

# ***Unlocking the Potential of Open Learning: A Shared Story of Education with Livelihood as a Force of Change for Mainstreaming Marginalized Women***

---

SUKANTA KUMAR MAHAPATRA, Academic Officer (Sociology)  
National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS)  
Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) ,Govt. of  
[Indiasukanta.dse@gmail.com](mailto:Indiasukanta.dse@gmail.com)  
Mobile-91-9716230645

---

## ***Sub Theme: Girls and Women Education***

---

### **Abstract**

Gender equality is critical to the development process. The process of globalization may have resulted in new avenues of growth, but due to unequal distribution of its benefits women are subject to discrimination in many facets of social life. While globalization has created space for better jobs and new economic opportunities, it has also resulted negative impacts on women in terms of their influence on personal lives. Women face further marginalization in the informal labour sector or impoverishment through loss of traditional sources of income. But it is essential to innovate and implement different ways and means to reap the benefit from the process of globalization. The paper discusses about how women being deprived of education are benefitted through open schooling system under NIOS. The paper will attempt to draw inferences about impact of these programmes on their life. It also explores how such kind of initiatives can be replicable in other situations

The paper will reflect on the case studies of adolescent girls from Muslim community who were unsuccessful to accomplish their life goals due to lack of education but wider opportunities provided by open schooling system has facilitated in fulfilling their life goals of education with livelihood. While these Muslim Girls are deprived of education being in the vicious circle of values and norms that provide less space for education of women, impoverishment and lack of educational infrastructure, the traditional institution of learning like Maktabas and Madrasas are upgraded and collaborated with NIOS for providing needful vocational education. On the other hand, the collaboration with employment generation programme and NGOs largely facilitate these young women to get access to education with livelihood. The success of Hunar Programme shows that traditional religious values are not limitations rather strengthens opportunities for education when the reforms take place within the institutions and religious capital are linked with Social Capital. But productive collaboration with industries and skill-based education with upgraded curriculum is essential catering to the needs of competitive demands of national and global institutions

### **1.0. INTRODUCTION**

The process of globalization has emerged as an important force in the changing labour market in recent decades. Not only the size and volume of workforce has increased in formal sector but increase of labour force is also marked in the informal sector.<sup>i</sup> On the other hand, Women's employment has increased in most countries, whereas men's employment has either stagnated or has declined driven by new demands and new expectations in the globalised economy. While the need of the households to have more than one income earner has brought women into the limelight as a major workforce in order to maintain or improve their living standards, other processes such as the rising weight of the service sector where women's jobs tend to concentrate, and the feminization of jobs in manufacturing reinforced the increase in women's job in the service sector<sup>ii</sup>. On the other hand, the negative impact of globalization i.e. high unemployment rate among men and more particularly lack of job security also influence the decisions of the families to depend on the women as breadwinner<sup>iii</sup>.

However, the labour market created by the process of globalization benefitted the elite and educated women at large than the vast majority of women, who are working in informal sector with low education and low skill. There has been a fall in the share of women's employment in manufacturing and services, increasing migration particularly of women, deepening agrarian crisis, increasing non-availability of employment in agriculture particularly for women. Over the years, the earning averages of the women with low education are declining compared to the women with high education<sup>iv</sup>. In addition to this, the lack of job security, greater levels of Physical and mental stress due to intense exploitation and health hazards at workplace are also negatively affect the employment of women. Thus, there is need to reshape the processes through educating and skilling women so that large number of women can benefit from the process of globalization which has generated a high demand of employment opportunities for women in developing nations. While formal training institutions don't have adequate arrangements to cater to the needs of large number of aspirants either due to resource constraint or due to the constraints arising out of the women with in the family or society or , open and distance education embedded with flexibility in timings or flexible course structure provides a tremendous opportunity to pursue academic and benefit from skills-based education and training(Gaba,2007)

Given these circumstances and the empirical evidence collected in the various studies, the paper explores the participation of Muslim women in education and employment in the second chapter. The third chapter discusses about the How Hunar as a vocational oriented programme bring changes in the life of the people. The last section focuses on various alternatives and scopes for improving the programme.

## **2.0. MUSLIM WOMEN IN EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT**

In India, the process of structuring and restructuring policies and programmes for the progress and development of women is in operation since decades. Special committees and commissions were set up in different times to bring policy changes and improvement in the indicators of education. Although many programmes were advocated after independence, special focus on women's education was first time emphasized in the National Policy on Education, 1986(Modified in 1992).The national policy chapter entitled Education for Women's Equality states: "The National Education System will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators, and the active involvement of educational institutions. The removal of women's illiteracy and obstacles inhibiting their access to, and retention in, elementary education will receive overriding priority. "

Further Sarva Siksha Abhiyan<sup>v</sup> was launched in 2000 to bridge gender and social gaps through micro-planning and school-mapping exercises and targeting the special programmes like Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya(KGBV) ensuring inclusion and quality education for girls. Many innovative facilities like separate schools for girls, availability of open learning resources, residential schooling, coaching facilities; scholarships, textbooks, uniforms and transport including bicycles were provided. As a result, the enrolment has increased manifold in current years.

Despite numerous efforts to improve school education, the scenario in India continues to be rather dismal. Several attempts have been made to improve the three basic strands of education viz. quality, quantity and equity but have not completely succeeded due to various reasons. A high proportion of out of school and working children in rural areas, low enrolment, and low retention rates are the most common issues affecting the school education. Girls and women belonging to socially and economically weaker sections such Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and Muslims are far behind their urban middle class background (Nayar, 2011). Muslim women are most deprived among all segments of population in India. According to an ORG-Marg Muslim Women's Survey — commissioned by the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi — conducted in 2000-2001 in 40 districts spanning 12 states, it was found that the enrolment percentage of Muslim girl children is a mere 40.66 per cent. As a consequence, the proportion of Muslim women in higher education is a mere 3.56 per cent, lower even than that of scheduled castes (4.25 per cent). On all-India basis, 66 per cent Muslim women are stated to be illiterate.

A study by Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon (2005) reveals that only 17.1% Muslim girls complete eight years of schooling and less than 10% complete higher secondary education. In north, the corresponding figures are 4.5% and 4.75% respectively, while the educational attainment for south Indian counter part is double than that of north India. The comparison of rural-urban Muslims reveal that only 1.5% Muslims vis-à-vis 4.8% urban Muslims are enrolled in senior secondary school, which is very minimal in comparison to the women's enrolment in All India Average<sup>vi</sup>(SES,2004-05).

It has been found that the unequal access to education for Muslim women is essentially the result of low socio-economic status<sup>vii</sup>. In addition to financial constraint, gender bias and low age of marriage found to be the major reasons of low attainment of education among Muslim Women( Hasan and Menon,2004).

Muslim men's education is found to be very low than males belonging to other religious and social groups<sup>viii</sup>. This directly or indirectly create pressure to impose ceilings on girls' education. Further, the fear of parents of making the girls highly educated may render the girls unmarriageable also prevents women from access to education. (Ghosh, 2005)

While the social restrictions operating for women, low education of men affect education of women, these factors also affect the job opportunity for women. Along with, compulsion for men to earn, the greater availability of jobs for men influences the decision of women in joining workforce (Shrivastav, 2009). Muslim women have a significantly low WPR – nearly half the national rate for women of all religions. While the WPR of Muslim women is 14.5, Hindu, Christian, Buddhists and other religions have WPR OF 27.5 per cent, 28.7 percent, 31.7 per cent and 44.2 per cent respectively. (Census, 2001)

### **3.0. OPEN SCHOOLING AS POTENTIAL FOR EDUCATION AND LIVELIHOOD FOR MUSLIM WOMEN**

Secondary education has been considered as the best preparation for entry into labour markets and further training. But inaccessibility to schooling by marginalized groups, drop-out and low enrolment in formal schools due to multiple factors both systemic failure and agents and structures operating between home, community and society have led to the emergence of Open schooling system in India(Sujatha,).Recently, The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) envisages that 15% of the youth population corresponding to the age group 14+ to 18 may be taken care of by the Open Schooling System. According to an estimate, the Open Schooling system is required to cater to the needs of about 150 lakh youth in the age group 14-18. With the numerous challenges ahead, open schooling system in india has taken a large scale transformation in recent years.

In India, the Open Schooling System is being operationalised by the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) at the national level and the State Open Schools (SOSs) at the State level. So far 18 states have set up State Open Schools. The National Policy on Education (NPE-1986) suggested strengthening of Open Schooling System for extending open learning facilities in a phased manner at Secondary level for all over the country as an independent system with its own curriculum and examination leading to certification. (NIOS,2011).

In India high percentage of population among Muslim women than other segment of population drop out from school education. While the average number of year that a Muslim Girls study is 2.7 per cent, the same is 3.8 years in case of Hindu Girls(Hasan and Menon,2005,Nayar,2011). While the prejudice and discriminatory attitude particularly Pardah system and high preference to send boys to school prevent successful schooling of the Muslim women, the low socio-economic status of the family do not help to afford school fees, or pay for the expenses of the uniforms, supplies and food that schoolchildren require. (UNICEF, 2009). But the cost of open schooling has been found to be low than other traditional and formal school system. At present (2005-07), the cost per secondary student per course at Kendriya Vidyalayas and Emmanuel Mission Secondary School (EMSS), Bhilwara a private School is more than 12 and 9 times respectively of that of NIOS (NIOS, 2005-06).On the other hand, the relaxations in admission fee were also provided to students belonging to women in NIOS (NIOS, Profile, 2011).

Similarly, NIOS has also taken special measures for the educational development of Muslims as a whole. Realizing that Minorities face number of constraints in education, the special minority cell was created in 2006. The cell plays an important and vital role for implementation of NPE 1986, and Programme of Action (POA) 1992. It is making efforts to bring out of school Muslim children within the fold of education through alternative schooling by accreditation of Maktabas and Madarsa. Minority Cell therefore has become a major instrument of Policy Intervention for Government of India for improving educational access for Muslim Minorities at school level in the light of the recommendations of Sachar Committee and Prime Minister - 15 Point Programme. The Minority Cell of NIOS grants accreditation on relaxed norms especially developed for Minority Institutions. This has helped to link traditional educational institutions of Muslims like Madarsas, Maktabas and Darul-Ul-Uloom into mainstream education. The National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (NCMEI) had signed an MoU with the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) — both autonomous institutions under the Union HRD ministry — to create a wider network of study centers in recognized and registered madrassas. About 350 minority educational institutions in the country are attached with National Open Schools of which 122 are madrassas. (NIOS, 2011). The Minority cell conducts Advocacy programmes for grant of accreditation and for minority education. (NIOS). The books were translated in Urdu medium for facilitating the education of children. Along with, the registration and examination fees of Muslim learners also covered under the Scheme for Providing Quality Education for Madarsas, a scheme which is launched by government of India for promotion of education of Muslims.

A new skill development programme "Hunar" was devised by NIOS with the objective of encouraging school education and development of Skills among Muslim women. The project was initiated in Bihar in collaboration with Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC) to impart skill training to Muslim girls in seven vocational courses from 2008-09 session. A total of 13768 Muslim girls have been imparted skill training in courses like Gram Sakhi, Cutting, Tailoring and Dress Making, Basic Rural Technology, Jute Production, Bakery and Confectionery, Beauty Culture and Early Childhood Care and Education. Looking at the socio-cultural realities, Madrasa and Institutions taking care of betterment of Muslims are chosen as nodal agencies for running the project. Out of 13768 girls, 11347 girls passed the examination and got certificate in respective trades. It is interesting to mention that not even one learner, dropped out of this programme. The programme has not only provided access to women's education but it has also empowered to get meaningful livelihood. Under the scheme, each candidate on completion of her training was given Rs 2500.00 as grant to purchase equipment to start her own business. Another landmark steps in this direction taken by Government of Bihar is that, girls who had excelled under project Hunar Phase – I, were to be given work of teachers/instructors under Phase – II. Thus, the programme not only provide the new learner a scope to encourage but also open the pathways for empowerment of the focus group (Bisht, 2012)

Ishrat Bano wanted to be a doctor. But she was not so lucky to see a medical college. Daughter of a poor man, she is now happy to fulfill her dream to some extent. She did a course under Gram Sakhi and learnt lessons in health and paramedics. This could become possible for this student of B.Sc under state government's ambitious project 'Hunar' introduced last year "This training will help me to reach the poor and help them in health-related matters," said Bano.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Afsana who underwent training for stitching and embroidery. "I attended the course free of cost and can now help my poor parents," said Afsana, daughter of a tailor at Phulwarisharif on the outskirts of Patna. Khushwari Khatoon said that she desires to join some hospital to serve as a paramedic. (Times News Network, June 11, 2009).

In charge of these centres Iftexhar Nizami said, "This programme has become a huge success and people from various blocks and villages have demanded that such centres be opened in their areas, too." He said Imarat has already sent proposal to the Bihar Education Project and National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) to open 700 more centres.

Hailing the state government project for Muslim girls, Imarat chief executive Maulana Anisur Rahman Qasmi said, "This scheme is not only attracting poor girls, but also inspiring them to resume their education and above all it has helped raise socio-economic level of their families." Thus, The popularity of the programme has created the dreams and aspiration among the among the Muslim community.

## LOOKING FORWARD

Globalization has created high demand employment avenues for women, thus tried to bridge gender gap in employment but glass ceiling continues to exist mostly affected by cultural influences in developing countries. (Bacchus, 2005). On the other hand, lack of adequate skills match to the requirements of industry and market entry dependent upon educational qualification has become a challenge to overcome the gender inequity in work. While these Muslim Girls are deprived of education being in the vicious circle of values and norms that provide less space for education of women, impoverishment and lack of educational infrastructure, the traditional institution of learning like Maktabas and Madrasas are upgraded and collaborated with NIOS for providing needful vocational education. On the other hand, the collaboration with employment generation programme and NGOs largely facilitate these young women to get access to education with livelihood. The success of Hunar Programme shows that traditional religious values are not limitations rather strengthens opportunities for education when the reforms take place within the institutions and religious capital are linked with Social Capital. But productive collaboration with industries and skill-based education with upgraded curriculum is essential catering to the needs of competitive demands of national and global institutions.

There is growing need to actively negotiate with multiple agents and actors with gendered approach that helps support, participation and engagement of community. NGOs should focus more on partnership and collaboration with in the sectors than on the promotion of their own interests, which show often the case. Greater mentoring and horizontal networking with women groups be it academic or professional group is required. Last but not the least, government and civil society should create a collective decision making structure at each level of education.

---

<sup>i</sup> See Reddy, S, Globalisation, Labour Markets, and Social Outcomes in Developing Countries

<sup>ii</sup> See Lourdes Benería. (2010), Globalization, Women's Work, And

Care Needs: The Urgency of Reconciliation Policies. North Carolina Law Review. Vol 88.

<sup>iii</sup> See World Development Report (2011) for description of shift in role of male as sole breadwinner to shared role of male and female as breadwinner.

World Development Report (2011) The decline of the breadwinner: Men in the 21st century. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2012/Resources/7778105-1299699968583/7786210-1316090663409/Spread-2.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> See Subhalaxmi, G (2012) Impact of Globalization on Women Workers in India.

<sup>vi</sup> School Education Statistics (2004-05) shows that Girls's enrolment to total enrolment in secondary and higher secondary education is 41.5%

<sup>vii</sup> The survey shows that the regions where the socio-economic background of Muslims is strong, Muslim women have also have higher levels of education. See Hasan, Z and R Menon (2004) Unequal Citizens: Muslim Women in India, New Delhi: Oxford University Press

<sup>viii</sup> Census 2001 reveals that Muslims have a total literacy rate of 59.1 per cent, below the national average. Except Muslims and other religions, all the rest of the major religions have literacy rates higher than the national average. See Census (2001)

---

## REFERENCES

- Bisht, B.S. (2012) HUNAR: A Community Based Skill Development Project for Muslim Girls. Presented a paper in the 6<sup>th</sup> Pan-commonwealth Forum on Open Learning. Accessed on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2013. [www.col.org/resources/micrositeGender/onlineRsrc/Pages/issues.aspx](http://www.col.org/resources/micrositeGender/onlineRsrc/Pages/issues.aspx)
- Gaba, A. (2007) Women Empowerment through Professional and Technical Programmes : A Case Study of IGNOU Asian Journal of Distance Education. Vol 5, no 1, pp 8 – 15
- Government of India. (2005). Selected Educational Statistics, 2004-05, New Delhi: Ministry of Human Resource Development
- Hasan, Zoya and Ritu Menon (2004) Unequal Citizens: A Study of Muslim Women in India. Delhi: Oxford University Press
- Kanwar, A. (1995). Distance education for women's empowerment. In A. Kanwar, & N. Jagannathan (Eds.), Speaking for ourselves : Women and distance education.
- Lourdes, Benería (2010). Globalization, Women's Work, and Care Needs: The Urgency of Reconciliation Policies. North Carolina Law Review. Vol 88.
- National Institute of Open Schooling (2009) NIOS profile. 2009: NIOS: Noida
- National Institute of Open Schooling (2010) NIOS profile. 2010: NIOS: Noida
- National Institute of Open Schooling (2011) NIOS profile. 2011: NIOS: Noida
- Nayar, Usha (2011). Education of Muslim Women and Girls in India. Delhi: The Women Press
- Nazreen Bacchus (2005). The Effects of Globalization on Women in Developing Nations. Accessed on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2013 <http://www1.aucegypt.edu/src/globalization/Documents/effect%20of%20glob%20on%20women.pdf>
- Reddy, S. (2006) Globalization, Labour Markets, and Social Outcomes in Developing Countries [http://www.brookings.edu/gs/research/projects/glig/glig\\_reddy.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/gs/research/projects/glig/glig_reddy.pdf). Accessed on 22/11/2012
- Shrivastav, N. and R. Shrivastav (2009) Women, work, and employment outcomes in rural India. Paper presented at the FAO-IFAD-ILO Workshop on Gaps, trends and current research in gender dimensions of agricultural and rural employment: differentiated pathways out of poverty. Rome, 31 March - 2 April 2009
- Subhalaxmi, G. (2012) Impact of Globalization on Women Workers in India. Accessed on 22/11/2012. <http://www.impowr.org/journal/impact-globalization-women-workers-india>.
- World Development Report (2011) The decline of the breadwinner: Men in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2012/Resources/7778105-1299699968583/7786210-1316090663409/Spread-2.pdf>