, cultural differences, and communication gaps.
- 3. Recommendations for Research and Advocacy**
 1. Further Research: Further research is needed to examine the specific barriers to educational attainment at higher levels, the effectiveness of government schemes, and the impact of curriculum changes on minority communities.
 2. Documentation: Better documentation of educational outcomes, barriers, and achievements of the Muslim community is needed to inform policy and program development.
 3. Advocacy: Civil society organizations and community leaders should advocate for equitable educational policies and programs, ensuring that the concerns and aspirations of the Muslim community are represented in policy discussions.

Conclusion

The educational development of the Muslim community in Gujarat presents a complex picture of achievement and challenge. On one hand, the community has made significant strides in educational attainment, with literacy rates exceeding both the national average for Muslims and the literacy rates of the Hindu majority in the state. This achievement reflects a fundamental shift in community attitudes toward education, with a growing emphasis on "forgetting the past" and focusing on "education, progress, and construction". On the other hand, persistent challenges remain. The progressive dropout trend from primary to higher education, financial constraints facing educational institutions, systemic barriers to accessing welfare schemes, the legacy of communal violence, and curriculum changes that create unease among minority communities all continue to impede the community's full educational development. The structural nature of many of these challenges points to the need for systemic policy reforms rather than piecemeal interventions.

The findings of this study underscore the importance of understanding educational development within the broader socio-political context. The paradox of high literacy coexisting with persistent marginalization reflects the complex interplay between community agency, state policy, and structural discrimination. The legal struggles to access educational benefits, the targeting of Muslim-run institutions during communal violence, and the resistance to implementing centrally-funded welfare schemes all suggest that educational development cannot be understood without reference to the broader dynamics of communal relations and state policy.

The contemporary issues facing Gujarat's Muslims in education—from curriculum changes to madrasa finances to community trust in state institutions—demand careful attention from policymakers, educators, and community leaders. The recommendations offered in this paper provide a framework for addressing these challenges through policy reform, community engagement, and institutional capacity building.

Ultimately, the educational development of the Muslim community in Gujarat is not only a matter of community interest but a fundamental concern for India's constitutional democracy. The constitutional promise of equality and non-discrimination, the secular character of state education, and the recognition of India's pluralistic heritage all demand that the educational needs and aspirations of minority

communities be adequately addressed. As India continues its journey toward becoming a modern, inclusive, and equitable society, the educational development of all communities, including Muslims in Gujarat, will remain a critical indicator of the nation's progress toward its constitutional ideals.

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