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Education and Exclusion of Muslims

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Education has long been seen as a creator of life chances. It has also been recognized as a great equalizer or leveller. There is wider consensus in both theoretical and empirical literature that widespread education in society leads to removal of iniquities in asset ownership, capabilities, and opportunities, a condition that not only enables individuals to acquire their rightful place in society but also promotes social cohesion and sustainability.[1] Thus, given the fact that the benefits of education accrue to both individuals and the wider society they are part of, social equity in education has significant bearings on social development.

During the past few decades, India has made rapid strides in expanding educational opportunities, leading to remarkable democratization of the education system. For instance, the number of primary schools during the period between 1951–2 and 2004–5 has increased by 3.7 times. The number of upper primary and secondary/higher secondary schools has increased by more than 20 times each during the same period. The number of colleges for general and professional education has increased manifold, 28 and 15 times, respectively. Similarly, during the period between 1950–1 and 2004–5, overall enrolment at primary and upper primary stage has seen a 7 and 17 time increase, respectively. The growth in enrolment has been more spectacular at secondary and senior secondary levels (about 25 times since 1951–2). Overall enrolment in higher education has increased from 1.7 million in 1950–1 to 10.48 million in 2004–5 at an average annual growth rate of 10.04 per cent.[2] To be brief, the current cohort of school-age children today—irrespective of social origin, economic circumstances, and geographic locations—enjoys far greater chances of accessing the education system, attending schools or colleges and completing a given stage of education than their grandparents and parents did.

However, the overall rosy picture quite often tends to conceal more than what it reveals especially in a country which is geographically as vast and socially and culturally as diverse as India. It is because social disparities in education may increase rather than decrease even during the period of rapid expansion of educational opportunities, for it is the advantaged/privileged section that first appropriates the benefits of enhanced educational opportunities. In other words, educational disparities in the given level of education continue to persist until almost all children of the privileged/dominant sections of society are accommodated in that level of education. This has led to the hypothesis of 'maximally maintained inequality' (Raftery and Hout 1993). In India, as a matter of fact, access to educational opportunities even at lower stages continues to remain unequal along several axes of regional and social stratifications despite remarkable expansion of educational opportunities. It is now well documented that religion is one the most pervasive axes of educational disparities, and that the Muslim community of India, the largest religious minority group, has fallen way behind other socio-religious communities (Alam 2012; Hasan and Menon 2004; Hussain 2004; *SCR* 2006; Shariff and Razzack 2006).

This chapter seeks to assess how Muslims are positioned in the education system vis-à-vis others and if and how far they have been benefiting from rapidly expanding educational opportunities in the country. The chapter is structured as follows. The first section spells out, although briefly, various processes that seem to have shaped and

reshaped overall socio-economic status of Muslims. The next section presents an overview of literacy and educational development among Muslims using recent data sources at the national level. The third section attempts to contextualize educational access and attainment among Muslims. This is followed by an analytical discussion of the factors that underlie educational disadvantages among Muslims vis-à-vis others. The last section concludes the discussion.

The Wider Context

India is a multi-religious country and, in fact, homes almost all major religions of the world, though in varying proportions. The followers of Islam, that is, Muslims, have constituted an important element of the Indian social fabric for over a millennium. Islam, a non-Indic religion, entered India through different routes and at various points in time. However, in course of time a large number of indigenous people, mostly belonging to lower castes and classes, also embraced Islam (Ahmad 1978; Ahmad 1999; Ahmad and Chakravarti 1981). As a result of conversion, on the one hand, and getting influenced by acculturation processes in the given socio-spatial context due to deeper interaction with the wider society, on the other, Muslims developed their cultural traits expressed in terms of language, customs, dresses, dietary habits, caste-like, or occupation-based groupings, and so on under distinct regional mould (Ahmad 1999). In brief, the 'Muslim social' is even more complex and complicated than other communities.

In undivided India, Muslims as a collective accounted for slightly less than a quarter of the total population.[3] A slightly higher proportion of them compared to the general population lived in urban centres, although there were pronounced regional variations. For example, about 1.9 and 3.5 per cent of Muslims in Assam and Bengal, respectively, lived in urban areas as opposed to 42 and 27 per cent in Central Province and Berar and United Province, respectively.[4] In general, Muslims had the same source of livelihood as the general population. An overwhelming majority of them was engaged in agriculture, though a good number of them were also artisans. At the time of Partition in 1947, the Muslim community, as various colonial official reports indicate, was by and large represented in the sphere of education and in public employment in proportion to its share in total population. The partition of country, however, seriously altered the social and economic structures of the Muslim community as it denuded the base of social strata comprising middle and upper classes (Hasan 1997; Imam 1975).

In 2001, Muslims with a population of 138 million accounted for about 13.4 per cent of total population in the country.[5] Unlike other minority communities, Muslims are unevenly distributed across the length and breadth of the country. At the national level, the proportion of Muslims varies from 66.9 per cent in Jammu and Kashmir and 30.9 per cent in Assam to 5.5 per cent in Tamil Nadu. Of the total Muslim population in the country, over half (53 per cent) lives in just four states, namely, Assam, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal. The four southern states—Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu—together account for one-sixth of the total Muslim population in the country. At the sub-national level, while there is hardly a district that does not have Muslim population, there are 20 districts (out of 594 districts in 2001) across states where the Muslims form the majority community. There are another 38 districts that have substantial Muslim population, accounting for over a quarter of total population but below 50 per cent. About 35.7 per cent of the Muslims, as against 27.8 per cent of the overall population, lives in towns and cities of different sizes, though there are considerable variations across states. For example, while fewer Muslims live in urban areas in Assam (6.4 per cent), they are predominantly urban in Tamil Nadu (72.8 per cent), Maharashtra (70.0 per cent), and Madhya Pradesh (63.5 per cent).

As the Muslim community consists of groups drawn from different social origin and occupational practices, they are represented in almost all kinds of occupations and economic situations with pronounced regional variations. As far as the current situation is concerned, the Muslim community as a whole stands economically disadvantaged relative to other communities—predominantly Hindus (*SCR* 2006; also see Table 12.1). Overall, the prevalence of poverty among Muslims is considerably high as compared to the general population. Labour force participation rates among them are much lower than the national average. While the proportion of main workers among Muslims is lower and that of non-workers is higher, indicating a higher unemployment rate among them, further questions may need to be asked about the extent of the informal economic sector in relation to the Muslims. Statistics indicate that the vast majority of workers among the Muslims are concentrated in the lower rungs of economic opportunities, although they are represented across occupations. Disproportionately large proportions among them are self-employed and/or engaged in home-based enterprises including small trades, petty business, and street vending. As employees,

much larger proportions of Muslims than others are casual workers, indicating their relatively lower access to and participation in well-paying or regular salaried jobs (Table 12.1).[6] What is, however, disturbing is the fact that while there has been substantial progress in the sum total of the socio-economic conditions of people in the country in recent decades, the socio-economic conditions of Muslims have worsened (Shariff and Razzack 2006).

Educational Attainment: An Overview

This section provides an overview of the educational status of Muslims vis-à-vis other socio-religious communities using the most recent available data sources.[7] As Muslims like any other communities are internally differentiated and reflect diversity in accessing socio-economic and educational opportunities, an attempt is made here to analyze their educational status vis-à-vis the referent group with references to such internal differentiations. Keeping this in view, five social categories are identified for the analysis:

1. Muslim OBC (Muslims reported to be as Other Backward Classes)
2. Muslim–Other (Muslims other than those reported as OBCs
3. Hindu–SC (Hindu Scheduled Castes)
4. Hindu–OBC (Hindus reported to be as Other Backward Classes)
5. Hindu–Other (Hindus other than Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes)

literacy

Although defined as one's ability to read, write, and understand a simple statement in any language, literacy is seen as a crucial indicator of educational development for it is highly correlated with other indicators of education. Generally, higher the literacy rate of a group, greater is its participation in the educational opportunities.

Of the four major religious groups—Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs—Christians with a literacy rate of 80.3 per cent is the most literate community, followed by Sikhs (69.4 per cent) and Hindus (65.1 per cent). The overall literacy rate of Muslims (59.1 per cent) is not only lower than the national average, but is the lowest of all religious groups. It is true of both males and females. However, the relative gap between Muslim and Hindu males is much higher than between females of the two religious groups (Table 12.2).

What has been the trend overtime? Is the trend one of convergence? Or are Muslims falling further behind the

Table 12.1 Economic and Employment Status of Muslims

Parameters	Year	All	Hindu	Muslim	Muslim/Hindu Ratio
% of workers	2001*	–	–	–	–
Main workers		48.1	49.1	42.2	.86
Marginal workers		13.0	13.5	10.4	.77
Non-workers		38.9	37.5	47.5	1.27
% of regular salaried	2004–5**	–	–	–	–
Government sector		34.2	35.3	23.7	.67
Public/private Ltd.		13.1	13.9	6.5	.47
Enterprise types	2004–5***	–	–	–	–
Informal sector (rural)		88.5	87.7	94.2	1.07
Informal sector (urban)		79.1	76.9	92.1	1.19
Formal sector (rural)		11.5	12.3	5.8	.47
Formal sector (urban)		20.9	23.1	7.9	.34
MPCE[1] (current prices)	2004–5**	–	–	–	–
MPCE (urban)		1105	1139	804	.70
MPCE (rural)		579	568	553	.97
Incidence of poverty	2004–5**				
Poverty ratio (urban)		29	27	44	1.63
Poverty ratio (rural)		28	28	33	1.78

Sources: * Census of India 2001, Religion Table.
** *SCR* 2006.
*** *National Sample Survey 2004–5*.
Note: [1]MPCE refers to monthly per capita expenditure.

Table 12.2 Literacy Rates by Religious Groups, 2001

Gender	All Religions	Hindus	Muslims	Christians	Sikhs	Hindu–Muslim Disparity Index*
All	64.8	65.8	59.1	80.3	69.4	0.05
Male	75.3	76.2	67.6	84.4	75.2	0.06
Female	53.7	53.2	50.1	76.2	63.1	0.03

Source: Census of India 2001.

Notes: Literacy rate calculated for population aged 7 years and above.

* Disparity index measures the extent of disparity between two mutually exclusive groups or subsets of population. Here, disparity between groups is computed using the disparity index developed by Kundu and Rao (1985). The index is expressed as follows: $DS = \log (X_2/X_1) + \log (200\text{-}X_1)/ (200\text{-}X_2)$; where X_1 and X_2 represent literacy rates of the relatively disadvantaged and advantaged groups, respectively. Larger the value, greater the disparity. In the present case, the referent group is Hindus, that is, the advantaged group relative to Muslims.

rest with rising literacy rates in the country? Table 12.3 presents literacy rates by age cohorts for different socio-religious communities (SRCs). Clearly, literacy rates for younger age cohorts are much higher than the older ones, consistent with rising awareness of education and participation in schooling in recent decades. In overall terms, the current generation (7–14 years) is twice as likely to be literate as their parents and grandparents were. This observation holds true across SRCs. The Hindu– Muslim disparity seems to have slightly decreased in recent decades as indicated by lower disparity values for younger age cohorts.

However, a closer scrutiny suggests that much of the observed reduced Hindu–Muslim disparity in literacy rates in younger cohorts is not because of recent upsurge in literacy rates among Muslims but owing to slower rate of increase in the literacy rates of the Hindu–Other, consequently slowing down the pace of progress for Hindus as a whole. And, the slower rate of increase in the literacy rates of the younger cohorts of Hindu–Other can be explained by the fact that their literacy level has already reached a stage where there is not much scope for any significant increase. If we leave aside the Hindu–Other category, the growth of literacy among Muslims has been taking place at a much slower rate than the Hindu–OBCs and SCs. As Figure 12.1 reveals, the literacy rates of Hindu–OBC and Muslim–Other were almost at the same level in 1940s/1950s (age cohort 50+), but the former seems to have overtaken the latter in 1960s/1970s. The gap thereafter further widened. What is even more important to note is that while in the past (the generation born in 1940s of age cohort 50+), literacy rate among the SCs was the lowest of all, the generation born in 1980s surpassed Muslim–OBC, and those born in 1990s seem to have left behind even the Muslim–Other (Figure 12.1). It thus implies that if current trends continue, the Muslims as a community will be the last in the queue to attain universal literacy.

ENROLMENT AND PARTICIPATION

The proportion of children on roll or actually attending educational institutions is a good measure of current

Table 12.3 Literacy Rates among SRCs by Age Cohorts

Age Cohort	All SRC	Muslims			Hindus				Disparity Index	
		OBCs	Others	All Muslims	SCs	OBCs	Others	All Hindus	Hindu–Muslim	Muslim Others–Muslim OBC
7–14	86.0	74.3	80.1	79.1	84.3	87.6	94.6	87.1	0.05	0.04
15–24	80.8	71.7	76.6	75.3	75.5	80.8	93.1	81.3	0.07	0.03
25–49	62.3	50.6	56.4	54.0	50.5	60.5	82.4	62.8	0.07	0.05
50+	42.7	31.6	38.6	35.3	28.7	38.2	64.4	42.8	0.09	0.09
7+	68.1	59.2	65.1	63.1	60.5	66.8	83.0	68.3	0.04	0.05

Source: *National Family Health Survey* (Raw Data Set), 2005–6, IIPS, Mumbai.

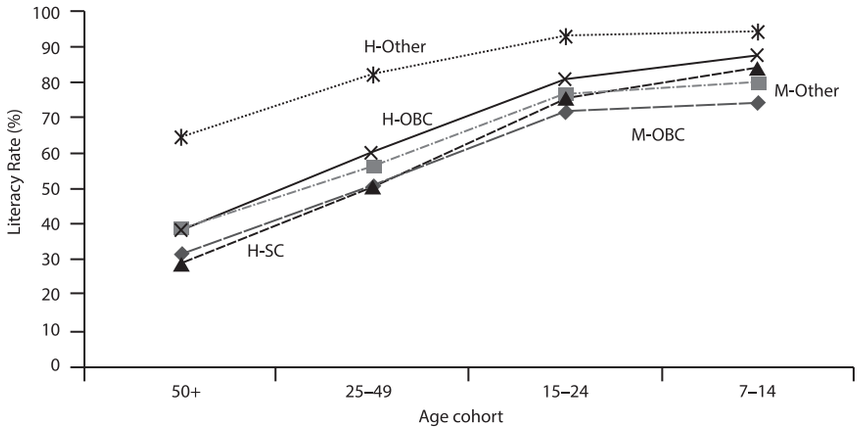

Figure 12.1 Progress in Literacy Rates across SRCs

Source: *National Family Health Survey* (Raw Data Set), 2005–6, IIPS, Mumbai.

participation in and utilization of educational opportunities. Since enrolment is a flow variable and can be improved within a relatively short period of time (Shariff and Razzack 2006), enrolment level of a group reflects its propensity to acquire education.

As the DISE 2009–10 statistics show, Muslim children accounted for about 13.5 per cent and 11.9 per cent of all the children enrolled at primary stage and upper primary stage, respectively, and thus consistent with the share of Muslims in total population (DISE 2011). According to NSSO (2007–8), about 46.2 per cent of Muslim children aged 5–29 were enrolled as against 52.7 and 58.3 per cent of children belonging to Hindus and Christians, respectively. Table 12.4 presents a little more detailed account of levels of participation in educational opportunities. Overall, 7 out of 10 children in the age group of 6–18 attended schools during the school year 2005–6. As expected, the level of participation in schooling was higher at lower ages than at upper ages. For instance, while 8 out 10 children attended schools in the age group of 6–14, the corresponding ratio for ages 15–18 was roughly 5:10. This implied a higher incidence of discontinuation or dropping out from school at the elementary level.

Remarkable disparities exist across SRCs. At one extreme are the children of Hindu–Other, of whom 9 out of 10 in the age group of 6–14 attended schools, indicating that they are on the verge of attaining universal elementary education. On the other extreme stand the children of Muslim–OBC who are least likely to attend school in the relevant age group, although even the children of Muslim–Other are not better-off as compared to the SCs, leave alone the Hindu–OBC or Hindu–Other. And this holds true across age groups. What is, however, interesting to note is that while the children of Muslim–OBC in general are less likely to attend school as against those of Muslim–Other, the gap between them tends to close with advancing age/stage of education. In fact, disparity between the two becomes too small at the upper age/stage to warrant attention (Table 12.4).[8]

Table 12.4 Proportion of Children Attending School/College, 2005–6

Age Cohort	All SRC	Muslims			Hindus				Disparity Index	
		OBC	Other	All	SC	OBC	Other	All	Hindu–Muslim	Muslim Others– Muslim OBC
6–10	76.5	61.6	66.6	66.1	75.4	78.2	87.1	78.4	0.08	0.04
11–14	80.0	64.6	67.9	67.2	77.0	83.3	91.5	82.3	0.09	0.03
15–18	47.4	33.4	34.1	34.1	41.4	49.6	64.3	49.6	0.17	0.01
6–18	69.8	55.2	58.4	58.0	66.6	72.2	81.9	71.8	0.10	0.03

Source: *National Family Health Survey* (Raw Data Set), 2005–6, IIPS, Mumbai.

Withholding internal differentiation, the gap between Hindus and Muslims not only persists across age groups, it gets widened with advancing age. However, the disparity between the two rises abruptly after the age of 14, as indicated by doubling of disparity value in the age group of 15–18. It suggests that while for most households elementary level is the critical point where the calculation of potential gains, risks, and opportunity costs sets in. As a result they are likely to spur their children to abandon study in favour of job. This calculus, however, takes a heavy toll among Muslims as compared to others.

EDUCATIONAL LEVELS

Completed educational level is one of the most crucial indicators of educational attainment. It provides information about the population which is not just literate but has actually experienced some years of formal schooling or has completed an exact grade/stage of education, no more or no less. In India though overall completed levels of education remain quite low as compared to many developing countries, the Muslims appear to be particularly disadvantaged (Table 12.5). Compared to the Hindus, while both Muslim males and females are equally likely to complete primary/middle level, they nonetheless fall far behind their counterpart among the Hindus after the elementary stage. Hereafter, the disparity between the Hindus and Muslims rises abruptly. Lower rate of completion of upper levels of education can be explained by lower level of participation of the Muslims in the post-elementary stage, as seen earlier. It thus suggests that the obstacles to educational advancement among the Muslims lie at the school level.

However, a look at the current situation, that is, the proportion that finished college and above in the age group of 18–25, reveals an even more disappointing picture (Figure 12.2). The Muslims in general not only appear to lag way behind the Hindus as a whole, they are pushed even below the SCs, leave aside the Hindu–OBC and the Hindu–Other. Overall, the proportion of those finished college among Hindus was almost double that of Muslims. Even the Muslim–Other is not better-off. They are only marginally ahead of the SCs and finish far behind the rest. For instance, the Hindu–OBC and Hindu–Other were 3 and 1.5 times, respectively, as likely to finish college as Muslim–Other.

WHERE DO MUSLIM CHILDREN STUDY?

One of the characteristic features of the school system in India is diversity in school types. There exists a variety of schools offering differential learning opportunities and educational outcomes. While most students still attend government schools, the proportion of school-going children attending private schools in both rural and urban areas has increased considerably in recent years (Juneja 2011; Kingdon 1996). This has been largely because of the failure of the public education system to meet the demands for schooling and deteriorating standard of learning and teaching in the existing government schools (De *et al*. 2000).

As popular perceptions have it, Muslim children largely attend madrasas to acquire religious education rather than schools, the sites of modern education. However, recent empirical evidence debunks this popular perception. It is reported that about 30 and 66 per cent of all enrolled Muslim children aged 7–16 years attend private and government schools, respectively, as against 29 and 71 per cent, respectively, for others. Thus, only 4 per cent of Muslim children enrolled in the relevant age group attended madrasas (*SCR* 2006), and this is despite the fact that madrasas are of different kinds. First, there is a distinction between *maktab* and madrasa and many children attending the former also attend schools. Secondly, there

Table 12.5 Educational Levels by Religion, 2001

Educational Level	Muslims			Hindus			Other Religions			Hindu–Muslim Disparity Index		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Primary/middle	27.6	32.0	22.9	27.2	31.7	22.4	29.1	31.6	26.6	0.00	0.00	0.00
Secondary/senior secondary	12.6	16.2	8.9	17.6	22.8	12.2	24.5	27.9	21.1	0.15	0.15	0.14
Graduate and above	3.6	5.0	2.0	6.9	9.3	4.4	9.4	10.7	8.0	0.29	0.27	0.34

Source: Computed from Census of India 2001, Table C9.

Note: The relevant populations for calculating educational levels are as follows:

Primary/middle = population aged 14+; secondary/senior secondary = population aged 17+; graduation and above = population aged 20+.

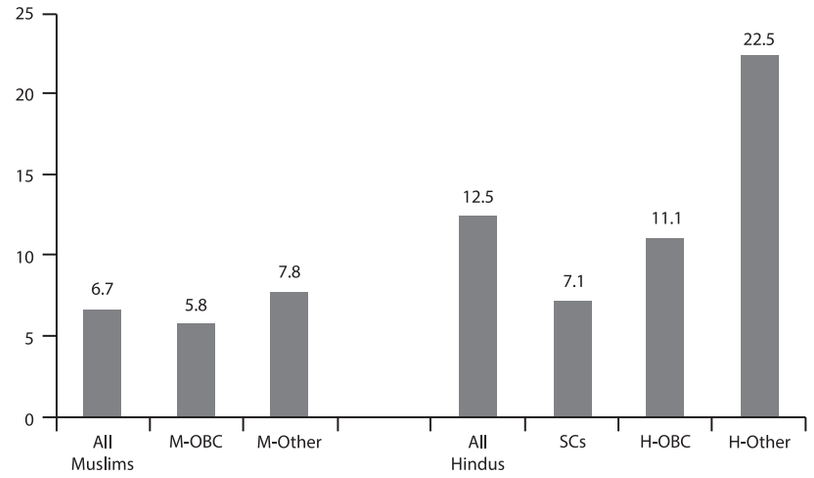

Figure 12.2 Proportion of Population (aged 18–25) Who Completed College and Above, 2005–6
Source: Computed from *National Family Health Survey*, 2005–6.

are many madrasas with public funding which do follow the general system of education. They thus bear close affinity to schools. There is yet another kind of madrasa which is unaided and private, irrespective of whether recognized or not, but do follow the general system of education. In all, four out of six madrasas (excluding maktab) follow the general system of education (NCERT 2005). Thirdly, in many situations, even non-Muslim children attend madrasa. For example, the madrasas in West Bengal have a fairly large number of non-Muslim children on rolls (*SCR* 2006). Given this, it may be safely concluded that the choice of schooling among Muslims is not significantly different from the wider society.

To sum up this section, Muslims in the overall context lag way behind other religious communities on any indicator of education. Rapid expansion in educational opportunities in recent decades has actually worked to the disadvantage of the Muslims as educational disparities between them and other SRCs have widened, rather than narrowing down. While this generalized picture is quite useful to taking into account the extent of religious differentials in the sphere of education, it is not very educative as accessing educational opportunities for individuals even within the given social group/community varies a great deal across types of residence, economic positioning, and indeed across developmental/regional contexts in which they live. It also implies that inter-community differences in educational attainment may vary along these lines. The following section attempts to look at access of Muslims to educational opportunities vis-à-vis other SRCs at disaggregated levels.

Contextualizing Access to Education

In India, educational development has taken place differentially across regions and also in terms of *rural* and *urban*. Access to education is also determined a great deal by where one resides. How do Muslims fare vis-à-vis other communities, predominantly the Hindus in diverse locations? Indeed, overall access of the Muslims improves in cities and towns in the company of others, and the trend is one of convergence as we move from rural to urban areas. And yet they lag even behind the SCs/STs irrespective of age cohorts, not to speak of non-SC/ST Hindus. It is also important to note that while disparities get reduced in the age group of 6–14 as we move from rural to urban areas, this trend is reversed in the upper age group of 15–18 years. In other words, the Muslims in towns and cities are more likely to be lagging behind other SRCs than in rural areas.

Historically, availability of and access to educational opportunities has varied a great deal across geographical regions, and in fact, the spatially embedded pattern of educational development has remained unchanged for decades (Nuna 1993; Raju 1991; Raza *et al*. 1992; Sopher 1980). Thus, *regional locations* are seen to be associated with educational advantage or disadvantage. As it is evident from Table 12.6, the Muslims living in the relatively developed states/region[9] have much better access to educational opportunities than those in backward states. Unlike the Muslims in backward states, the Muslims in relatively developed states are ahead of the SCs/STs and closer to, if not at par with, non-SC/ST Hindus as far as participation in education is concerned. It thus seems

Table 12.6 Participation in Education of SRCs by Residence, Economic Class, and Region

Background Characteristics	6–14 Years			15–18 Years			Hindu (non- SC/ST)–Muslim Disparity Index	
	Muslims	Hindus		Muslims	Hindus		6–14	15–18
Residence		SC/ST	All other		SC/ST	All other		
City	73.1	80.7	88.7	39.8	49.6	67.0	0.08	0.22
Town	73.1	79.2	87.0	39.1	48.5	67.0	0.08	0.24
Rural	64.0	72.1	81.5	30.9	35.5	49.5	0.11	0.21
Economic Class								
Rich	82.2	89.0	91.8	50.1	63.5	73.2	0.06	0.17
Middle	69.0	83.5	85.4	28.1	41.7	47.5	0.10	0.23
Poor	54.9	67.1	73.9	18.7	27.9	34.5	0.13	0.27
Region								
Forward	81.7	80.7	87.9	44.8	43.8	55.5	0.04	0.10
Backward	61.0	69.6	79.9	27.7	35.5	53.4	0.12	0.29

Source: *National Family Health Survey* (Raw Data Set) 2005–6.

to suggest that greater the availability of educational opportunities, as in the advanced region, the lower the level of disparity between groups.

Economic or class location of a child is not only expected to determine whether or not he/she may enter school, but also how long he/she, if enters school, will stay the course. Generally speaking, higher the economic class children belong to, greater is their chance of being in school and for a longer duration. This is because education is an activity that involves investment of certain amount of time, energy, and money. Obviously, different classes, measured in terms of wealth, would be able to invest in children's education differentially. Besides, they would also significantly differ in terms of aspirations for and value attached to education. In brief, even if normative value of education is widespread and education for few years may be available for free, all sections of society would not go in for education of their children in equal terms. Only those families/households would choose to educate their children that could afford the cost of education and see accruing tangible benefits in education. As can be seen in Table 12.6, participation in and duration of schooling varies considerably across economic classes and this is true of both Hindus and Muslims. Although the Muslims lag behind Hindus as a whole as well as SCs/STs in the corresponding economic classes, the disparity between Hindus and Muslims narrows down considerably as we move up the economic ladder. It suggests that improvement in economic conditions has more positive impact on schooling among Muslims than Hindus.

To sum up the discussion so far, while the Muslims lag way behind the rest of population including the SC/STs, hitherto the most excluded social group, their educational disadvantages are, however, not uniform across socio-economic and spatial contexts. While this gives insights into what may underlie access differentials in educational opportunities, it remains simplistic and, in turn, is less educative. Also, it does not enable us to understand the mechanism through which different factors either independently or in combination work out intergroup disparity because the factors constraining participation in education are often interrelated and mutually reinforcing and therefore not always easily distinguishable. In this context, it is essential to systematically disentangle the impact of underlying factors influencing educational chances of individuals and the groups they are member of. Only then it would be possible to understand the mechanism through which intergroup inequality is worked out. Thus, what follows is an analytical discussion of the factors that are supposedly responsible for relative educational disadvantage among the Muslims.

What Ails Education among Muslims? A Discussion

Before we proceed to understand the complex mechanism that works out intergroup educational inequality, it may not be out of place to look through, though cursorily, the conventional explanations accounting for relative educational disadvantages facing the Muslim community. While a number of explanations have been proffered to

account for relative educational deficits among the Muslims, the following are the most salient ones.

RELIGIO-CULTURAL ETHOS

A popular view explains relative educational lag among the Muslims by referring to Islamic theology and cultural ethos of the Muslims. It has been argued that Islamic prescription of education hinders the Muslims to acquire modern education imparted in schools because Islam places high premium on religious education. Muslims, therefore, prefer to send their children to madrasas to study Islamic theology and thereby fulfil their religious requirements and maintain socio-cultural ethos (Baig 1974; Borooah and Iyer 2005; Sharma 1978; Vajpeyi 1989). It is also argued that Muslim societies in general accord low status to women by not allowing them to go outside home either for education or for work. In other words, one of the reasons for lower educational attainment among Muslims is their treatment to women and that unless girls are treated as well as boys, the Muslim community will continue to suffer educationally. In brief, to those who view Islamic theology and cultural ethos of the Muslims as potentially the most powerful factor preventing them from taking advantage of educational opportunities, the reasons for disparate levels of education among Muslims are rooted in factors internal to the community itself.

MINORITY GROUP COMPLEX AND SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION

A second view accounts for educational deficits among the Muslims by referring to the policy of deliberate neglect of the community by the state. It has been contended that Muslims are denied access to educational opportunities in many and subtle ways. In the first place, educational institutions managed by the Muslim community are discriminated against in financial, legal, and recognition matters. Secondly, a rather surreptitious way of keeping Muslim children out of school is the utter neglect of Urdu especially in north India where it happens to be the mother tongue of large number of Muslims. Slowly but gradually, Urdu has been driven out as a medium of instruction even at the primary level in many states of north India (Farouqui 2002). Thirdly, school curriculum is heavily culturally biased with disproportionate exposition to Hindu traditions and mythologies that stand in direct conflict with religious values of the Muslims. Thus, the lack of Urdu-medium schools combined with unfavourable school curriculum have made Muslim parents reluctant to send their children to government schools, particularly Hindi-medium schools, which lack sensitivity to socio-cultural ethos of the Muslim community (Ansari 1992; Vasfi 1989). Simply put, Muslim parents are in a way forced to send their children to madrasas—the only site available to the community that preserves its religious and cultural values and meets its educational and intellectual needs. It is, therefore, not surprising if participation of the community in modern education largely provided by the state is much lower than the Hindus. Thus, from this perspective, the factors underlying educational disadvantages among Muslims are external to the community.

HISTORICAL TRAJECTORIES UNFAVOURABLE TO MUSLIMS

A third explanation traces the root of educational and developmental lag among the Muslims in historical processes underlying development of modern education in India and debunks the theory built around essentialist constructs of socio-cultural ethos of the Muslim community. It has been argued that the educational lag among Muslims is, in fact, rooted in the history of uneven educational development in India. During the British period, educational development was concentrated in favoured locations, that is, the port cities of the presidencies. Educational opportunities spread beyond these enclaves of development at slower pace. A vast majority of the Muslims was living outside the boundaries of evolving metropolitan culture in these favoured locations vis-à-vis colonial economy. British capitalism and the system of education thus entered the Muslim-concentrated areas much later, and as a consequence they failed to make a mark in the new system of education (Seal 1968; Smith 1946). It took them a long time to catch up with other communities, but this process of 'catching up' suffered a severe blow in the wake of partition of the country and formation of Pakistan in 1947. It is argued that large chunk of educated middle, professional, and upper classes of the community, especially from north India, migrated to Pakistan and those who stayed behind were poor artisans, agricultural labourers, petty shopkeepers, and small peasants who constituted the bulk of illiterates. Thus, the partition of the country not only denuded the base of educated strata of the Muslim community substantially, but also left the community bereft of leaders and role models who could have acted as a catalyst to aspirations for education and white-collar job (Imam 1975). Put another way, educational disadvantages among the Muslims could be attributed, though partly, to historical trajectories that placed them in disadvantaged positions,

socially and economically, rather than their aversion to modern education.

OVERALL POOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF MUSLIMS AND ATTENDANT LOWER DEMAND FOR EDUCATION

A fourth explanation attributes educational backwardness among the Muslims to the social and economic situations they are placed in and demand for education in those situations in general. Implicitly though, this line of argument suggests that relative educational deficits among the Muslims are neither due to their unwillingness to acquire modern education nor because of discriminatory practices against them. Rather this could be explained by the prevailing socio-economic conditions experienced by them and the perceived cost and benefit of education in such conditions (Ahmad 1981). Generally speaking, it is the upper and middle strata that are not only capable of investing in education, but that they also aspire for white-collar professions. As a rule, it is likely that middle/upper classes Muslims would take to education as others. But the number of people within this strata has been quite less compared to other communities[10] and has not expanded to significant extent during the past few decades (Shariff and Razzack 2006), leading to overall lower demand for education among them. In other words, when the Muslims are compared to others as an undifferentiated category, they appear to be lagging behind.

However, these explanations/formulations have too many problems to be acceptable.[11] The following multivariate analysis and underlying discussion does not help scrutinize the above explanations, and also problematizes relative educational deficits among the Muslims. The ensuing analysis uses logistic regression[12] as an analytical statistical tool to probe the net effects of the predictable variables such as age, gender, residence, region, religion, and economic class on participation of children (aged 6–18) in schooling. The results of binary logistic regression are presented in four Models (Ms). In M_1 estimates of the net effects of independent variables for all are presented. M_2 estimates the net effects for age cohorts 6–14 and 15–18 separately. M_3 and M_4 compare the net effects of independent variable for religious groups (Hindus and Muslims) and regions separately.

Table 12.7 presents the net effects of predictor variables on the probability of participation in schooling. It can be observed that *age* and *gender* of the children are strong predictors of participation in schooling. In general, as seen in the preceding section, higher the age of child lower is he/she likely to be studying. Controlling for all other variables, the children aged 15–18 are three times less likely (1.0/.267 = 3.74) to be studying as against those aged 6–14 (M_1 and M_2). With minor changes, this observation holds true irrespective of gender, developmental context and other socio-economic characteristics of household. There is a large body of literature that has highlighted the reasons why children with increasing age particularly beyond the age of 14 tend to have lower probability of continuing study. One of the main reasons is increasing cost of schooling with advancing grade/stage. This becomes a matter of particular concern for poor or low income households, for whom opportunity cost, leave aside the direct cost, of schooling turns out to be very high as the children grow up (Kanbargi and Kulkarni 1991; Lieten 2000). However, while opportunity cost has a more significant role to play in the case of boys than girls, the negative association between schooling and age in case of girls can largely be attributed to distance to schools and marriage as universal construct.

Overall, gendered location seems to have profound impact on access to schooling. It can be observed that girls have lower probability of getting enrolled compared to boys even after controlling for household characteristics and developmental context (M_1 and M_4). In Indian socio-cultural framework, sons are privileged over girls in many respects and for diverse reasons. Son preference in education primarily stems from two intertwined and reinforcing reasons, that is, gender division of labour and perceived differential returns on investment in education for sons and daughters (Caldwell 1985; Unni 1995). Gender division of labour has implications not only for socialization of children (that is, to prepare them for their adult roles appropriate to sex, man and women), but also for economic value of education. Not only are girls not expected to work outside the home, the perceived return to investment in education of girls is seen far less tangible than for boys.[13] The reason being while sons remain at home when they marry, daughters move away after getting married. To put differently, the economic benefit that might accrue from a daughter's education would be enjoyed by her affinal relatives rather than her natal family. On the contrary, girls' education is seen inconsistent with their perceived role in the private domain, that is, domestic work, caregiving, and the task of reproduction.

Economic well-being of households is found to be the most crucial determinant of schooling (Banerjee 2000; Jabbi and Rajyalakshami 2001). Overall, the children of poor households are much less likely to participate in

Table 12.7 Odds Ratios for Attending Educational Institutions

Predictor Variables	Model 1 (All)	Model 2 (Age)		Model 3 (Religion)		Model 4 (Region)	
		6–14	15–18	Hindu	Muslim	Forward	Backward
Age		–	–	–	–		
6–14 (rc)	1.000	–	–	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
15–18	0.627*	–	–	.615*	0.587*	.557*	0.645*
Gender							
Boys (rc)	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Girls	.852*	0.898*	0.756*	0.827*	0.941*	0.897*	0.825*
Residence							
Urban (rc)	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Rural	0.995**	1.056	0.943*	0.993*	1.068**	0.949**	1.029
Economic class							
Poor (rc)	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Others	1. 630*	1.551*	1.842*	1.650*	1.516*	1.566*	1.638*
Region							
Forward (rc)	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	–	–
Backward	0.894*	0.784*	.913*	0.834*	0.686*	–	–
Religion							
Hindu (rc)	1.000	1.000	1.000	–	–	1.000	1.000
Muslim	0.648*	0.705*	0.540*	–	–	0.678*	0.621*
Other	1.260*	1.129*	1.596*	–	–	1.335*	1.302*

Source: Computed from NFHS household data set of 2005–6, IIPS, Mumbai.
Notes: (rc) refers to reference category.
* denotes significance at 1 per cent level.
** denotes significance at 5 per cent level.

schooling as compared to the rest. The negative association between being poor and schooling stands out across age cohort, religion, and developmental contexts (M_1, M_3, and M_4). This is neither unexpected nor surprising for two reasons—cost of schooling and home environment (lack of motivational resources). Even if there might be a higher level of aspiration for education in poor households, the perceived or real cost of schooling in such households would be too high to afford. Therefore, they may choose not to put their children in school. Even as they choose to do this, they are likely to withdraw their children early because it would become difficult to bear the cost of education as they grow up. Moreover, the home environment in the poor households is often not conducive to schooling. The lack of parental involvement and motivation for doing well in school leads to disinterestedness among children, which eventually results in discontinuation from study even at the early stage. On the contrary, relatively economically affluent households have both material and motivational resources to invest in their children's education for longer years.

In overall terms, those living in relatively advanced region, regardless of other factors such as age, religion, economic well-being, and so on, are more likely to participate in education than those in relatively backward states/region (see M_1). It is because in a milieu of widespread educational opportunities as well as socio-economic development, even the poorer or less advantaged segments of population envision the possibilities of educating their children. On the other hand, in the context of restrictive opportunities as in the backward states, the privileged segment of population, as the theory of *social closure* suggests (Murphy 1988), tends to monopolize scarce resources including education by closing off opportunities for the less advantaged segments in various ways.

Let us now turn to what happens to educational disparities between religious groups under study when the influence of all other factors is accounted for. Controlling for all other variables, religion indeed emerges as a significant contributing parameter in creating disparities. Compared to Hindus, the odds are heavily weighted against the Muslim children. Overall, the probability of Muslim children not being in school is 1.5 times that of Hindus in the age group of 6–14 (M_2). The gap further increases with advancing age and the probability of Muslim children not being in school in the age group of

15–18 becomes 1.8 times that of Hindus (odds ratios of Hindus to those of Muslims = 1.0/0.540 = 1.85; M_2). This indicates higher dropout among Muslims with advancing age. This is further confirmed by the results in M_3. As suggested earlier, the elementary stage serves as a terminal stage more for the Muslims than the Hindus. Interestingly, while both Hindu and Muslim girls are less likely to be in school than boys, the gender disparity among Muslims is less than among Hindus, negating the popular perception about discrimination against the schooling of girls among Muslims (M_3).

It can be seen that controlling for all other variables, the impact of being rich and poor on attending schools/colleges is as strong for the Muslims as for others (M_3), that is, Muslim and Hindu households experiencing similar economic conditions are equally likely to access educational opportunities. It thus rejects the essential construct of the Muslims which tends to treat them as homogeneous in regard to their response to modern education as in other matters.

Developmental context/region also does intercept the observed disparity between the Muslims and Hindus, although some gaps remain. For example, in the forward states/region the probability of Muslim children not being in school is 1.4 times that of Hindus compared to 1.6 times in the backward states (M_4). In other words, withholding educational deficits among Muslims relative to Hindus, the Muslims living in relatively developed states are much better placed than in the backward ones as far as participation in education is concerned. This could be explained by two factors other than economic ones. First, compared to Muslims in the relatively backward states, much larger proportions of Muslims in the relatively advanced/developed states live in urban areas (about 55 per cent as against 35.8 per cent for the region as a whole). Given the fact that urban areas stand out in sharp contrast to countryside in terms of educational opportunities, it can be proposed that very high level of urbanization among Muslims may have weakened, if not completely offset, the impact of certain constraining factors specific to Muslims. Second, while many states of the region such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka have witnessed concerted efforts at the community level for educational advancement, such initiatives have been lacking in other parts of the country.[14]

In the light of above discussion, relative educational deficits among Muslims can be placed and understood in a complex rather than a simplistic framework. This is no denying the fact that Muslims as a whole fall far behind the rest of the population in terms of educational access and attainment, although considerable variations occur according to socio-economic characteristics of household and regional location. Given the fact that endowment differences combined with location of residence in general explain a large part of intergroup educational difference; and that only a miniscule proportion of Muslim children attend madrasas, the thesis that *religious* and *cultural ethos* of Muslims is the culprit for their lower educational attainment is untenable.

The explanation along the lines of *minority complex* and *systemic discrimination* also poses too many problems to prove its application. For one thing, even though perceived or actual discrimination may be assumed to have impacted participation of Muslims in educational opportunities, yet how much effect does it have cannot be quantified and statistically tested. Secondly, Muslims live in different situations (majority/minority). In many situations, they form the majority group and they may be expected to influence the developmental processes or allocation of publicly provided goods and services in their favour in those situations. By implication, discriminatory perception stemming from their minority status cannot be framed as universally impacting Muslims' access to education. Also, we have already seen that developmental contexts intercept educational attainment of individuals (both Hindus and Muslims) quite significantly. Muslims in relatively advanced states are as much likely to access educational opportunities as others, predominantly non-SC/ST Hindus. Seen in this context, the claim that the Muslims in general are prone to discriminatory treatment by the state and its agencies and this largely prevents them from acquiring modern education would be unsustainable. However, the potential of this perspective to explain part of educational deficits among Muslims cannot be entirely dismissed. It has some relevance, though in specific contexts, for in certain contexts (largely in the northern and eastern states) there exists inverse relationship between relative size of Muslim population and availability of basic amenities including schools (Alam 2009; *SCR* 2006). Given that aspiration for and access to education is not independent of availability of educational opportunities, lack of educational opportunities in predominantly Muslim habitations has serious implications for equalizing access of Muslims to education.

Socio-economic characteristics of households and associated demand for education appear to be a powerful analytical formulation as it explains greater part of educational deficits among Muslims relative to others. Educational decisions are after all made in the households and economic well-being of the household exerts

profound influence on whether and how long a child will be put in school. In other words, larger the base of a group or sub-group with people having resources to invest in education or are engaged in white-collar occupations, higher would be its participation in educational opportunities. Historically, spread of education among both Hindus and Muslims has always shown such a class character (Alam 2012). Currently, as seen at the outset of this chapter, Muslims in overall terms cut a sorry figure in the sphere of economy and employment, and that disproportionately large proportion among them relative to other communities is likely to be poor and likely to engage in such occupations where aspiration as well as demand for education is generally low. As a result, when we compare the educational status of Muslims as a whole vis-à-vis other communities the whole community appears to be lagging behind. However, 'attribute disadvantages' do not, at least at the macro level, fully account for differential access to education. It is here the supply side factor come into the picture and assumes significance. As discussed earlier, predominantly Muslims habitations in certain parts of the country are particularly marked by lack of schools and other basic facilities. Needless to say, presence of educational opportunities in the localities inhabited by vulnerable groups such as Muslims serves as the extra push required by them in the context of unequal power relations (Alam and Raju 2007).

The Upshot

Undoubtedly, education is a powerful instrument of dismantling several forms of social inequalities. It enables individuals to acquire the rightful place in society and structures of opportunities. Social equity in education, therefore, constitutes an important element of social and human development. While there has been rapid expansion of educational opportunities, access to and participation in education remains far from equal, and religion emerges as the most pervasive axes of inequality. Whichever educational indicators one takes into account, the Muslims as a whole lag way behind other communities. In fact, in certain contexts, they tend to have fallen even behind the SCs/STs, hitherto the most marginalized communities in the country. In other words, educationally, the Muslim community constitutes the most excluded segment of society.

The reasons for lower levels of access of the Muslims to educational opportunities are diverse and intertwined in complex ways. At the macro level, while the correlates of educational access/attainment influence access of the Muslims to educational opportunities much the same way as they do others and the impact is as strong for them as for others, some gaps still remain. Put another way, endowment differences between the Muslims and Hindus alone fall short of fully explaining educational differentials between the two groups. The residual gap between these two communities may exist because of structural/institutional barriers, such as the relative lack of availability of basic amenities including educational opportunities in the Muslim-concentrated areas, although the state is under constitutional obligation to ensure that no child is denied education just because of lack or absence of educational opportunities.

There are various approaches to address intergroup inequalities in education in multiethnic, multicultural, and multireligious countries. In the Indian context, two schools of thought stand out. One approach suggests that inequities in education are rooted in the design of education system itself. Not only is it marked by the overall lower level of educational attainment, but also by unequal distribution of opportunities across region (rural/urban and developed/underdeveloped) and sectors of education. In other words, social disparities in education will diminish with the rise in educational attainment and further democratization of the education system. The other approach advocates conscious efforts to eliminate disparities by way of affirmative action in favour of disadvantaged groups. It thus implies that educational expansion alone will not reduce disparities across social groups. As it turns out even rapid expansion of educational opportunities does not lead to reduction of disparities. Disparities tend to reduce significantly only when the participation of the privileged segment in a particular level or grade reaches the saturation point. Hence, this means that the 'expansionist approach' will take a long time to equalize access to educational opportunities for the disadvantaged segments such as the Muslims. Viewed thus, affirmative action in education for the Muslims is the best way to enable them to catch up with others in a relatively short period of time.

Notes

1. For a useful review of literature on the benefits accrued from education, see Kingston *et al*. (2003).

2. See *Selected Educational Statistics 2004–5*, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India (GoI).

3. As per the 1941 Census, Muslims accounted for about 24.2 per cent of total population of India, whereas Hindus 69.5 per cent. Also see Davis (1949).

4. See Census of India 1921, Superintendent Government Printing, Calcutta.

5. See Census of India, 2001, Office of Registrar General, GoI.

6. Also see *SCR* (2006).

7. One of the problems of stocktaking of socio-economic conditions of religious groups in India has been a lack of dependable statistics cross-classified by religion. In post-independent India and until recently, there has been a complete blackout about how different religious communities have benefited from the developmental processes. It was in 1987–8 when National Survey Organization for the first time divulged statistics on different parameters of socio-economic development cross-classified by religion. After independence, the Census of India also chose not to tabulate and publish educational and economic data for religious groups until the 2001 Census, although it duly published figures relating to demographic attributes/characteristics of different religious groups. While different sources of data are used for the analysis, National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data set that includes a number of indicators of education is used for detailed investigation. The NFHS is a large-scale survey covering all India and arguably India's one of the most rigorous and scientific and nationally representative surveys.

8. Part of it could be attributed to benefits of affirmative action policy that the Muslim OBCs receive in the company of OBCs as a whole. This, however, needs further investigation.

9. The classification of states into forward and backward region is applied to sixteen major states of India, which account for about 96 per cent of total population of the country. Forward region includes the following states: Punjab, Haryana, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. Backward region comprises the following states: Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan. Geographically, relatively developed states are situated in the southern and western parts of the country and are contiguous except for Punjab and Haryana which are separated by Rajasthan from all other states in this group. Backward states, on the other hand, are in the northern and eastern parts of the country and are geographically contiguous. The two geographically distinctive regions differ not only in terms of geographical attributes, resource base but also in terms of socio-economic and educational development. Also and broadly speaking, the relatively advanced or forward states have clear edge over the backward states in terms of administrative efficiency and delivery mechanism.

10. As mentioned earlier, for a large part of the colonial period the Muslim community lacked an indigenous capitalist class developing into a modern one. The formation of the middle class among the Muslims took place at a much later date compared to the Hindus. Broadly, the class structure among the Muslims before independence was characterized by very broad base comprising of poor Muslims with a thin layer of middle and slightly thick upper strata. Thus, there were either very rich (mostly from feudal class) or poor Muslims. Also see Ashraf (1975) and Misra (1961).

11. See Alam (2012) for a critical appraisal of these explanations.

12. Logistic regression, in brief, estimates the probability of an event to occur. It is a generalized linear model used for binomial regression, making use of several predictor variables, which may be either numerical or categorical. For example, the probability that a child will be in school might be predicted from knowing his/her socio-economic background. Logistic regression predicts the log odds of the dependent variable, which could be written in the following form: $z = b_0 + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + ... + b_kX_{k;}$

In the equation *z* is the log odds of dependent variable; b_0 is the constant and there are 'k' independent (X) variables, in the present instance giving the characteristics of ith child. If X_1 is a binary (0, 1) variable, as is the present case, then $z = X_0$ (that is, the constant) for the '0' group on X_1 and equals the constant plus the b coefficient for the '1' group. To illustrate, the dependent variable in the present analysis is dichotomous and coded 1, if a child attended school or educational institution in the calendar year 2004–5, and 0 otherwise. In Table 12.7, exp (β) is the odds ratio—the ratio of the probability an event (for example, attending school) occurs divided by the probability of the corresponding non-event (not attending). In Table 12.7, the odds ratio for the referent group is 1.0. If odds ratio of the group which is being compared with the referent group is greater than 1.0, it indicates that the independent variable increases the likelihood of child's being in school as against the referent group. In case the odds ratio is below 1.0, it means that the independent variable decreases the likelihood of child's being in school as against the referent group.

13. For a useful review of literature on this, see Bhatty (1998).

14. In the southern states there exists for a long time now a well-established network of Muslim educational societies. On this, see Mohammad (2007).

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