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Name of the Study : A Study of Status and Problems of Education of Muslim Women in the district of Kishanganj, Bihar

Despite many programmes launched by the government, Bihar remains one of the highly backward states in term of education, industrial development and economic prosperity and the largest percentage of uneducated population. And in Kishanganj district where the Muslim community comprises around 70% of the population, the female literacy is the least in all over India that counts only 18.6 per cent against Bihar's female literacy of 33.1 per cent and national female literacy rate of 54.1 per cent, according to the 2001 census.

In order to further understand the reasons for the lowest female literacy in the district, the present study entitled "A study of status and problems of Muslim women in the District Kishanganj, Bihar" is being conducted as an attempt to build a sound understanding of the status and problem of education of Muslim girls for policy makers, planners and researchers.

All the seven blocks of Kishanganj district constitute the population of the study. For the purpose of the study, five blocks out of seven blocks from the district were taken as samples. These five blocks included Kishanganj block, Bahadurganj, Thakurganj, Pothia and Kochadhaman. Records from each school were collected with the permission of schools heads and concerned authorities of the schools. Existing data on all relevant indicators available from primary and secondary sources, official documents, reports and studies on the education of Muslim girls were analyzed and interpreted. In order to collect necessary data for the present study, surveys were conducted to collect data of the existing phenomenon with a view to employ that data to justify current conditions and practices or to make intelligence plans.

The findings of the research study suggest that despite being a Muslim dominated district, percentage representation of Muslim girls in primary schools as percentage of total girls is less than 50% for all the sample blocks (except Kishanganj block which has 85% representation). At the higher secondary school level, the presence of Muslim girls among all the girls is very low - 19% in Pothia block and 12% in the Kochadhaman block. This reflects a trend of increasing drop out of Muslim girls at higher secondary level.

Low conversion rate from primary to middle and high school could be attributed to a number of factors including the unwillingness of the parents to send their daughters to the school and engage them in household works, absence of female teachers in most schools and also because of the engagement of teachers in various activities like appointing them to oversee elections, census and other responsibilities besides teaching. Since most parents cannot afford private education and teachers are kept engaged in other non-teaching activities resulting in low conversion rate from primary to upper primary happens. Also, the infrastructure provided for girl's education is very mediocre and it reflects in the absence of toilets for them both in the upper primary level and upper Primary with secondary/ higher secondary school level.

Despite many central and state government sponsored educational schemes for minorities, the number of illiterates among Muslims in Kishanganj district is as high as 69%. In this scenario, the possible solutions could be to set up primary girls schools in large numbers. Since Muslim girls have shown least affinity to education, Muslim dominated wards, mohallas and Panchayats should be separately identified through a survey and primary girls school should be set up in those areas in large number. Further, a massive campaign for educational awareness through Sarva Siksha Abiyan should be launched.

Four years back, the Bihar government launched the highly successful Mukhyamantri Ballika Cycle Yojana. The government should continue with this plan. Also, the Government should ensure the availability of toilets and drinking water facilities in all school to arrest the dropout rate. Since Kishanganj District is an economically backward district, some job related courses should be promoted that after the completion of secondary education women may easily get some employment to earn their livelihood.