

Educational Challenges of the Minority Educational Institutions at Odisha

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Abstract

Education for all is an aspiration and commitment of India since the inception of the constitution. The journey of making education a fundamental right at the elementary level is a proof which indicates the seriousness and commitment of the nation. In spite of the efforts taken, accessibility to quality education for all continues to remain a vision. To begin with, it is necessary to identify where the standard of education of the minorities lie. At the same time, it is pertinent to understand that India is constituted of a diverse community wherein the challenges in each community are unique. The minority communities having a distinct religious, linguistic and cultural background are a persistent source of concern as they continue to lag behind in educational progress. Many a time, these challenges are attributed to isolation and disadvantaged situation as seen in the government documents, reports and literacy census. These necessitate for exploration and critical analysis of the actual position that exist particularly in the educational sector. On the background of the issues raised, the study was confined to Muslim and Christian minority schools of Odisha at the elementary level, selected by purposive sampling and analysed, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The findings indicate that there is a challenge in the areas of infrastructure, teacher appointment and lack of in-service professional development opportunities. Isolation from the mainstream society in the larger context is yet another challenge. Findings are discussed for the overall educational development that has an implication for various other minorities also.

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INTRODUCTION

The expression 'minority' has been derived from the Latin word 'minor' and the suffix '*ity*', which means 'small in number'. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, Minorities means "group held together by ties of common descent, language or religious faith and feeling different in these respects from the inhabitants of a given political entity". The Oxford Dictionary defines minority as a "smaller number or part; a number or part representing less than half of the whole; a relatively small group of people, differing from others in race, religion, language, or political persuasion". A special Sub-Committee on the Protection of Minority Rights appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Commission in 1946 defined 'minority' as those "non-dominant groups in a population which possess a wish to preserve stable ethnic, religious, and linguistic traditions or characteristics markedly different from those of the rest of the population". Adopted by consensus in 1992, the United Nations Minorities Declaration in its Article 1 refers to minorities as based on national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity, and provides that States should protect their existence. However, there is no internationally agreed definition as to which groups constitute minorities. It is often stressed that the existence of a minority is a question of fact and that any definition must include both objective factors (such as the

existence of a shared ethnicity, language or religion) and subjective factors (including that individuals must identify themselves as members of a minority, UN 2010).

In the Indian context, from the sociological perspective, minorities are groups of people who do not enjoy a proportionate share of social, economic, or political power in a society. Although the Constitution of India does not define the term 'minority', it recognises the existence of minorities based on religion, language and culture and guarantees them certain rights and safeguards (Haque 2009). According to the Report of National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities, 2007, two types of Minorities are recognised in India — Religious and Linguistic minorities. The Constitution of India does not define minorities. However, it uses the word 'Minorities' in Articles 29, 30, 350 (A) and 350 B. Article 29 has the word 'minorities' in its marginal heading and specifies that any section of citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script, or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same. Article 30 speaks specifically of two categories of minorities — religious and linguistic. The Articles 350 (A) and 350 (B) relate to linguistic Minorities only. At present the categories of religious Minorities include: Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis (Zoroastrian) and Jains. These communities are

notified by the Union Government under Section 2 (c) of the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992. Jain community was also notified as minority community on January 27, 2014. As regards linguistic minorities, there is no majority at the national level and so the minority status is to be essentially decided at the State or Union Territory level.

According to the Census of India, 2011, the population of Muslims is 17.22 crore (14.23%), Christians 2.78 crore (2.30%), Sikhs 2.08 crore (1.72%), Buddhists 84.43 lakh (0.70%) data for Parsis (Zoroastrian) is not available in the Census. Out of the total literacy rate of India as per 2011 census which is 74.04%, the minorities literacy is — Muslims (68.5%); Christians (84.5%); Sikhs (75.4%); Buddhists (81.3%); and Jains (94.9%). The literacy rate for Zoroastrian (Parsis) is not available in the 2011 Census.

MINORITY IN ODISHA

Odisha being a state having composite communities occupies a distinct place in our country as it represents a unique blend of unity among various classes of socio-economic and cultural background. Out of the 30 districts, Gajapati and Bhadrak have been identified as Districts with a high population of minorities. The welfare of Minorities of Odisha comes under the SC and ST Development, Minorities and Backward classes welfare Department, Government of Odisha, wherein the concerned department takes care of the policies,

programmes, regulation, etc., related to minority communities. As per 2001 census, minorities account for 5.64% of Odisha's population which includes — Christians (2.44%), Muslims (2.07%), Sikhs (0.05%), Jains (0.02%), and Buddhists (0.03%), respectively. As per the Census of India, (2011), Odisha has only 2% Muslim population but there was a gradual increase in number of madrasa to 217 and spread over the 15 districts of Odisha. As per the number of Muslim concentration, the number of madrasas differ in different districts. In fact, there are 167 madrasas spread across different districts of Odisha. Out of the total number of madrasas only one is fully government, situated at Jajpur district. Christian minority schools in the context of Odisha are basically under the religious jurisdiction and management of the Roman Catholic Archbishop, management Diocese of Church of North India, Baptist Mission Society, and Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church (JELC), etc. The institutions managed under the three denominations mentioned above are unique in its own way and they have a commendable contribution for the education of the state. At present, there are approximately 400 Christian-managed schools.

Administrative Set Up of the State for the Development of Minorities

- (a) There is a Ministry for SC/ST and Minorities Welfare — A Separate

Department of Minorities and Backward Classes Welfare was set up in 1999

- (b) Odisha ST and SC Development Finance Cooperative Corporation is the channelising agency for the National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation (NMDFC)
- (c) State Backward Classes Commission set up in 1993

Other Institutional Set Up

- (a) Minority Commission — No Minority Commission in the state
- (b) Wakf Board/Wakf Tribunal/Haj Committee: All these Institutions have been set up by the State Government and Grants are also being released to them
(Source: <http://www.minorityaffairs.gov.in/reports/annual-reports>)

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Education is the basic input for sustainable development; especially in the context of socio-economic development particularly for the socially excluded groups. If groups are able to obtain high quality education, it is one of the clearest routes towards upward mobility and social acceptance. For this upward mobility, it is the most important to empower the weaker sections of the society. In spite of education being a fundamental right since almost a decade, there exists a wide gap in the benefit of

education for all. The main concern in this regard continues to remain within the socially disadvantaged and minority communities. For instance, though the economic and social situation of Muslims is not the same throughout India, one cannot deny the fact that poverty and lack of genuine financial recourses are hampering socio-educational development of the community at every step (Qasmi 2005). Considering the diverse nature of the country, the spirit of aspiration is seen in the constitutional provisions, such as Article 29, 30, 347, 350 (A), etc., as a key move towards establishment of egalitarian society and state. In spite of these, there exists variation among the six (6) religious minorities in India (Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Parsi [Zoroastrian] and Jain) wherein Muslims continue to face maximum challenge. Statistics shows that Muslims are one of the most backward communities in the field of education and literacy in the country (Qasmi 2005). The status of minorities, particularly of madrasas at Odisha is the same in terms of educational challenges in spite of the programme and schemes implemented, such as Prime Minister 15 point programme, Quality Education in Madrasa (SPQEM) and the schemes of the National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation, etc. As the educational status of the minority community has been a persistent

cause of concern as minority deficits in education persist. There is a strong view emerging that reduction of the educational gap among certain minority groups which necessitate the challenging issues to be addressed by taking into considering all the dimensions of the schools. It is also important to understand the system of functioning and other academic activities of the school and the professional need of the teachers through research study. Thus, the present study has been designed to explore the challenges faced by minority schools in the context of Odisha in order to collaborate in the educational endeavor.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

(a) To study the educational challenges faced by madrasas and Christian minority schools at the elementary level in Odisha.

(i) **Delimitation:** The study was delimited to *madrasa* and Christian managed schools at five districts of Odisha and confined to 24 schools at the elementary level, i.e., 12 schools each from madrasas and Christian schools as given below (Table 1).

Table 1

Madrasas		Christian minority schools	
Cuttack	04	Khurda	04
Kendrapara	04	Cuttack	04
Jajpur	04	Koraput	04

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

(a) **Design:** The descriptive survey type was used for the study.

(b) **Tool:** School information checklist, questionnaires, interview schedule for the teachers and head teachers, observation schedules for classroom and school processes were employed for collection of relevant information or data.

(c) **Sample:** Samples were selected purposively from the schools which comprised Principals, Teachers and Community members.

(d) **Analysis and interpretation:** The collected data were analysed descriptively using frequencies and percentages that are presented in Table 2. It is presented for both the minority educational set ups separately. The quantitative analysis is supplemented with qualitative data gathered through interview and observation.

Table 2
Infrastructural Facility

Facilities	Madrasas (N=12)			Christian minority schools (N=12)		
	Good	Manageable	Poor	Good	Manageable	Poor
Principals'/Head teachers' room	6 (50%)	3 (25%)	3 (25%)	8 (66.67%)	3 (25%)	1 (8.33%)

Teachers' common room	5 (41.67%)	4 (33.33%)	3 (25%)	7 (58.33%)	3 (25%)	2 (16.67%)
Office room	3 (25%)	4 (33.33%)	5 (41.67%)	7 (58.33%)	4 (33.33%)	1 (8.33%)
Classroom space	2 (16.67%)	5 (41.67%)	5 (41.67%)	3 (25%)	6 (50%)	2 (16.67%)
Sufficient furniture in classroom	2 (16.67%)	3 (25%)	7 (58.33%)	7 (58.33%)	4 (33.33%)	1 (8.33%)
Light and ventilation in classroom	2 (16.67%)	4 (33.33%)	6 (50%)	9 (75%)	3 (25%)	0 (0%)
Library	3 (25%)	3 (25%)	6 (50%)	6 (50%)	3 (25%)	3 (25%)
Sufficient reading materials in the library	1 (8.33%)	4 (33.33%)	7 (58.33%)	4 (33.33%)	4 (33.33%)	4 (33.33%)
Reading room	2 (16.67%)	3 (25%)	6 (50%)	2 (16.67%)	4 (33.33%)	6 (50%)
Functional toilet	5 (41.67%)	4 (33.33%)	3 (25%)	8 (66.67%)	2 (16.67%)	2 (16.67%)
Boundary wall	1 (8.33%)	3 (25%)	8 (66.67%)	5 (41.67%)	5 (41.67%)	2 (16.67%)
Playground	2 (16.67%)	3 (25%)	6 (50%)	6 (50%)	2 (16.67%)	4 (33.33%)
Provision of ramp and rail	0 (0%)	2 (16.67%)	10 (83.33%)	7 (58.33%)	3 (25%)	2 (16.67%)
Water facility	6 (50%)	4 (33.33%)	2 (16.67%)	8 (66.67%)	2 (16.67%)	2 (16.67%)
Electricity facility	9 (75%)	3 (25%)	0 (0%)	9 (75%)	3 (25%)	0 (0%)

While comparing the infrastructural facilities at the two set up, it is evident from the table above that Christian minority schools are at an advantage with better facilities, in all the areas assessed. This could be due to the better administration and

connectivity or linkages within the management system. Moreover, it was found that, madrasas do not receive most of the facilities provided by government and they feel isolated and sidelined which directly and indirectly relate to the status of infrastructure.

PROFESSIONAL NEED OF TEACHERS

Table 3
Position of Teaching Head/Teachers

Type of school	Position of HM/Principal	Position of trained teachers	Attended training/orientation programme	Training needs of teachers in different areas
Madrasa	100%	30.07%	60%	80.02%
Christian minority school	53.33%	46.05 %	70.01%	70.05%

The study indicates that, many teaching posts in different categories are lying vacant both in the madrasas and Christian schools. Only 53.33% of Christian schools have principals and only 46.05% trained graduate teachers are there, which affects teaching of different disciplines, particularly science and mathematics. Whereas Madrasas has principals or headmasters (100%), but teacher vacancy for different subjects at the elementary level are at a low with 35%. It is quite interesting to note that, many of the teachers are contractual in different schools for teaching different subjects particularly in the Christian schools.

As for teacher professional growth, in the madrasas 60% teachers have attended training or orientation programmes organised by SSA, DIETs and SCERT, but, 80.02% teachers opined that they need training on pedagogy, ICT and teaching children with special needs in a rigorous manner. As for the Christian minority schools, teacher training is being conducted by its management board or school

authority on a regular basis. Around 70.0% of the teachers said that they have attended trainings provided by government agencies. However, 70.05 % teachers in the Christian minority schools also opined that they need a specific pedagogy training and management of inclusive classroom.

CLASSROOM TRANSACTION

The classroom observation is made based on the above six parameters of classroom process Table 4. The percentages indicate that they do not differ significantly and it range between 59.1 to 65.2%. Grand average is 61.17 for Christian minority schools, whereas in the madrasas the range is between 45.38 to 79.38%. There is a slight variation between the two set ups in terms of assessment of learners which is 61.17% (Madrasas), 61.77% (Christian schools), whereas a marked difference was observed in terms of inclusive classroom management, i.e., 45.38% (Madrasas) and 61.39% (Christian-managed schools). With regards to content management in the transaction process, madrasas

Table 4
Classroom Transaction

Parameters	Madrasas			Christian minority schools	
	Maximum dimension scores	Average obtained score (N=40)	Average obtained score in %	Average obtained score (N=40)	Average obtained score in %
Content knowledge of the teacher and its relevance	24	14.35	59.79	15.65	65.2
Organisation of content	21	13.22	62.95	12.57	59.85
Presentation of content	48	26.43	55.06	28.37	59.1
Teacher-student interaction	21	16.67	79.38	12.55	59.76
Assessment of learner	18	11.01	61.17	11.12	61.77
Inclusive classroom management	48	24.78	45.38	29.47	61.39

scored a higher percentage at 62.95% while Christian managed schools are at 59.85%. This may be due to the madrasa teachers' exposure to government agencies' teacher training programmes. However, it is found that the need for teacher's professional development is required

at both the systems, which can be linked and supplemented to findings of teachers' opinion in the interview.

SOCIAL CLIMATE IN THE SCHOOLS

Table 5 depicts the data based on observation and interaction with teachers and students.

Table 5
Social Climate

Parameters	Madrasas (N=12)		Christian schools (N=12)	
	Good	Poor	Good	Poor
Physical environment	3 (25%)	9 (75%)	6 (50%)	6 (50%)
Academic environment	10 (83.33%)	2 (16.67%)	7 (58.33%)	5 (41.67%)

Social environment	9 (75%)	3 (25%)	8 (66.67%)	4 (33.33%)
Interpersonal relationship	10 (83.33%)	2 (16.67%)	9 (75%)	3 (25%)

Social climate is conducive, both in the *Madrassa* and Christian schools, as indicated in the table above. Teachers are very concerned for students learning and maintain a good interpersonal relationship between head and teachers, teacher to teachers and students and teachers.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

- (a) One of the major findings is that infrastructural facility is not up to the mark and needs upgradation or improvement. This also affects the academic aspects particularly at madrasas. Sharma and Pankaj (2008) in a baseline survey of minority concentration districts of India found that there exists an infrastructural deficit at the village level and school sector. Moreover, in the larger picture, the infrastructural issue can also be linked to Bhattacharya's (2015) findings, wherein villages with large Muslim population are located in states or areas with poor physical and social infrastructure.
- (b) Classroom observation revealed that teachers do not have the latest pedagogical input to support students' learning. Lack of exposure to latest technology, no provision to be part of academic discussion and sharing with other institutes or organisations may be the main cause of resorting to traditional mode of teaching. This can also be linked to teachers' identity crisis due to the existence by itself as an island. This concern needs to be taken into cognizance by policy framers and other stakeholders of teacher education institutes.
- (c) Need-based training in content and pedagogy areas, RTE Act, action research, teaching children with special needs, use of ICT in classroom, and guidance and counseling of students are not organised for the teachers. Similar challenges can be cited in a study of madrasas at UP and West Bengal by Nair (2008) who mentioned that, the number of teachers sanctioned was found to be inadequate and the school Head were insufficiently equipped to supervise the additional subjects; nor were the teachers adequate in professional capacity.
- (d) Teachers assessed student performance in a more or less traditional way using oral and written tests and giving assignments. There is a need to orient teachers to use multiple methods of evaluation as per the guidelines of CCE.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The study clearly shows that madrasas are at a greater disadvantage with reference to the infrastructure which calls for immediate attention from the authorities. Given the fact that minority institutions getting support to improve quality, the beginning has to be made with infrastructure.

Both in the Christian and *madrasa* schools' professional development is totally neglected and teachers are in identity crisis. The in-service teacher development programmes of the state have to include teachers from the minority institutions in a phased manner and carry out follow up, which will develop confidence among the teachers. They must be motivated to undertake developmental work, project work, adopt a new methodology of teaching and work as a resource teacher during training programmes. The teacher must be supported to utilise the training inputs received in the training programme for qualitative improvement of education.

Limited association of minority schools with other educational institutions in the locality and larger community is observed. Madrasa, despite being the focus of attention and concern, continue to function in relative isolation, doing little to alleviate the poverty of the ordinary Muslims in the state (Aleaz 2005). There are some common problems shared by the Muslim population

all over India in terms of pervasive and lingering sense of insecurity, apprehension of communal riots, marginalisation and threat to religious and cultural identity (Momin 2004). Collaboration with the local, district, state and national level institutions for academic activities and interaction with the immediate community for social events would quickly heal the isolation that in turn gives a positive direction to the journey towards inclusion.

There is lack of effective machinery to look into widespread negligence and indifferent treatment towards education of the minorities, especially Muslims. The important grievances of religious minorities relate, perhaps to the operation of the state agencies of the law and order, welfare, education and health, public services, state contracts, credits, licenses, and the judiciary (Akhtar and Nadir 2009). In this regard minority programmes and schemes like PM's 15 point programme and SPQEM are worth mentioning towards bringing change in the much neglected sector of society for education. To reap the 'demographic dividend', Indian policymakers and administrators will have to proactively implement at least existing social welfare programmes, particularly those that are related to school education (Sanghi and Srija 2014).

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