

LIFTING INDIAN MUSLIMS FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION LADDER A TRANSFORMATIVE AGENDA FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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Purpose of Report

Indian Muslims have significantly the lowest levels of school and higher education enrolment, and among the highest rates of stunting caused by malnutrition, which affects later development, academic performance, health and employment outcomes. Moreover, the estimated **31 million** disadvantaged Muslim youth outside schools and colleges have limited literacy and employable skills, and are larger than their Muslim counterparts enrolled in schools and colleges. Muslims are also among the poorest groups in India, and clearly the most socially and politically marginalised.

For nations and communities in crisis seeking sustainable solutions, educational reform is the single most important driver of all-round social and economic development. Therefore while the perennial Muslim education issues of reforms in Urdu medium schools and madrasas, increasing girl's enrolment and school scholarships are discussed, this new education agenda goes far beyond it to meet the enormous challenges of uplifting Indian Muslims from the bottom of the development and education ladder. By 2050, Indian Muslims will be larger than the Muslim population in any other country, including Pakistan and Indonesia.

The main purpose of this report is to catalyse a discussion on the new educational reforms and directions, which are required to promote the development and education of Indian Muslims. The present online report, *Lifting Indian Muslims from the Bottom of the Development and Education Ladder: A Transformative Agenda for the 21st Century* is a much shorter version of an earlier 2019 online report. For enabling wider dissemination, a listing of its abstract and recommendations have been provided separately in English. This abstract has also been made available in Hindi.

Contents of Report

	Title	Page No.
	Abbreviations	3
	Abstract	4-5
	Introduction	6-7
Section 1	Rationale, Goals, Priorities and Distinctive Features of The New Education Agenda	7-10
Section 2	Implementing Goal 1 - Ensure All Muslims Complete 12 Years Of Quality School Education From Classes 1-12 Attaining Relevant Learning Outcomes	10-22
Section 3	Implementing Goal 2 - Ensure All Muslim Children Between Birth - 6 years Benefit from Access to Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes for the Birth - 3 years Stage of Infancy and 3 Years of Pre-Primary Education	22-25
Section 4	Implementing Goal 3 - Ensure All Muslim Youth Under25 Years Outside Schools and Colleges Under25 Years Have Better Access to Varied Educational Opportunities and Vocational Training.	26-30
Section 5	Impact of the 2020 National Education Policy (NEP) on the Implementation of the Three Goals of the New Education Agenda	30-32
Section 6	Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Implementation of the Three Goals of the New Education Agenda	33-35
Section 7	Indispensable Role of Muslim Organisations And Civil Society Groups in Implementing All Three Education Agenda Goals	36-40
Section 8	Complete Listing of Recommendations for Government, Muslim Organisations And Civil Society Groups Towards Implementing All Three Goals of the New Education Agenda	41-44
	Footnotes	45-53
	Tables	54-60
	Notes	61-64

ABBREVIATIONS

AISHE	All Development India Survey on Higher Education
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
IIT	Indian Institute of Technology
IIM	Indian Institute of Management
ITI	Industrial Training Institute
KGBV	Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya
MOI	Medium of Instruction
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
MWCD	Ministry of Women and Child Development
NEP	National Education Policy
NSS	National Sample Survey
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SC	Scheduled Caste
ST	Scheduled Tribe
SMC	School Management Committee
SPQEM	Scheme for Providing Quality Education in Madrasas
UDISE	Unified District Information System for Education

ABSTRACT

Few know that Muslims - and not Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes - are the most educationally disadvantaged group in India, having the lowest rates of school and higher education enrolment. Far fewer are aware that Indian Muslim children under 5 years have among the highest rates of stunting, resulting mainly from chronic child malnutrition. Equally unrecognised, and therefore entirely overlooked, are the **31 million** poor and lower middle class Indian Muslim youth under 25 years outside schools and colleges - with extremely limited literacy and numeracy skills - whose numbers are larger than their disadvantaged Muslim student peers enrolled in the formal educational system.

Cumulatively, these three indicators of development and educational backwardness of Muslims have a considerable negative impact on every aspect of their lives: literacy and numeracy, academic performance and intellectual development, health, jobs, employable and life-enhancing skills and knowledge, as well as their contribution to India's overall political, social and economic development.

By 2050, it is estimated that India's Muslim population at about **310 million** Muslims will be larger than any other country in the world, including Pakistan and Indonesia. In 2020, Indian Muslims compose about **15%** of the country's population, and the most disadvantaged among them are the poor and lower middle class, who compose more than **80%** of Muslims in India. Therefore, discussions on educational reform of Indian Muslims cannot continue to be limited to better access to schools and higher education, Urdu medium schooling and madrasas. If a transformational education is to be the key to lifting Muslims from the morass that they find themselves in, it must focus on the development and education of poor and lower middle class Muslims under 25 years.

This independent *and* non-commissioned report, *Lifting Indian Muslims from The Bottom of The Development And Education Ladder: A Transformative Agenda For The 21st Century, 2022*, highlights four key issues of a new agenda that needs to be implemented:

1. Education has to be broadly defined extending beyond formal education. Its new goals must prioritise and focus on the development and education of poor and lower middle class Muslims under 25 years numbering **79 million**, as follows: improving and expanding Early Childhood Development and Education (ECCE) programmes for **21 million** children between birth- six years; twelve years of quality school education for **27 million** students; and improving education and training opportunities for **31 million** out-of-school and college youth.
2. This report delineates various features of the rationale for this agenda; its three inter-dependent goals; and articulates various implementation issues involved in transforming the development and learning of India's vulnerable Muslim population. At **79 million** disadvantaged Muslims under 25 years, this group is larger than the population of France, Italy or South Africa.
3. Only government – Centre, State and Sub-State – has the primary responsibility, human and financial resources and the institutional outreach capacity to meet this enormous challenge, which has been made even more difficult at present by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

4. Finally, this report highlights the indispensable role of Muslim organisations and Civil Society groups in implementing this agenda. It lists a series of two main types of recommendations: advocacy activities - primarily focused on ensuring that government fulfils its responsibilities - as well as complementary community-based learning initiatives, for realising all three goals of the agenda.

This transformational education agenda's knowledge and experiential foundation has 3 features:

1. An analysis based on a variety of secondary education sources: relevant books, official reports, national and international development and education data, etc.
2. A national and international consensus built over three decades on what needs to be done to improve the education of large disadvantaged groups.
3. The author's experience over three decades as an academic researcher, and active engagement in directing small and large-scale projects in different states of India to improve the development and education of poor rural and urban infants and children, students and youth under 25 years, while also participating in state, national and international bodies and discussions.

This report uploaded on a dedicated website www.educationofmuslimsindia.org, is a much shorter and updated version of an earlier 2019 report.

INTRODUCTION

In our contemporary world of significant political, social and economic dislocations, disadvantaged communities with large populations like Indian Muslims need to periodically take stock and chart new directions for the development and education of their children and youth, to meet the challenges of an ever-changing present and uncertain future. More than a decade ago, the Sachar Committee addressed similar concerns in its 2006 Report entitled, *Social Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India*. It was the first such official document in independent India to focus exclusively on Indian Muslims, and included a pioneering and comprehensive analysis of their education.

The 2006 Sachar Committee Report's major contribution in education was to highlight various features of the steady post-independence deterioration in the educational status of Muslims, situate this decline within the context of the socio-economic and political disadvantages faced by them, and to make various educational recommendations to reverse this downward trend. The availability of enrolment data since the Sachar Report has demonstrated that Muslims have now reached the bottom of the Indian education ladder - a clear and invisible decline in their educational status since independence with lower education enrolment rates than SCs and STs. This continuing deterioration and other important developments since the Report's publication in 2006, necessitate a critical introspection into the educational position of Muslims in contemporary India towards charting a significantly improved educational future.

The human dimensions and enormity of the educational challenges in undertaking this endeavour can be gauged from the following estimates of the Indian Muslim population. The 2011 Census indicated that there were approximately **172 million** Muslims, constituting **14.2%** of India's population, making them the largest religious minority in India; larger than the population of most countries and the third largest Muslim population in the world next to Indonesia and Pakistan.

Using World Bank population estimates for the country as a whole, it was calculated that in 2021 there are likely to be about **90 million** Indian Muslim children and youth under 25 years excluding the approximately **2 million** enrolled in college (Table 1). Of this **90 million**, approximately **80%** of Indian Muslims are poor and lower middle class, constituting about **79 million**.¹ (*For more details on how this rough approximation of 80% was calculated and other related issues, see Note 1*).

Highlighting the enormous challenge it will be to provide for the education of this population of **79 million** vulnerable Muslims under 25 years, it should be noted that this group is larger than the population of either France, Italy or South Africa.

This independent and non-sponsored report focuses on the government policies that need to be adopted, and the complementary policy advocacy and community-based measures that also need to be undertaken, to significantly improve the development and education of this group of **79 million** poor and lower middle class Indian Muslims aged under 25 years. Focusing on these disadvantaged Muslims, this report principally aims at delineating the rationale, goals, priorities, policies and other interventions that constitute a new education agenda for this group.

The report will articulate a coherent education vision, as well as delineate concrete measures, that address the concerns of Indian Muslims. Its main goal is to stimulate a discussion as to the concrete steps that Indian Muslims should be taking, in this crucial juncture of their development, to chart a significantly better educational future.

1. RATIONALE, GOALS, PRIORITIES AND DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE NEW EDUCATION AGENDA

1.1. Rationale - Why a New Education Agenda for Indian Muslims Under 25 Years is Imperative

Official data indicates that Muslims have now the lowest levels of school and higher education enrolment – lower than even traditionally disadvantaged groups like SCs and STs. Their participation rates are especially lower than these traditionally vulnerable groups in all prestigious school and higher educational institutions, including Kendriya Vidyalayas, Navodaya Vidyalayas, IITs, IIMs and other Institutions of National Importance (Tables 2 and 3).

Muslims have also among the highest stunting rates of children under 5 years. Stunting has a significant impact on later school learning, as well as all-round development. Therefore, focusing on school education will not be enough without strengthening its foundation in the early years. Moreover, Muslims have large numbers of disadvantaged youth under 25 years outside schools and colleges, who have limited literacy, numeracy and employable skills to cope with contemporary challenges. Many of them would be already married and have children, and need other relevant inputs, including health, marriage and parental counselling.

Post-Sachar education policies for Muslims have had very limited impact.² In fact, pointing to the political marginalisation of the Muslim community converging with the equally pronounced socio-economic marginalisation of the community, Jaffrelot and Kalaiyarasan observed recently that Muslims have been losing out to Dalits and Hindu OBCs, since the Sachar committee submitted its report in 2006.³ Moreover, there are new contemporary challenges which include the striking omission of even the mention of Muslims in the official 2020 National Education Policy (NEP), and the varying and significant negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the schooling of all disadvantaged groups.

Muslims continue to be among the poorest and most disadvantaged groups in India. A pioneering 2018 study indicated that during the current economic liberalisation period, most of the upward mobility gains in India over recent decades had accrued to other vulnerable groups like SCs and STs, but for Muslims these opportunities had substantially deteriorated.⁴ Muslims are now also the most insecure and politically marginalized in India.

In times of crisis, for nations at large and individual communities like Indian Muslims seeking sustainable solutions, there is now a world-wide, evidence-based consensus that relevant education reform is the single most important driver of all-round social and economic development.⁵ A new education agenda is required which cannot continue to be merely limited to improvements in school and higher education, Urdu and madrasas. Only a comprehensive agenda which also addresses current educational and other critical issues facing 3 groups of **79 million** disadvantaged Indian Muslims : children under 6 years; school students; and youth outside schools and colleges under 25

years, can impact education and economic deprivation significantly and break the cycle of limited intergenerational social mobility.

1.2. Three Goals of the New Education Agenda

The following 3 goals are an adapted and summarised restatement of the varied educational components of SDG 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals.⁶ The first two goals of this new agenda, dealing with school and early childhood care and education (ECCE), also feature in the 2020 NEP.

Goal 1 - Ensure all Muslim children complete a full cycle of 12 years of quality school education from Classes 1-12 attaining relevant learning outcomes.

Goal 2 - Ensure all Muslim children between birth - 6 years benefit from access to Early Childhood Care and Education programmes, including 3 years of pre-primary education.

Goal 3 - Ensure all Muslim youth outside the formal education system, aged under 25 years, have better access to varied educational opportunities and vocational training.

While this agenda applies to all Indian Muslims, this entire report focuses entirely on the development and education of poor and lower middle class (vulnerable) Muslims under 25 years.

The following is a very rough breakdown of these 3 groups of vulnerable Indian Muslims estimated to be about **79 million** in 2020 ; approximately **80%** of the **90 million** Muslims under 25 years:

1. **21 million** infants and children under 6 years
2. **27 million** school students
3. **31 million** out-of-school and college youth below 25 years

1.3. Key Reasons for Prioritising Poor and Lower Middle Class Muslims in the New Agenda

1. *Muslim educational inequality* - In developing countries there is a 32 percentage point gap between the chances of children in the poorest and richest quintiles completing primary school.⁷ In India too, there is a considerable difference in enrolment rates between the highest and lowest socio-economic status quintiles.⁸ Since Indian Muslims have the lowest school education participation rates, **27 million** poor and lower middle class Indian Muslim school students would therefore constitute one of India's largest and most educationally disadvantaged group. One recent estimate is that by 2018-19, at best about 2/3 or **67%** of (vulnerable) Muslim youth in the age-group 16-18 years, would have completed eight years of elementary schooling (Note 2).
2. *Positive discrimination and enhancing capabilities* – Disadvantaged Muslims need educational and related public policies that positively discriminate in their favour and thus enable them to benefit from an empowering education. The 2019 UNESCO *Right to Education Handbook* highlights a variety of benefits that education confers to individuals, their communities and countries.⁹ Since disadvantaged populations in most countries have

limited opportunities to develop their talents and participation, the *Human Development Report 2014* observed that equality of opportunity entailed differential and targeted treatment of the poor, which included providing them with greater resources to enhance their capabilities and life choices.¹⁰

3. *Positive discrimination and improving social mobility* - Underscoring the significance of prioritising the school education of disadvantaged Muslims are the findings of a recent pioneering study of intergenerational mobility in India during its recent economic liberalisation phase. All the gains of economic liberalisation had gone to SCs and STs since policies in development and education had positively discriminated in their favour. *While a high school education was an absolute prerequisite for a white-collar job in government or the private sector, the study noted that, "access to high school and college for Muslims from bottom half families has stagnated for the last fifteen years".¹¹ In fact for these poorer Muslims, opportunities for social mobility had substantially deteriorated.¹²*
4. *Reducing 'elite capture'* - Unless disadvantaged Muslims are specifically targeted, the more affluent, powerful sections of the Muslim community will disproportionately benefit from any educational schemes aimed at the general population of Muslims. When educational schemes or benefits of any other kind are provided to a group, the world-wide experience has been that it is the well-off within the group that 'capture' the scheme and become its primary beneficiaries. According to the Kundu Committee, wealthier members from other minorities benefitted most from post-Sachar policies for minorities rather than Muslims, who were not specifically targeted.¹³

1.4. Distinctive Features of the New Education Agenda

This agenda has five principal features which distinguish it from other recent commentaries on the state of the education of Indian Muslims. These recent discussions have generally not made any substantial break from the general thrust of the 2006 Sachar Committee's educational perspectives and recommendations, which principally focused on improving access to school and higher education, and to a more limited extent Urdu and madrasas. The critical issues it omitted included prioritising the first 3 years of childhood; learning in all stages of education, and the concerns and needs of out-of-school and college youth under 25 years.

Therefore, the five distinctive features of the new agenda include:

1. Underscoring the foundational importance of developmental inputs during the first 1000 days of life, and demonstrating that the learning of disadvantaged Muslim students cannot depend solely on educational reforms in preprimary centres and schools, but also requires a special focus on learning and development in the first 3 years of infancy.
2. Articulating a more expansive conception of learning to meet the challenges facing all disadvantaged school students in contemporary India, including Muslims. This would be far more relevant to the extensive range of the latter's educational needs than basing it mainly on student learning outcomes and a misguided focus on vocationalising secondary education- the narrow and main features of current school educational reform.
3. Rectifying the lack of attention paid to the large group of out-of-school and college vulnerable Muslim youth under 25 years, who have been considerably neglected,

and whose varied and considerable learning needs are generally viewed as requiring little else beyond adult literacy classes and opportunities for vocational training.

4. Demonstrating that only an uncompromising focus on improving the development and learning of all 3 groups of **79 million** disadvantaged Muslims under 25 years can meet the larger learning crisis faced by Muslims, and engage constructively with the developmental challenges they face in contemporary India. This would also require concentrating on states and districts in which Muslim participation is particularly weak.
5. Highlighting the understanding that while government has the primary responsibility in implementing all 3 goals of the education agenda for poor and lower middle class Muslims, Muslim organisations and other Civil society groups have an indispensable role. This involves the latter engaging in policy advocacy to ensure effective implementation of government programmes, and initiating a range of community-based activities improving the cultural and social capital of disadvantaged Muslims. Both sets of initiatives are detailed as recommendations in the final section of this report.

Though higher education features in the Sachar Report and contemporary educational discussions, and would confer multiple benefits to disadvantaged Muslim youth, it has been omitted in this new agenda. Its inclusion would have detracted attention from focusing most post-secondary initiatives on the neglected group of disadvantaged out-of-school and college youth under 25 years. At an estimated **31 million** in 2020, the latter are far larger in number than the **2 million** Muslim students in higher education in 2018-19 - mostly enrolled in private colleges, and who would mainly be from middle class and wealthier households. Implementing focused initiatives for this bigger disadvantaged youth group would also confer more significant benefits to them and Muslim communities than new initiatives in higher education.

2. IMPLEMENTING GOAL 1 - ENSURE ALL MUSLIMS COMPLETE 12 YEARS OF QUALITY SCHOOL EDUCATION FROM CLASSES 1-12 ATTAINING RELEVANT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Implementing 12 years of quality education for all Muslims requires an analysis of the varied deficiencies in both enrolment (access and retention) and learning of vulnerable Muslim students, and an articulation of the government policies and programmes that could make a significant difference to their educational development.

Learning is the focus of this new education agenda. While access and retention of Muslim students are important, and are the exclusive focus of almost all discussions on Muslim educational reform, learning has been prioritised here and described in greater detail. There is an internationally and nationally recognised consensus on the crisis of learning in our schools.¹⁴ Improving basic learning skills in school has significant positive consequences for disadvantaged individuals, communities and nations.¹⁵ Besides, retention of students in school is also crucially dependent on their effective learning. Finally, while states like Kerala have fairly high Muslim student enrolment rates, the quality of school learning in all states require significant improvement.

There are 7 parts to this section of the report on implementing Goal 1, as follows:

1. Deficiencies in Enrolment of Disadvantaged Muslim Students - Inter-State and Inter-District Differences

2. Government Policies and Programmes to Improve Access and Retention of Disadvantaged Muslim Students
3. Deficiencies in Learning of Vulnerable Muslim Students and its Consequences
4. Government Policies and Programmes to Improve Learning of Vulnerable Muslim Students
5. Muslim Girls' Education
6. Medium of Instruction
7. Madrasas

2.1. Deficiencies in Enrolment of Disadvantaged Muslim Students - Inter-State and Inter-District Differences

While U-DISE data indicates that Muslims have the lowest rates of school enrolment in India, there are significant inter-state differences. Of the 15 states which contain about **95%** of the Muslim population in India, the best 5 educational performers in rank order were Kerala, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Karnataka; the next 4 states were Jammu & Kashmir, Assam, Andhra Pradesh and Telengana. In proportion to Muslim's share of their respective state populations, the lowest 6 school education performers were Bihar, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh (Table 4).

Significant inter-district differences also exist in Muslim enrolment at all levels of school education in these states, best illustrated by the hugely contrasting enrolment performances of Kerala at the top and Uttar Pradesh at the bottom. 11 of Kerala's 14 districts had more than **100%** Muslim enrolment at the high school level in comparison to the proportion of Muslims in the district. On the other hand, there was not a single such high performing district in Uttar Pradesh. As many as 72 of the 75 districts in Uttar Pradesh were low performers – less than **80%** Muslim high school enrolment in proportion to the percentage of Muslims in each of these 72 districts. In sharp contrast, Kerala had not a single low performing district (Table 5).

2.2. Government Policies and Programmes to Improve Access and Retention of Disadvantaged Muslim Students

Poor and lower middle class Muslim students discontinue schooling mainly because of limited learning as well as their poverty and inability to afford the direct and indirect costs of schooling. Government state and sub-state policies therefore should increase 'free' school provision such as uniforms, textbooks, learning materials and scholarships. Provision of more educational scholarships for them is particularly important at the high school and higher secondary stage where the direct costs of education are far larger than earlier stages.

Such policies and programmes also need to take into account the inter-state and inter-district differences discussed earlier. Uttar Pradesh at the bottom, needs to do far more to retain its vulnerable Muslim students than Kerala at the top.

2.3. Deficiencies in Learning and its Consequences

2.3.1. The Importance of Improving Foundational Skills of Vulnerable Muslim Primary Students Which Are Substandard and Among the Poorest

Missing in the influential Sachar Report was the importance of prioritising foundational learning in retaining young Muslims in school, including the understanding that all students needed to acquire a basic set of language, mathematics and other cognitive and non-cognitive competencies in the primary and later stages of schooling, These skills would enable them to be more aware and productive citizens, access various knowledge resources like the internet, as well as technical and higher education institutions. Not prioritising learning in the 2006 Sachar Report was surprising since prior to its publication both DPEP and SSA - multi-state, large-scale educational projects - had focused on improving poor levels of learning in the nation's elementary schools.

Recent reports of ASER and the India Human Development Survey (IHDS 2) – both large scale learning surveys of Indian students - revealed that in terms of acquisition of reading, writing and arithmetic skills, Muslim primary students were either the worst performers, or among the worst, in comparison to OBCs, SCs, STs and their peers from other religions.¹⁶ A 2005 Pratham Survey of learning in Mumbai Municipal Corporation schools revealed that more than **50%** of Urdu medium Class 3 students were unable to read and write, and that these students fared significantly lower than their counterparts in Marathi and Hindi medium government schools.¹⁷ The vast majority of the Muslims students in the above studies were from poor and lower middle class families.

2.3.2. Negative Impact of Poor Primary-Level Skills - Incomprehension and Dropout, and Limitations in Further Education and Employment

The lack of acquisition of basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills at the primary level rarely gets completely remedied at higher levels of education for disadvantaged students, and makes the understanding of any subject taught during their entire span of schooling extremely limited. This incomprehension and lack of participation in any meaningful way with classroom instruction, along with the direct and indirect costs of schooling, are the main causes for premature dropping out of many Muslim children, shortly before and after they complete upper primary school. As documented earlier, enrolment rates of Muslim students are lower than the national average, and at best only about **66%** of disadvantaged Muslims between 16-18 years are likely to have completed 8 years of schooling.

These poor educational qualifications limit the education and employment future of many young disadvantaged Muslims. Those without Class 10 or Class 12 certificates cannot pursue attractive vocational training options such as the courses in a large number of crafts and trades offered by the Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), or entry into polytechnic colleges. Employment options are also extremely limited for youth without school, ITI or polytechnic qualifications.

2.3.3. Schools Are Also Not Preparing Disadvantaged Students for Dealing with Present and Future Challenges of Living as Productive and Participating Indian Citizens

Schools are failing spectacularly in their fundamental responsibilities of providing basic literacy, numeracy and other related cognitive skills, which has had multiple negative consequences.

A 2017 ASER study concluded that many rural youth in the age-group 14-18 years, who are enrolled in schools or colleges had limited foundational skills in literacy, numeracy and English, and even weaker was their ability to apply these skills to everyday tasks.¹⁸

Limited literacy skills in regional languages and English will diminish access to the internet, which provides access to online education and skill-enhancing courses, and enables dealing with practical concerns – buying and selling; accessing and filing government documents; knowledge of advertised employment opportunities, etc.. Lack of foundational literacy and numeracy skills in work forces around the world have resulted in reduced job earnings and labour mobility.¹⁹ Moreover, the skills required for emerging new jobs require a higher order of communication and cognitive skills.

Since government and low-cost private unaided schools focus on rote learning to enable students to pass school tests and external examinations, they do not prepare students with the relevant skills, attitudes and values to become effective Indian citizens. In addition, students need to be also equipped with advanced reading and reasoning skills to meet the new global citizenship challenges of climate change and Fake News. As presently constituted, government and low-cost private schools catering mainly to disadvantaged students cannot equip them to meet the known and unknown challenges of the 21st Century.

2.4. Government Policies and Programmes Need to Improve Learning of Vulnerable Muslim Students

Most disadvantaged students, including poor and lower middle class Muslims, attend government schools and to a lesser extent low-cost private schools. Moreover enrolment in government schools will substantially increase, due to the significant impact of the pandemic on poor household incomes. Poor Muslim parents will increasingly withdraw their children from these low-cost unaided private schools and send their children to government schools. Like so many similar vulnerable groups, they simply will not be able to afford the costs of the former, especially during and immediately after these pandemic times.

The focus of implementation in this discussion will therefore be on government and not private budget schools. Unlike the latter, which have limited capacities to change, government schools have the financial and human resources to implement policies and programmes which can make a positive impact on the quality of student learning, which at present is significantly substandard in both types of institutions. Moreover, unlike government schools, the data required for planning initiatives in private budget schools is limited.

This focus on learning enhancement in government schools will pay particular attention to the learning needs of their poor and lower middle class students, which are different from those of their more affluent peers studying in high fee-charging private schools. Unlike the latter, the former cannot depend on the cultural and material capital of homes to compensate for deficiencies in schools that they attend. While the focus of the following six policies and pedagogical interventions are for the improvement of learning for all government school students, these may need to be tweaked in some cases to also cater to the needs of the smaller subset of Muslim students.

2.4.1. Six Important Interventions Required for Improving Learning in Government Schools

a) *Focus on Acquisition of Foundational Primary Level Skills of Vulnerable Students*

Based on national and international evidence, the single most important curricular recommendation of the 2020 NEP has been to recommend the acquisition of foundational literacy and numeracy skills in the first two years of primary school, building on a foundation of 3 years of preschool.²⁰

Changes in teacher training, textbooks, curricular materials, and evaluation are also required.

b) *Remedial Education at the Primary Level and Beyond*

National and international evidence indicates that remedial education programmes are effective for overcoming deficiencies in basic literacy and numeracy skills at the foundational and post-primary stages of schooling.²¹

Remedial programmes need to be provided extensively in schools and communities. Given the impact of the pandemic on early foundational skills, these need to be initiated immediately.

c) *Improving Learning in Key Subjects, Especially the Teaching of English*

Improvement in conventional subjects like science and mathematics is important. Currently missing in school curricular reform - most noticeably in the 2020 NEP - is improving the considerably low proficiency in English of disadvantaged students.²² This deficiency is mainly because their English teachers do not know the language nor how to teach it.²³

Improving teachers' English competencies and pedagogical capacities, and providing related supplementary English curricular materials for students

d) *Promoting Constitutional Principles and Values*

Disadvantaged students have been at the receiving end of various forms of discrimination in schools, and Muslim students especially have been emotionally and physically bullied in the recent past.²⁴ Analysing social science and language textbooks in several states, the Central Advisory Board of Education observed that, "Textbooks now proliferate in which communal ideology shapes the contours of the understanding of Indian history, society and culture.---They teach a 'history' swamped by myths, false scriptural attribution and concocted claims for India's greatness-- most disturbing is the propaganda against minority religions". According to a 2021 publication of Christophe Jaffrelot, there has been a more recent effort, especially in BJP-ruled states, to deliberately side-line Muslim contributions to India's development, promote communal ideology and illiberal values.²⁵

School textbook and related educational materials must be produced within the framework of the Constitution

e) *Discontinuing Current Plans of Vocationalising School Education Before Class 10*

Vocationalising school education before Class 10, especially for poor and lower middle class students, is seen as a panacea to skill development and economic progress, despite authoritative evidence to the contrary that it does not fulfil its objectives and is prohibitively costly to implement on a large-scale.²⁶

Such populist solutions of early vocationalisation of school education need to be reconsidered.

f) Teacher Development - Subject Matter Competence and Attitudes towards Students

Both international and national research indicates that many teachers do not have the reading or mathematical skills expected of their elementary school students.²⁷ Teachers in India also mistreat or neglect many disadvantaged students, including Muslims.²⁸

Teacher subject matter competence and attitudes are critical to equipping students to meet current and future challenges of acquiring knowledge, employment and exercising citizenship.

2.5. The Education of Indian Muslim Girls – Recent Significant Advances But Far from Receiving 12 Years of Quality Education

There has been a long-held view that low enrolment rates of Muslim girls is due to the conservatism of parents, reflected in their reluctance to send their girls to school. *However, UDISE enrolment data for 2015-16 indicates a fundamentally changed ground reality – surprisingly, more Muslim girls are now enrolled than Muslim boys at the upper primary, high school and higher secondary stages (Table 6).* The Net Attendance Ratio for Muslim girls, according to the 2017-18 NSS 75th Round, is also higher than boys at the upper primary and higher secondary levels, but not for secondary. Urban Muslim girls especially show demonstrably far higher levels of attendance than urban Muslim boys at all 3 levels of school education (Table 6).

But gendered views on education still prevail among Muslim parents. The evidence indicates that Muslim boys are more likely to be sent to fee-charging private schools and English medium institutions, while poor girls are sent to free government and Urdu medium schools.²⁹ More boys are also enrolled in higher education than girls (Table 6).

This gender differential in parental choice of private schooling, medium of instruction and higher education reflects their differing views of the purposes of education in the lives of Muslim boys and girls. Parents perceive these additional investments in the education of their sons as improving their future employment choices, and the material prospects of the entire family. Unlike Muslim boys, girls contribute far more to domestic and other duties from an early age, and are simultaneously socialised by their families and immediate communities into becoming good Muslim wives and mothers, who will be married off and belong to other families. School education is viewed essentially as making daughters literate and numerate and preparing them for these future domestic roles - also reflected in the increasing number of girls being sent to madrasas is to produce actively pious Muslim wives and mothers.³⁰

However, during the last two decades, there has been a change of attitudes to the education and employment of Muslim females as a result of the changes in the cultural, economic and socio-political environment, especially in urban areas.³¹ In a 2017 interview, Amitabh Kundu who headed the Post-Sachar Evaluation Committee, observed that “the employment rate among educated urban Muslim women is rising. Increasingly, they are breaking familial and traditional barriers to get education and employment”.³² The more recent protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act in which young Muslim girls and women were active and vocal leaders and participants, reflect this change of social and political attitudes dramatically.

Disadvantaged Muslim parents therefore no longer need to be persuaded - in fact are keen - to educate their girls – a phenomenon noted earlier by the Sachar Committee.³³ What they now need to

be convinced of is that their daughters should be provided equal educational opportunities as sons to pursue 12 years of education, and also acquire higher order reasoning skills as well as values to help them function as active citizens contributing to their individual, family, community and national development. This is becoming increasingly important as women are not only contributing to family expenditures, but due to breakups in families are the sole bread-winners in a growing number of cases

Governments and communities all over the world have recognised that educating girls provides a variety of proven individual and social benefits.³⁴ Given their Net Attendance Ratios of **44%** and **31%** at high school and higher secondary levels in 2017-18, Muslim girls are a far cry from achieving the agenda goal of 12 years of universal school education (Table 6).

2.5.1. Recommendations for Muslim Girls' Education

- Towards universalising 12 years of school enrolment, improving access and retention of vulnerable Muslim girls in school, as detailed earlier in Section 2.2, including focusing on states and districts with very limited Muslim participation and reducing the direct costs of education. A focus on improving access of Muslim girls in rural areas with large Muslim communities needs special attention
- Equally important are advocacy efforts and institutional community educational initiatives, repurposing the content and goals of the education of Muslim girls, helping them visualise options outside the domestic front and promoting their aspirations for a better future.

2.6. Which Medium of Instruction Can Promote 12 Years of Quality Education for Poor Muslim Students - Urdu, English or Regional Languages?

The choice of medium of school instruction (MOI), especially for educationally disadvantaged students, is important since it significantly affects the years of schooling and the quality of learning that they receive, as well as access to higher education and employment. In a multi-lingual country like India, promoting certain languages as mediums of instruction (MOIs) is clearly an important instrument in improving human resource development and reducing inequality.

Regional languages have flourished at all levels of school education in most states of post-independence India, due mainly to aggressive state government policies. Far less government assistance for other languages has resulted in fewer state-supported schools for mother tongue speakers of even major Indian languages, including Urdu. English medium schooling has received even more limited state support, but has witnessed tremendous expansion especially in the last few decades. It is the wide-ranging impact of market forces that has driven this recent exponential growth of low-cost, private unaided English medium schools for the disadvantaged in India.

There may be multiple reasons for selecting a language as the medium of instruction. The following discussion attempts to address only a single fundamental question: Which among the MOIs currently being provided in the schooling of poor and lower middle class Muslim students - Urdu, the regional languages, or English - will give them the best opportunity to complete 12 years of good quality school education from Classes 1-12 in the coming decades? It should be reiterated that this is a shared goal of the 2020 NEP, SDG4 and this new education agenda for Muslims.

2.6.1. Urdu as a MOI Cannot Provide 12 Years of Quality School Education

Though there has been a close affinity for Urdu among various Muslim communities in different regions of India, Urdu speakers and Urdu medium schooling have been in decline for decades. The 2011 Census indicated that **4.2%** of India's population declared Urdu as their first language, accounting for only **30%** of all Indian Muslims.³⁵ *Urdu medium schools provide just a miniscule 2% of total Indian school enrolment (Table 7) Moreover, very few Urdu medium schools have secondary and higher secondary sections, thus limiting further schooling for students completing elementary school (Table 7) The quality of instruction and learning in these schools is also poor.*³⁶

For the tiny minority of students, from Urdu-speaking households completing 12 years in an Urdu medium school, higher education options are extremely limited and so too are career options in the government and private sector. Moreover, as one perceptive observer in Karnataka has highlighted, "a person educated through Urdu medium is not sufficiently skilled to apply for a Government job, or can read a newspaper in English or Kannada or file an FIR in a police station, or plead his case for facilities with civic authorities or Civil Supplies Department or can understand the dominant cultural trends in popular literature, films or journalism. This incapacity deters the community's effective integration with mainstream life and development"³⁷

While middle class Muslims deserted Urdu medium schools decades ago for English medium institutions, disadvantaged Muslims are at present following suit. The 75th NSS Round indicated that in 2017-18 only 12% of Urdu speakers sent their children to Urdu medium schools (Table 8).).

2.6.2. Low-Cost English Medium Schools Also Cannot Provide 12 Years of Quality Schooling Despite Great Demand for these Private Unaided Schools by All Vulnerable Groups, Especially Muslims

Due to the growing globalisation and liberalisation of the Indian economy in the 1990s and subsequent decades, the widespread use of computers, employment opportunities and internet access increased significantly the importance of English. As Baird observed in 2009, "English serves as the language of expertise and management in India English maintains a powerful presence among the poor of India... the vast majority of low-income parents I interviewed believed that if their child can speak English, he or she would be guaranteed a middle-class job. In previous demand-side analysis of the low-fee private school sector, the majority of lower-middle class Indians viewed English as their ticket to mobility—just within reach, but with required sacrifices"³⁸

This demand for low-cost private schools is also due to a perception that they offer better quality education than government schools, and English skills in particular. Poor and lower middle-class parents, including Muslims, make considerable financial sacrifices to withdraw their children from government schools and send them to these low-cost private English medium schools. This migration has been reinforced by arguments from powerful Indian spokesmen that English is the tool for education and socio-economic transformation of the poor and disadvantaged in India. These include public intellectuals such as Chandrabhan Prasad and Kancha Ilaiah, acting as spokesmen for the disadvantaged, and industrialists such as Narayana Murthy of Infosys fame, and politicians like the ex-Chief Minister Rajasekhara Reddy.³

According to the 2017-18 75th NSS Round, Muslims have been more invested than Hindus in English medium schooling.⁴⁰ While only 12 % of Urdu speakers send their children to Urdu medium schools, as many as 52% have opted for English medium. (Table 8) Unconfirmed figures indicated that while there were about a dozen English medium schools in Bangalore run by Muslims in 1982, by around 2016 this had expanded to 450 schools!⁴¹

This tsunami of private unaided and low-cost English medium schools driven by public demand has had other impacts on the education of all disadvantaged groups. Private and government schools have closed down Urdu and regional medium sections, replacing them with English medium sections. While some state governments like Kashmir, Nagaland and Andhra Pradesh have switched over completely to English, others have introduced English medium selectively in different regions of their states.

However, it is the quality of English instruction and learning in these private unaided as well as government schools, which make it unsuitable as a potential MOI for providing 12 years of quality education for poor and lower middle class Muslim students. Reports from NCERT and individual researchers highlight the extremely limited acquisition of English skills of students; the almost equally poor English proficiency of private and government school teachers; the sole reliance on translating the textbook in local languages to convey meaning; and focusing classroom instruction on memorising model answers for possible questions that could appear in the all-important examinations.⁴² The home and community background, in which English communication is almost non-existent, can do nothing to remedy these significant limitations of low-cost private and government schools teaching in English.

Therefore, English medium schooling, far from being a panacea as an MOI for poor Muslims, can only exacerbate the existing crisis of learning and completion rates of schooling, i.e. the low acquisition of even basic skills of literacy and numeracy, let alone achieving critical thinking skills, as well as the inability of the vast majority of disadvantaged Muslim students to reach Class 10.

2.6.3. Accessibility and Advantages of Regional Languages as MOIs for 12 Years of Quality Education for Disadvantaged Muslims

Regional medium government schooling is accessible at the higher secondary stage in both urban and rural India. Far more Urdu speaking households send their children to regional medium than Urdu medium schools (Table 8). Government regional medium schools have obvious advantages for poor and lower middle-class parents, including Muslims - no fees, provision of midday meals and uniforms, textbooks, scholarships, etc. *These direct costs of schooling matter in retaining vulnerable children in school for 12 years, and will be even more significant when all schools start functioning full-time after the pandemic. In these pandemic years, as will be discussed in Section 6, poor and lower middle class parents are withdrawing their children from low-cost private schools, whose enrolment has considerably decreased during this period.*

Unlike Urdu, regional medium schooling provides many more opportunities for higher education, employment and promoting socio-cultural and integration goals. Since Muslim children interact with children from other communities, regional medium schools have also a higher potential for promoting fraternity.

Disadvantaged Muslim children and adults speak in the regional language within their communities and neighbourhoods. This is a better foundation for more effective early learning and personality development in comparison to children studying in English pre-primary centres and schools, where English is neither heard nor spoken at home or outside.

However, although standards of teaching and learning across all subjects are extremely low in regional medium government schools, unlike low-cost private unaided schools, government schools have the financial and human resources to significantly improve classroom instruction and learning outcomes. The recent transformation of government schools in Delhi is illustrative of the change that is possible.⁴³

2.6.4. Recommendations for Medium of Instruction for Disadvantaged Muslim Students

- Urdu needs definitely to be popularised. However, it will continue to decline as a medium of instruction for it provides no future for students studying in Urdu medium schools
- Improving the quality of learning in regional medium schools, especially the improvement of English as a school subject, is important with special attention to enhancing the communication skills of English teachers.
- Despite its unsuitability as a medium of instruction for vulnerable Muslims, English medium schooling is likely to flourish in the near future as the demand for it will surely continue to increase. Therefore, improving teachers' English competencies should be prioritised in private and government English medium schools. .

2.7. The Overwhelming Majority of Madrasas Are Incapable of Providing 12 Years of Quality Education for Disadvantaged Muslim Students

While it is important to provide religious instruction, the following discussion focuses on whether Indian madrasas as a whole can also provide 12 years of quality education for vulnerable Muslim students

2.7.1. Estimates of Indian Madrasas

Despite unfounded and exaggerated popular claims to the contrary, only a small proportion of Muslim children attend full-time madrasas. Official estimates vary indicating that between **4%, 7%** and **10%** of Muslim children attended madrasas – data provided respectively by the 2006 Sachar Committee,⁴⁴ UDISE 2015-16 (Table 9) and the 2011-12 National Monitoring Committee on Minorities' Education.⁴⁵ Since many private schools, including madrasas, are not included in official enrolment data, we may never be able to quantify accurately the number of children attending full-time madrasas, and also distinguish them from those studying in maktabs which offer part-time religious instruction to Muslim students who also separately attend full-time mainstream schools.⁴⁶

2.7.2. Main Features of Indian Madrasas

There are many types of madrasas ranging from a minority that are controlled and funded partially or completely by government, to the vast majority of private madrasas which are sometimes grouped under, or loosely associated with, different schools of Islamic thought working in isolation

from one another.⁴⁷ Most of these private madrasas operate through funds raised from local Muslim communities and Islamic philanthropic organisations. Since they offer free education and often free boarding facilities, as well as possible employment as imams and maulvis, most madrasa students belong to poor families.

It should be emphasised that the majority of private madrasas which depend on community funding, are poorly equipped and teach at best up to the elementary level. Moreover, they are poorly staffed, and their curriculum and modes of teaching and rote learning have not deviated from the traditional pattern of religious instruction.⁴⁸

The primary goal of all madrasas is to provide students with a knowledge of the Koran and appropriate religious practices, which is also reflected in the post-independence growth of girls attending madrasas, and the provision of special madrasas for girls. Their principal function is to produce pious and observant Muslim wives and mothers.

In post-independence India, reforms in madrasas have attempted to prepare more competent *ulema*, and also provide new skills and knowledge to all madrasa students to cope with the challenges of education and employment in modern India. While individual and some groups of private madrasas are also undergoing modernisation, the largest government reform initiative has been the Scheme for Providing Quality Education for Madrasas (SPQEM).

According to the 2018-19 NUEPA Evaluation Report, SPQEM was started in the XIth Five Year Plan in 2009-10, covered over 21,000 madrasas and was currently being implemented in 18 states in the country.⁴⁹ Its main objectives were to introduce formal school subjects like Science, Mathematics and English in the madrasa curriculum, and improve academic proficiency of madrasa students through the provision of salaries for additional teachers, provision of teaching-learning materials and equipment, and the strengthening of libraries. SPQEM was welcomed by parents, madrasa staff and managements since it improved the enrolment of poor Muslim students, exposed them to modern subjects, and to aspire to newer, modern occupations.⁵⁰

2.7.3. Why Most Madrasas Funded by Government and Communities Cannot Provide 12 Years of Quality Education

- Limitations in the Quality of Teachers and Teaching of Secular Subjects in SPQEM Madrasas and Other Unrecognised Institutions

Both the 2013 and 2018 SPQEM large-scale evaluations conducted by NUEPA and Jamia Millia Islamia documented that untrained and unqualified teachers were teaching subjects like science, mathematics and English, and that teachers were appointed by individual madrasa managements, and not regulated by any authority. Moreover, in many government funded madrasas, the science kit and the single computer provided were also not used by students. Conventional rote learning prevailed in secular subjects such as science and social studies, similar to those used in teaching the Koran and Islamic subjects.⁵¹

The teaching of secular subjects in other unrecognised madrasas is likely to be even more limited, since it is government SPQEM funding that has enabled many madrasas to provide both teachers and learning resources to teach these subjects. A 2015 report of a survey of 55 madrasas

conducted by the Karnataka Students' Islamic Organisation of India (SIOI) documented that less than half taught English, and less than **20%** had access to science, mathematics and social science subjects.⁵² Another study of 500 prominent madrasas across India revealed that 85 per cent of them did not teach Social Sciences, English and Mathematics.⁵³

- *Limitations In Access for Madrasa Students to High School and Higher Education*

Even among the majority of madrasas, most madrasas do not have high school and higher secondary sections, and to further their education students will have to transition to government or private schools. The process of getting their child admission into a new school is difficult for all parents. Transitioning from a madrasa with its focus on religious instruction to a secular school is even more difficult at any stage. When students transition from the parallel stream of primary-level madrasas to continue their education in regular schools, they "will find it very hard to adjust to new educational and pedagogical context".⁵⁴ Madrasa students immersed in religious instruction and related subjects in other languages like Arabic and Urdu would find it far more difficult than regular students to cope with novel academic requirements when they transition to mainstream educational institutions. Madrasas, like similarly truncated Urdu medium schools, obstruct further education and social mobility.

- *Madrasa Graduates Have Limited Opportunities for Employment and Social Mobility*

There are no state or all-India level studies that explore the link between madrasas and employment. But a study of 77 madrasas enrolling about 8,000 poor students in Mewat district of Haryana, a Muslim majority district, indicated that **78%** of the madrasa graduates were employed in madrasas, dargahs and mosques, and only a few went on to university education. It went on to observe that 'madrasa trained persons cannot bring any substantial socio-economic change because their professions cannot bring good remuneration.'⁵⁵ Similarly, M. A. Siraj has observed that due to the oversupply of madrasa graduates, they are hired as madrasa teachers at a pittance and transfer to their students "the same knowledge that fetched them a measly livelihood incapable of improving the quality of life."⁵⁶

- *The Unresolved Synthesis of Religious Knowledge and Secular Subjects - Mainstream Madrasa Reform in India Cannot Produce Productive and Participating Citizens*

An ongoing debate, which began in the colonial past, on which there is little consensus among madrasa authorities even now, is what constitutes secular subjects; to what extent should secular subjects be included in the curriculum, and the religious and practical objectives they should serve. As Arshad Alam notes, contemporary debates about the introduction of modern subjects in madrasas do not understand the madrasa world-view in which secular subjects are welcome in the madrasa curriculum as long as they do not disturb its fundamental religious core.⁵⁷

Madrasa managements are happy to receive government SPQEM funds since they could be now perceived as 'modern' institutions teaching science, English and the use of computers – all widely regarded by themselves and their communities as desirable symbols of modernity. The primary goal of madrasa education of producing pious and observant Muslim men and women has not been adequately reconciled with the demands of contemporary education in India.

Since little or no thought is given to a meaningful integration of the secular and religious world-view, they cannot also provide the knowledge and skills required for their students to become productive and participating citizens. In fact, according to Arshad Alam, the introduction of secular subjects could reinforce conservative religious agendas.⁵⁸

2.7.4. Recommendations for Madrasas

- Though madrasas provide an important service of religious education for Muslims, madrasas cannot also provide 12 years of quality education for disadvantaged Muslims.
- Towards implementing Goal 1 for poor Muslim students, the Kerala model of combining part-time religious instruction in maktabs and madrasas, and separate full-time schooling in mainstream schools, should be considered for more universal adoption.
- Madrasas should not be a default option for poor Muslims. As the Sachar Committee Committee Report also recommended, “the State must fulfil its obligation to provide affordable high quality school education through the formal education system”⁵⁹.
- As is being attempted in mainstream schools in India, madrasas should focus on improving the learning of secular subjects of their students. They should critically evaluate whether their ongoing reforms are promoting basic skills and knowledge required for disadvantaged Muslims, and to help them successfully cope with the multiple challenges of living in contemporary India.

3. IMPLEMENTING GOAL 2 - ENSURE ALL MUSLIM CHILDREN BETWEEN BIRTH - 6 YEARS BENEFIT FROM ACCESS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMMES FOR THE BIRTH -3 YEAR STAGE OF INFANCY, AND 3 YEARS OF PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

3.1. The Birth - 3 years Stage Is Critical to Later Development - Poor Nutritional Status of Indian Children - Stunting Among Muslim Children - Impact of Government Programmes

3.1.1. The Birth - 3 years Stage Is Critical to Lifelong Health, School Performance, Intellectual Development and Adult Earnings

Research in neuroscience, behavioural sciences, health sciences and economics has established that the first 1000 days of life, between a woman’s pregnancy and her child’s second birthday, is the critical window of time for influencing lifelong health and intellectual development.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the findings of Nobel Laureate James Heckman and his colleagues have also established that, in comparison to any other later stage of childhood and education, the rates of return to a nation’s economy and society at large is the highest for investment in children’s development between birth to 3 years.⁶¹

Optimal development of young children at this stage occurs when an integrated approach is taken involving the health and nutrition of adolescent girls (prospective mothers and young mothers), and ensuring that adequate health inputs, nutrition and psycho-social stimulation is provided to infants. Deprivation of these inputs in early infancy can have severe consequences such as wasting and stunting. Associated with an underdeveloped brain, stunting (significantly lower height for age) can be irreversible by the age of two and can have “long lasting harmful consequences including

diminished mental ability and learning capacity, poor school performance in childhood, reduced earnings and increased risk of nutrition-related diseases such as diabetes and hypertension”.⁶²

3.1.2. Deterioration in the Already Poor Nutritional Status of Indian Children

A Lancet global study indicated that malnutrition was the predominant risk factor for death in children younger than 5 years in 2017 in every Indian state.⁶³ The 2015-16 National Family Health Survey (NFHS 4) reported that **38%** of Indian children under 5 years were stunted, and **21%** were wasted.⁶⁴ According to the 2018 Global Nutrition Report, India has the largest number of stunted children (**47 million**) as well as wasted children (**26 million**) in the world.⁶⁵ Both stunting and wasting reflect chronic and acute child malnutrition respectively.

Since NFHS 4, the situation has further declined. Data from 17 States and 5 UTs for 2019 reported by NFHS-5 revealed that in 11 states stunting rates had increased, and wasting had increased in 13 states.⁶⁶ Given the rise in hunger of disadvantaged groups during the pandemic, the immediate future is likely to show significant worsening in the already unacceptable high rates of child malnutrition, child health and development.

3.1.3. High Stunting Rates Among Indian Muslim Children

A July 2021 study, “The Missing Piece of the Puzzle: Caste Discrimination and Stunting”, noted that while the stunting rate among Indian children was as high as **36%**, there were considerable inter-group variations: the lowest were Upper Caste Hindus (26%), and the highest SC –ST (**40%**), OBCs (**36%**) and Upper Caste Muslims, who did not identify as SC or OBC, at **35%**.

In more than **50%** of 565 districts of India, Muslims had extremely high stunting rates between **40% - 50%** or more than 50%. The situation for stunted Muslim children was particularly poor in the BIMARU region (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh). In **71%** of districts in this region, the stunting rates of Muslims was extremely high - between **40% - 50%** or more than **50%**.⁶⁷

3.1.4. ICDS

The largest initiative of its kind in the world, the flagship government Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) offers a variety of services for infants and mothers in anganwadis (child centres): food supplements, growth monitoring, health checkups, immunisation, preschool education and community contact. Related services for pregnant and lactating mothers include medical check-ups, supplementary food, health and nutrition education.

There is a great demand for ICDS services by disadvantaged households. The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) 12th Plan document has also highlighted a national consensus that significantly expanding and improving the quality of ICDS “has the potential of contributing to a reduction in mortality, improved child nutrition status (increased weight for age in children) and a favourable impact on reducing malnourishment”.⁶⁸

3.1.5. Lacunae in ICDS – Overall Limited Coverage and Poor Utilisation by Muslim Mothers and Children

Despite government and judicial directives to universalise ICDS services, NFHS 4 indicated that in 2015-16 only **54%** of children in the birth-6 years age-group received any one or more of the following ICDS services for children - food supplements, immunisation services, health checkups and preschool education. About half the pregnant and lactating mothers did not receive any of the 3 ICDS services: supplementary food, health checkups and health and nutrition education.⁶⁹ Moreover, though ICDS services are provided free, its utilisation by Muslim mothers and children are lower than the national average, and far lower than the utilisation rates of SCs and STs.⁷⁰

3.1.6. Lacunae in ICDS - Limited Importance of Birth-3 Years Stage and Poor Understanding of Psychosocial Development of Infants

The continuing increase in child malnutrition, stunting and wasting rates reinforces the finding of the 12th Plan document of the MWCD that ICDS services had been “relatively well implemented only in isolated pockets”, and that it “has been largely criticized for its relative lack of focus on both the 0- 6 month age-group and children in the 6 months to 3 years period, both of which are the most vulnerable to slip into under-nutrition”⁷¹

Moreover, as the *2013 National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy* has highlighted, these infants need psychosocial stimulation and early interaction in safe, nurturing and stimulating environments within the home, and appropriate child care services.⁷² There are considerable advantages accruing to poor children from receiving psychosocial stimulation, which is still not understood widely in India by caregivers, and even by those who design ECCE programmes.⁷³

3.1.7. Recommendations for Early Childhood Programmes for the Birth-3 years Age Group

- Prioritising the expansion of ICDS services in states and districts, with sizeable Muslim populations where ICDS coverage is particularly limited, like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.⁷⁴ Both states have the largest and third largest Muslim populations in India respectively, and between them constitute about one third of all Indian Muslims.
- Special efforts are required by government personnel and community organisers to increase the current limited participation of Muslim mothers and their infants in ICDS programmes.
- Promoting programmes of parental education and family planning among Muslim couples.
- Special effort in the above government and community efforts to promote the education of Muslim caregivers, involving good nutrition practices complemented by psychosocial stimulation of infants, and the need for the provision of safe and nurturing home environments. This is particularly important in the BIMARU region in which the vast majority of districts have extremely high stunting rates of Muslim children.

3.2. The Benefits of Good Quality Pre-Primary Education (3-6 Years) and Government Provision

Good quality preschools, according to Lancet reporting data from 71 countries, provides various benefits – higher attendance and achievement rates and lower drop out and repetition rates at later stages. Moreover, it is the most disadvantaged children that gain the most from these

programmes.⁷⁵ A 3-state report of 14,000 children, *The India Early Childhood Education Impact Study*, concluded that preschool participation from age 4 to 5 years had a significant impact on school readiness, and that its findings “add further evidence to the body of knowledge from around the world on the positive impact of preschool education on later learning”.⁷⁶

3.2.1. Poor Quality and Limited Coverage of Preschool Centres for Disadvantaged Children

The NFHS 4 estimate that **38%** of children under six years received pre-primary education in ICDS anganwadis in 2015-16, should be treated cautiously.⁷⁷ Most urban anganwadis, for example, conduct limited or no pre-primary classes, since they function under severe accommodation constraints. In fact most of them are merely de facto food distribution centres.⁷⁸

ICDS anganwadis and low-cost private preschool centres serving predominantly poor children provide very limited developmental and educational opportunities for children. Teaching practices in the vast majority of them is based on the notion that teachers are meant to fill passive children, who are empty receptacles, with desirable knowledge. They have failed to keep pace with developments in the neurosciences, learning theories and developmental psychology.⁷⁹

3.2.2. Three Years of Pre-Primary Education in the NEP - A Renewed Priority

The principal school education goal of the 2021 National Education Policy was to provide 3 years of pre-primary education as well as 12 years of school education. The pre-primary stage would be implemented through a variety of models involving anganwadis and pre-primary centres run in schools. The NCERT has been entrusted with the task of the development of the National Curriculum and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education.

3.2.2 Recommendations for Pre-Primary Programmes for 3- 6 Year Olds

- Research indicates that the many benefit of preschooling accrue to only good quality pre-primary programmes.⁸⁰ Therefore quality initiatives need particular focus in ICDS expansion.
- Until the NCERT brings out the ECCE framework, the official guidelines for the required large-scale qualitative improvements is provided in the 2014 document of the MWCD entitled, *Quality Standards for Early Childhood Care and Development*, which identifies 8 components of quality in pre-primary service provision.⁸¹
- A detailed description of the domains of development at this stage, as well as the type of developmentally appropriate activities for children to be engaged in, is articulated in the 2014 *National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Curriculum Framework*.⁸²

4. IMPLEMENTING GOAL 3 - ENSURE ALL MUSLIM YOUTH UNDER 25 YEARS OUTSIDE SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES HAVE BETTER ACCESS TO VARIED EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING.

The predominant focus of government policies and programmes in India is on students enrolled in the formal system of school and higher education. Consequently the entire out-of-school and college group has been almost totally neglected.⁸³ The situation of poor and lower middle class Muslim children and youth among them is particularly grim, in terms of access and utilisation of the limited opportunities available to them for education and development. By 2020, it should be reiterated that it is estimated that there are about **31 million** disadvantaged Muslims between the ages of 6-24 years outside the educational system – more than their peers enrolled in schools and colleges, and larger than the population of most countries.

Unlike students, this group is not systematically enumerated and therefore continues to remain ‘invisible’, getting limited attention by both government bodies and NGOs, including the 2020 NEP. Even the progressive 2006 Sachar Committee Report recommendations did not single out this neglected group of Muslim children and youth, outside schools and colleges for improvement.

This large group of children and older youth would be engaged in different activities including young and older children staying at home, who may be part or full-time child labourers engaged in domestic chores or family-based work, or working outside in small businesses, trades and manual occupations. Like their disadvantaged counterparts, most of this group of disadvantaged Muslims will have limited functional literacy and numeracy skills even if they have left school after Class 10.⁸⁵ Many of these employed and unemployed Muslim youth would also be seeking opportunities for skill development and vocational training, or a second chance to acquire a formal school or college qualification to further their prospects for better employment and improved material welfare. Finally, many of them would be young married couples and would also need guidance in their marital and parental roles. There is also a need for youth forums to engage with national and local issues, and the varied challenges of the 21st Century.

What needs to be concretely done for this wide range of vulnerable Muslim youth will be analysed under an adapted version of the broad ‘second chance’ pathways categorisation by Rukmini Banerji.⁸⁶ The following subsections will detail the main official government schemes under 5 broad categories, and evaluate where possible their impact on poor and lower middle class out-of school and college Muslim youth under 25 years.

4.1. Distance Education for Learning Equivalency and Educational Certification - Limited Success of the Special Scheme for Madrasa Youth to Access the National Institute of Open Schooling

For those who have dropped out of school and want to continue with their formal education, the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) offers a variety of courses and certification for students in Classes 3, 5 and 8, as well as for high school and higher secondary stages. It also offers a number of vocational and life enrichment programmes.

The NIOS started a minority cell in 2006 to assist madrasa students to take up secondary, higher secondary and vocational courses. But a 2013 evaluation of its implementation indicates that it

was not successful as a majority of eligible madrasas had no information about NIOS and its functioning.⁸⁷

4.2. Muslim Involvement Limited in Government Schemes for Women's Empowerment, Literacy, Skill Development and School Entry - Mahila Samakya, Nai Roshni and KGBV

Mahila Samakya - MS was started in 1989 to empower marginalised rural women, and by 2014 it ran 55,402 sanghas (groups) in 11 states with a membership of about 14 lakhs.⁸⁸ Of particular relevance to rural Muslim girls and women who face a number of constraints on their behaviour, are the MS programmes for skill training and re-joining the formal system of education. MS has been successful in its empowerment initiatives of promoting the education and development of marginalised girls and women. *However, various evaluations have indicated that while SCs and STs constitute a majority of its membership, Muslim women's participation is underrepresented.*⁸⁹

Nai Roshini – A scheme for Leadership Development of Minority Women has been implemented since 2012 by the Ministry of Minority Affairs with the help of NGOs in various states of India. Its objective is to empower minority women with confidence and knowledge to interact with government institutions at all levels. *A 2016 quick evaluation of the Nai Roshni scheme indicated that the scheme was being implemented by 343 NGOs in 24 states. In the 8 states that were studied intensively, most women trainees were Muslim women.*⁹⁰

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya - For girls unable to attend school, the KGBV scheme provides residential education at the upper primary level. The scheme provides a unique opportunity for rural girls from deprived backgrounds to receive an empowering and quality education. *However, though the KGBVs have great educational potential for Muslim rural girls, and despite reservation for them, they are underrepresented in KGBVs unlike SCs and STs.*⁹¹

4.3 Limited Success of Government Programmes for Eradicating Illiteracy Among Muslims

The total number of illiterates in India in 2011 was **283 million** of which **26%** were Muslims - much larger than the Muslim share of the Indian population at **14.2%**. A majority of the illiterates were to be found in the following 6 states containing **45%** of Indian Muslims – Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat.⁹² BY 2015, the main adult literacy programmes of MHRD had resulted in **366 million** being certified as literate. *Unlike SCs and STs, as a share of the Indian population, Muslims were underrepresented in this group of new literates.*⁹³

4.4. Five Government Skill Development Schemes – Muslims Targeted in Only Two Small Schemes

1. Skill Development schemes of the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) are the main government initiatives meant to provide skills to youth, particularly early school leavers facing entry barriers because of lack of required educational qualification. Established in 2008 and mandated to train **150 million people** by 2022, actual performance fell far short. The NSDC only managed to skill around **600,000** youth (**0.4%**) till September 2017, and could place only **72,858** trained youth, exhibiting a placement rate of around **12%**.⁹⁴ No separate data is available for Muslims
2. Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) - A national network of government and private ITIs have been established to provide trained workers to industry, and by 2015-16 had a seating

capacity of more than **2.5 million**. ITI courses run for 1-year to 2-years duration, and the entry qualification for the majority of the 73 engineering and 48 non-engineering courses are Class 10 or Class 12.⁹⁵ No data is available for Muslim students.

A 2017 World Bank evaluation observed that as “**46 percent** of Industrial Training Institute (ITI) trainees are from below poverty line households, comprehensive skills training also provides an effective pathway for youth from poor backgrounds into employment”.⁹⁶

3. Smaller in outreach, the Apprenticeship Training Scheme provides apprentices to industry as well as public sector undertaking, involving a period of basic training followed by practical training in the factory. The entry qualifications range from Class 8 to Class 12 and there are 260 designated trades. No data is available separately for Muslims. Apprenticeship training is attractive for youth, especially from poor families, because it combines earning with the possibility to obtain an educational certificate that is recognized in the market.
4. The Nai Manzil schemes of the Ministry of Minority Affairs (MMA) is meant to provide bridge programmes for poor minority students to obtain open schooling certification of Class 8 or Class 10, as well as impart skill training. In 2016-17 and 2017-18, 87,266 students were enrolled of which almost half were females.⁹⁷
5. The Seekho Aur Kamaon Scheme of the Ministry of Minority Affairs targets youth from 14 -- 35 years of age, and aims to improve employability of existing workers, school drop outs, etc. belonging to minority communities and ensure their placement. Between 2013-2017, there were 2,17,454 people trained in residential and non-residential courses. A 2017 evaluation study noted that most of the trainees contacted by the evaluators were Muslims.⁹⁸

4.5. Family Planning Information and Practice - Strategies Focusing on Muslims Needed

The following data has been taken entirely from S.Y. Quraishi's comprehensive empirical analysis in his 2021 book, *The Population Myth: Islam, Family Planning and Politics in India*.

Though Muslim population growth in the last decade has started on a trajectory of gradual decline, as it did for Hindus, the inter-Census data has shown that population growth for Muslims has been consistently higher than for Hindus.⁹⁹ This has been the cumulative result of many socio-economic and regional factors including that Muslim communities have limited information on family planning and limited access to government services.

In 2015-16, NFHS 4 indicated that amongst all India's religious groups Muslims have the lowest level of family planning practice (using any method of contraception); Muslim women have the highest unmet need for family planning services than other communities – the gap between women's reproductive intentions and their contraceptive behaviour; amongst women in the age-group 15-19 years, a larger proportion of Muslim women had started child-bearing. They are also the lowest among all groups in the age-group 15-49 receiving advice on family planning and antenatal care from a skilled provider, and the lowest utilisation of health facilities for delivery of children. Both Muslim men and women in the age-group 15-49 have also had the least exposure to family planning messages on any type of media.¹⁰⁰

What Quraishi highlights in his analysis is that despite low rates of family planning information and practice, Muslims are more and more interested in knowing about and utilising family planning methods. What can make a fundamental difference are targeted and innovative government and community strategies that provide information and access to family planning measures to Muslim communities, and motivation to adopt them.

4.6. Thirteen Recommendations for Out-of School and College Youth Under 25 Years

- a) *Expansion of All Second Chance Programmes*– The number of existing programmes available for formal education through NIOS, literacy, women’s empowerment, skill training, parental education and family planning can only enrol a fraction of all poor and lower middle class youth in India, and need to be significantly expanded.
- b) *Focusing on Muslim Youth* - Since evaluations of various schemes indicate limited participation of disadvantaged Muslim youth, special initiatives of Government and Civil Society are required to maximise their optimal use of available second chance opportunities.
- c) *Provision of Data on Muslim Youth* would be one such important government contribution since such information would be the foundation for planning programmes to improve Muslim participation.
- d) *National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS)* - A good second-chance opportunity to acquire a higher secondary certification for the vast majority of Muslim youth who have dropped out before completing high school. This certification will enable them to enrol in ITIs or polytechnics and colleges. Muslim youth should be incentivised to enrol in these courses. The special madrasa initiative of the NIOS requires more publicity.
- e) *Reducing Muslim Illiteracy* would mean focusing on expansion of adult literacy programmes in the following 6 states containing **45%** of Indian Muslims – Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat. The focus should be on Muslim illiterates in the younger age group 15-24 years, who are likely to want to be literate.
- f) *Mahila Samakhya, Nai Roshni and KGBV* - These government schemes can have immediate and long-term benefits for poor and lower middle class Muslim women and girls. Given their limited participation, special efforts are needed to publicise these programmes among potential Muslim beneficiaries, as well as facilitate their entry.
- g) *Focusing Family Planning information and Services for Young Muslim Couples* including targeted and innovative government and community strategies that provide information and access to family planning measures, and motivation to adopt them. Guidance is also required for young married Muslim couples on family life education and parenting - the latter has been detailed in the preceding Early Childhood Education discussion.
- h) *Other Needs to be Met by Civil Society Initiatives* - For improving their employment and earning prospects, English courses for vulnerable Muslim youth.
- i) *Short-Term Skilling Initiatives* – The skill development courses of the National Skill Development Corporation requiring limited educational qualifications are of particular importance to most Muslim youth who do not possess high school degrees.

- j) *Long Term Institutional Skilling Schemes* like the ITIs and the Apprenticeship Training Scheme have better skilling and economic prospects than the shorter term courses for Muslim youth.¹⁰¹ In fact, the Sharda Committee Report highlights the poor quality of skill development programmes of various Central Ministries, including the Ministry of Minority Affairs, and recommends proper evaluations of these schemes before their further expansion.¹⁰²
- k) *Increasing Enrolment of Vulnerable Muslim Youth in Skill Development Training* – Need to reduce the financial and opportunity cost of pre-service vocational training, which as the 2016 Sharda Committee noted, is a serious barrier against entry of youth into vocational education courses.¹⁰³ This could be done by various incentives including subsidising the cost of training.
- l) *Optimising Skill Development Training and Employment among Disadvantaged Muslim Youth* involves their receiving relevant up-to-date information on skills and jobs. According to the Sharda Committee Report, there is a problem of information asymmetry. Employers, industry or services are looking for skilled people to employ but cannot find them, and youth looking for jobs do not know which skills are in demand and therefore cannot find jobs.¹⁰⁴
- m) *Information Provision Initiatives of Muslim Organisations and Civil Society Groups* - Effective implementation of all the above recommendations is predicated on the availability of information and proper guidance. Like their counterparts from other groups, poor Muslim youth interact with very few knowledgeable mentors and also live in information-poor environments which provide limited assistance to meet new challenges. They desperately need institutionalised initiatives that inform and guide them to optimise the limited second chance opportunities that are available.

5. IMPACT OF THE 2020 NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY (NEP) ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE THREE GOALS OF THE NEW EDUCATION AGENDA

In July 30, 2020, the National Education Policy (NEP) was released after a long series of nationwide public discussions with various groups in urban and rural India initiated in 2015 by MHRD. The NEP which was approved by the Union Cabinet before its publication is now being discussed by the states. Though its roll out by the states will take time, it is clear that the NEP will influence the development and education of present and future generations of children, students and youth.

5.1. Enabling Implementation of Goal 1 of New Agenda - NEP Pedagogic Recommendations

A significant goal of the 2020 National Education Policy (NEP) is the provision of the highest quality education for school learners from historically marginalized and disadvantaged groups composing the majority of India's population. The NEP recommendations concerning the duration and content of quality education is essentially related to tackling the ongoing crisis of school learning in India. A focus on overall learning, including early learning in schools, has been highlighted in this report.

For quality learning, important NEP recommendations include experiential and active learning; a focus on literacy and numeracy skills in Classes 1-2 built on a foundation of 3 years of pre-primary education; to develop creativity, critical thinking and related life skills and values in high school students preparing them for the varied challenges of 21st Century India. These pedagogic concerns

were discussed in some detail earlier in Section 2, and 12 years of quality school education recommended by the NEP constitutes Goal 1 of the new agenda of this report.

5.2. Compromising Implementation of Goal 1 of New Agenda – The NEP’s ‘Missing Muslim’

Given that Muslims have the lowest school and higher education participation rates in India, the most glaring of omissions in the 2020 NEP has been that even the word ‘Muslim’ does not feature anywhere in the entire document. While there are specific recommendations for SCs and STs, Muslims as a group have been deliberately excluded from it.

It should be emphasised that this was not the case with the earlier 2019 Draft NEP, which had explicitly singled out SCs, STs and Muslims as deserving of special consideration. Noting that Muslims were the most educationally underrepresented among religious communities, it made a number of detailed observations and recommendations to improve their educational status.

Merely observing in the 2020 NEP that interventions are required particularly for educationally underrepresented minority communities, does not compensate for the reluctance to name Muslims and focus on them in this national document, and to deal equitably with a community of more than 170 million, constituting more than **14%** of India’s citizens.

5.3. Compromising Implementation of Goal 1 - Subverting Fundamental Tenets of the Right to Education (RTE)

A major goal of the 2020 NEP, like its 2019 Draft predecessor, was its recommendation that all Indian children should receive 15 years of quality education – essentially advocating that the duration of 8 years of elementary schooling in the Right to Education Act (RTE) needed to be extended upwards through Grade 12, and downwards to include quality pre-primary education for 3-6 year olds.

Both documents explicitly understood that government interventions would be necessary to provide quality learning for all 3 to 18 year olds, especially India’s disadvantaged and educationally underserved. Most observers welcomed these recommendations. The key difference between both documents is that education features as a justiciable children’s right only in the 2019 Draft NEP. In the 2020 NEP, there is no legal and binding commitment on government to provide for a downward and upward extension of the 6-14 age-group of the RTE Act. This will affect implementing educational schemes for all disadvantaged children, including vulnerable Muslims.

Additionally, while perfunctorily mentioning the RTE Act a few times, the NEP has recommended alternative education centres for migrant children and dropouts, and allowing local schools to make their own decisions on infrastructural inputs based on local needs and constraints. These recommendations violate fundamental tenets of the 2009 RTE Act. It will allow government not to be accountable for providing minimum standards of provision, teaching and learning in government schools, and will result in a downward spiral in the quality of schooling that will be provided to Muslim disadvantaged students and other similar groups

5.4. Compromising Implementation of Goal 2 – No Legal Commitment to Implement Goals

A major contribution of the NEP was the recognition of the importance of making relevant interventions in the development and education of children under 6 years – infants between birth-3 years and pre-primary age children between 3-6 years. However, as detailed in the earlier subsection 5.3, there is no legal and binding commitment on the part of government to implement such desirable recommendations.

5.5. Implementation of Goal 3 - 'Missing' Vulnerable Out-of-School and College Youth in NEP

While the 2020 NEP discusses vocational education, polytechnics, literacy, adult education, etc. and makes appropriate recommendations, there is no understanding of its beneficiaries - the large numbers of disadvantaged Indian youth outside the formal educational system, and their varied educational and vocational needs. And since both crucial features – numbers and needs - are not explicitly stated, it is not surprising that disadvantaged youth as an identifiably distinct group is missing in the NEP. As detailed earlier in Section 4, they need a variety of second chance educational interventions and programmes.

It should be noted that even in the early stages of development of the 2020 NEP, the government educational establishment had obviously neglected this group. Of the 33 themes that MHRD published in 2015 to facilitate its discussion, 13 themes covered school education and 20 themes dealt with higher education. Only one theme referred specifically to the needs of the larger number of learners outside the formal educational system.¹⁰⁵

5.6. Conclusion – Looking Forward

Nothing can be done to alter the original 2020 National Education Policy Document which has already received the approval of the Cabinet. However, there is a possibility to rectify some of its important commissions and omissions in the roll-out of the NEP in the States. What needs to be particularly highlighted is that despite the backward condition of Muslims on various development and education indicators - as discussed earlier in this section – Muslims as a group have not even been mentioned once in the entire 2020 NEP document.

This deliberate omission needs to be rectified in the State roll-out plans. More important, it is the state and sub-state plans and schemes in which initiatives for Muslims need to be specially incorporated. Any special government schemes for them, as will be detailed in Section 7, will not be undertaken without special advocacy efforts by Muslim and other Civil Society organisation

6. IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE THREE GOALS OF THE NEW EDUCATION AGENDA

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected India, and every other country's development and education disastrously. Though there is little evidence specifically available on Muslims, its impact has been particularly grim on all disadvantaged Indian groups. Consequently, all three goals of the new agenda for Muslims would be negatively impacted.

In the beginning of 2022, we are still in the grip of the pandemic. Therefore, what is being articulated are estimates and broad impact. A clearer picture will only emerge after all schools reopen, start functioning normally and more reliable assessments emerge.

6.1. Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Goal 1 of New Agenda – Further Deterioration in Learning

According to the 2021 Report of the India Task Force of the Lancet Covid-19 Commission, UNESCO listed "interrupted learning" among the top adverse consequences of COVID-19 school closures worldwide. It estimated that Covid-19-led school closures caused worldwide learning losses estimated at two thirds of an academic year on average.¹⁰⁶ Both UNESCO and the World Bank estimated that it could 'potentially increase the Learning Poverty levels to **63%** and drive countries even further off-track from achieving their Learning Poverty goals'.¹⁰⁷

In India, the prolonged school closures has definitely worsened the existing crisis of learning among India's vulnerable elementary school-going age children. A learning survey undertaken by the Azim Premji Foundation in January 2021, 'reveals the extent and nature of the 'forgetting / regression' kind of learning loss (i.e. what was learnt earlier but has now been lost) among children in government schools across primary classes because of school closure during the COVID-19 pandemic'.¹⁰⁸ The study covered 16067 children in 1137 government schools in 44 districts across 5 states. It revealed that on an average, **92%** had lost one specific important language ability, and **82 %** of them had lost at least one basic mathematics ability, from the previous year across all Classes 2-6.¹⁰⁹

In part, this deterioration in learning is because these disadvantaged students had limited online teaching resources, in comparison to their more well-off peers - a consequence of the existing digital divide that existed in pre-pandemic India. **15%** of rural, as opposed to **42%** of urban households, had internet connections and only **2%** of the poorest households had access to a computer.¹¹⁰

The consequences of these divides were accentuated during the pandemic when online teaching became the only possible contact that schools had with students locked up at home. Despite remedial efforts of many organisations, most vulnerable children have had limited, poor quality, or no access to online learning during the pandemic. Pratham's Annual State of Education Report (ASER) indicated that merely **11%** of students in private and government schools countrywide, logged into online classes, and **21.5%** accessed one-way video recorded classes.¹¹¹

Prior to the pandemic, the varied negative consequences of the extremely limited acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy skills among India's most disadvantaged children in the early years and later years were detailed in the extended discussion on learning in Section 2. This included limited understanding of classroom teaching and other classroom subjects; reliance on rote learning; poor

performance in classroom testing and examinations; lack of interest in school and early drop out; limited functional literacy and numeracy skills to cope with life outside school, etc. Due to the pandemic, this grim situation will only deteriorate further in the near future.

6.2. Potential Impact of Covid-19 on Goal 1 – Drop Out of School Students

In pre-pandemic times, it should be reiterated that for disadvantaged students there were unacceptably high rates of students dropping out before completing high school or even elementary school, especially disadvantaged Muslims. Present trends indicate that this situation is likely to get even worse. The United Nations (UN), in a report issued in August 2020, warned that prolonged school closure could result in a higher incidence of dropouts: **23.8 million** additional children and youth (from pre-primary to tertiary) may drop out or not have access to a school in 2021.¹¹² The pandemic is more likely to impact girls' education. About **10 million** girls in secondary school worldwide are estimated to drop out, with a large percentage of these girls being Indian.¹¹³

6.3. Impact of Covid-19 on Goal 2 - Further Deterioration in Dismally Low Rates of Child Nutrition

The Covid-19 disruptions to the free Mid-Day Meal Scheme in school, and the meals provided in anganwadis, has put an estimated **115 million** children at the risk of severe malnutrition.¹¹⁴ With anganwadis closed during the pandemic, hot cooked meals that were provided to children in them were discontinued, and states started to provide take-home rations and other substitutes for children and other beneficiaries.

A 2021 Centre For Policy Research document reports that several states lagged behind in providing these entitlements.¹¹⁵ The inability of children to access cooked meals during the lockdown is likely to have a detrimental effect on their nutrition and health, especially girls and children from marginalised groups. An OXFAM India report demonstrated, that approximately **35%** children did not receive their mid-day meals. Of the remaining **65%**, only **8%** received cooked meals while **53%** received dry rations and **4%** received money in lieu of the MDM.¹¹⁶

Prior to the onset of Covid-19, as documented in Section 3, the 2019-20 NFHS 5 Report revealed that the considerably low rates of acute and chronic malnutrition among Indian children under 5 years, documented by the earlier 2015-16 NFHS 4, had deteriorated in various states. And as further documented, Muslims along with SCs and STs had the highest stunting rates for children. The pandemic can only worsen this dire situation.

6.4. Impact of Covid-19 on Goal 3 -Vulnerable Out-of School and College Youth

The negative impact of Covid-19 on poor youth has been varied. The pandemic- generated livelihood crisis has led to a surge in the demand for cheap child labour and the number of children being pushed into illegal and 'hazardous' work.¹¹⁷ Experts fear that this will set the country back by decades in its fight against the already sizeable child labour problem. India has over **10 million** children (5-14 years) and **23 million** adolescents working across industries (2011 Census), and there are fears that school closures are beginning to push these numbers up.¹¹⁸ A study conducted in three states (Bihar, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh), showed that **42 %** of 15-24 year-olds experienced an increase in their domestic workload. The pattern has been clearer among adolescent girls (**52 %**) than boys (**22 %**).¹¹⁹

Additionally, as the 2021 India Task Force of the Lancet Covid-19 Commission has highlighted, ‘the absence of a structured school led routine and peer interactions has not just disrupted the lives of children, but amplified the anxiety caused by the isolation, the fears of the disease and the loss of physical, intellectual, and social engagement’.¹²⁰ Given their prolonged isolation at home, the unmet physical and mental health needs of children and adolescents have been detailed in various reports, and gender-based violence, child marriage and early pregnancy also make girls and young women more vulnerable.¹²¹

6.5. Significant Negative Impact of Covid-19 on Low- Cost Private Schooling and Madrasas

As detailed in Section 2.6., many Muslim parents are sending their children to low cost English medium schools. A comprehensive review of the private school sector in India concluded that due to stress on parent and school finances, the private sector is likely to shrink in the short run, with parents shifting their children to more affordable schools, including government schools. Schools with lower liquidity would possibly even close.¹²² A recent newspaper report has indicated that many schools have in fact closed down in some urban areas.¹²³

It is therefore not surprising that, like their private low-cost secular counterparts, madrasas too are feeling the financial impact of the pandemic.. A February 2021 conference of management and teachers of madrasas noted that madrasas were being starved of funds from Muslim charities, unable to pay teachers and that student were dropping out.¹²⁴

6.6. Conclusion – Looking Forward

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the World Bank in June 2021 slashed India's GDP forecast to 8.3 per cent for FY22, the fiscal year starting April 2021, as against its earlier estimate of 10.1 per cent.¹²⁵ Due to this economic downturn, it will be difficult to increase the public expenditure on education in India to **6%** as recommended by the NEP – first suggested by the 1968 Policy, subsequently perennially reiterated by various bodies and educators, and continues to remain an unimplemented recommendation. We will be lucky to maintain our current levels of educational expenditure, unacceptably low as they may be given the predicted fall in rates of economic growth, reduced expected tax intakes and the need for significant increases in expenditures on health care and economic recovery.

Moreover, while India was able to move millions out of poverty in the recent past, the pandemic has reversed this drastically. Using World Bank data, a Pew Foundation report estimated that the number of people who are poor in India (with a per person income of \$2 or less a day) increased by **75 million** because of the Covid-19 recession, accounting for **60%** of the global increase in poverty.¹²⁶

Given the new pandemic realities, it will be extremely challenging to implement the three goals of the new education agenda, and meet the developmental and educational needs of poor and lower middle class Muslim infants, students and youth. This cannot be accomplished without Muslim organisations and like-minded Civil Society groups ensuring that all levels of government implement existing commitments and meet new challenges, as well as initiate new complementary community initiatives. The next two sections of this report details these policy and programmatic initiatives.

7. INDISPENSABLE ROLE OF MUSLIM ORGANISATIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS IN IMPLEMENTING ALL THREE EDUCATION AGENDA GOALS.

The penultimate section of this report focuses on articulating various aspects of the critical role that Muslim organisations and like-minded Civil Society Groups need to play in executing the new education agenda. While complementing the all-important government initiatives, including ensuring that official schemes are properly implemented, these organisations will be the main drivers of the specific recommendations listed in the next and final section.

7.1. Why Muslim Organisations and Other Civil Society Groups are Crucial to Initiating Advocacy Activities Directed At Government Institutions and Schemes, and Implementing Community-Based Learning Interventions, for Disadvantaged Muslims Under 25 Years

Only government – Centre, State and Sub-State – has the institutional, human and financial resources and outreach capacity to meet the enormous challenge of implementing all three goals of the education agenda for **79 million** disadvantaged Indian Muslims under 25 years - a group larger than the population of the vast majority of countries in the world!!

However, all disadvantaged groups in India have to struggle to get government to implement schemes and ensure that they receive its benefits. Schemes may be announced but their timely and proper implementation is another matter. Moreover, disadvantaged Muslims have additional challenges such as contending with discriminatory official policies. Their main current concern, as documented in Section 5, is that Muslims have not even been mentioned in the 2020 National Education Policy, unlike disadvantaged groups like SCs and STs. Therefore disadvantaged Muslims have this additional burden to engage with as they struggle to extricate themselves from the social, political and educational quagmire that they find themselves in, as well as cope with the enormous economic and pedagogic impact of the pandemic detailed in Section 6.

Muslim organisations and other Civil society groups consequently need to engage with Central, State and Sub-State government agencies to kick-start, monitor and ensure that government programmes for poor and lower middle class Muslims under 25 years are implemented and function properly. These policy advocacy activities need to be complemented by community based learning interventions for Muslim children, students, youth and young parents.

Why both sets of activities are particularly important for this vulnerable Muslim majority, and not for the more affluent Muslim minority, can best be understood by articulating the cumulative influence on their respective lives of the 'Matthew Effect', and their unequal possession of financial, social and cultural capital.

7.1.1. The 'Matthew Effect' and Capital - The Multiplier Effect of the Impact of Early Advantages and Disadvantages and Unequal Possession of Financial, Cultural and Social Capital, on the Widely Different Life Trajectories of Affluent and Vulnerable Muslims

Most individuals from educated and affluent backgrounds have singularly distinct development and education trajectories from birth onwards, compared to those from poor and lower middle class households. The former begin with a development and learning advantage in infancy, which is cumulatively built on in later years - the 'Matthew Effect' - coined by Robert Merton to describe the

social phenomenon that early advantage begets further advantage, and correspondingly that early disadvantage begets further disadvantage.

For better-off Indian children, students and youth - including Muslims - this early advantage and its multiplier effect on further advantage, is a result of possessing far more 'financial and cultural capital' than their vulnerable counterparts. This enables them to live in more stable, hygienic and less crowded homes, have educated parents, attend good schools and to be provided with additional learning resources, including books, mobile phones and computers. This financial and cultural capital that their families provide ensures that early cumulative advantages in health, nutrition and learning in childhood, translates into a virtuous cycle of positive outcomes in schools and beyond.

Additionally, like their privileged peers from other groups, better-off Muslims also possess more 'social capital'. For example, these Muslim students have relatives, friends, special coaching classes or paid consultants to tutor them for qualifying exams, and advise and mentor them in making appropriate educational and career choices. Consequently, many affluent Muslim students are able to successfully access information and knowledge about applying for openings in higher education and employment, and perform well in competitive examinations. This enables them to enter and complete their education in prestigious higher education institutions, and also secure high-paying jobs.

In stark contrast, poor and lower middle class Muslims have extremely limited financial, cultural and social capital - the resources and advantages that a clean, uncrowded, educated well-off household can provide, including information and access to educational institutions and career networks, and the knowledge and skills to perform well in competitive examinations. This lack of various forms of capital limits their development of knowledge and skills that promote education and social mobility.

For vulnerable Muslims, disadvantage begins with deficits in development and learning in the first 1000 days of life influencing lifelong health, intellectual development and adult earnings. They start pre-primary schooling with a learning and developmental disadvantage, which increases incrementally in later years – first in the poor quality pre-primary centres they enrol in, and later in the inferior government and low-cost private schools they attend.

Early disadvantage begets further disadvantage – poor early learning worsens – and consequently, as detailed in Section 2.3., many vulnerable Muslim students drop out. Those who complete high school or the higher secondary stage have limited learning skills. For them and the minority that complete their schooling, their families do not have the social capital to guide them in making informed educational and career choices, including knowing about the type of government or private sources of scholarship and financial assistance for higher education, or the wide variety of potentially available careers.

A similar perspective has been eloquently highlighted by Anirudh Krishna. In India “children of poorer parents, no matter how talented and hard-working, rarely achieve positions commensurate with higher capabilities” and mostly end up in low-paid or dead-end positions, due to lack of information and role models in their environment:

“While it is of fundamental importance, education is not the only significant gap in preparation. Multiple weaknesses – including lack of information about the full range of career options, non –availability of guidance about how to get ready for the competition, and absence of better role models – combine to present almost insurmountable obstacles for lakhs of talented and hardworking individuals in disadvantaged situations. - - - - - The ladders that lead talented people upwards are broken in many places. These breakages are detrimental not just for the affected individuals; they limit the achievements of an entire society”¹²⁷

7.2. The Implications of the Mathew Effect and Capital on Advocacy Activities for Vulnerable Muslims –Types of Advocacy Activities and the Role of Muslim Organisations and Civil Society Groups in Engaging with Government Institutions and Schools

As detailed in previous sections, government programmes are limited in number and quality for all disadvantaged groups, especially for poor Muslim children, students and youth. Without advocacy activities by Muslim and other Civil Society groups engaging with government at all levels, expanding government provisions for vulnerable Muslims will be a considerable challenge, made more difficult at present by the considerable negative consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic.

There are 3 broad types of advocacy activities that need to be undertaken:

- Advocating for provision of ‘Missing Data on Muslims’.
- Macro-level policy and programme interventions to promote the interests of vulnerable Muslims
- Micro-level processes that directly affect the functioning of schools and Muslim students

7.2.1. Importance of Advocating for More Official Data on Muslims - Lessons from Contrasting Education Trajectories of SCs, STs and Muslims in Independent India

‘Missing Data on Muslims’- No effective engagement with government in plan formulation, monitoring and evaluation is possible without relevant information available to the public. Till the Sachar Committee Report, almost no government educational statistics were made available separately on Muslims. Though there has been considerable improvement since its release in 2006, important national official publications still do not furnish Muslim educational data. These include the NCERT’s annual publications on learning outcomes in key curricular areas for Classes 3, 5 and 8 between 2000 -2016; MHRD’s annual statistical publication, *Educational Statistics At A Glance* which provides literacy, school and higher education data; and reports of the Kendriya Vidyalayas and Navodaya Vidyalayas. All these publications, however, provide detailed information on SCs and STs.¹²⁸

It should be emphasised that the post-independence educational success of SCs and STs was mainly due to the education reservation policy instituted for them, whose progress was tracked and reinforced by the regular reporting of government agencies on a variety of education indicators. This collection and reporting of data, enabled government agencies and Civil society groups to initiate, target, monitor and evaluate SC/ST enrolment and learning, and make mid-course corrections in various large-scale educational schemes such as DPEP and SSA.¹²⁹ While just prior to independence,

SCs/ STs had far poorer rates of enrolment than Muslims, they have now overtaken the latter at all levels of school and college education, including participation in prestigious school and college networks, as documented in Tables 2 and 3.

Recommendation on 'Missing Data on Muslims' - Whatever data is reported on SCs and STs should be reported for Muslims too. This includes all government publications tracking the educational progress of students – enrolment, learning, provision of scholarships etc., as well as schemes for children under 6 years and for out-of-school and college youth. Multinational institutions like UNICEF, UNSECO and the World Bank should also be urged to follow suit in the reporting of data on Muslims. Rectifying the limitations in the reporting of data on Muslim education is one of the most important policy advocacy contributions that Muslim Organisations and Civil Society groups can make, and requires immediate attention.

7.2.2. Advocacy Activities for Vulnerable Muslims - Two Types of Macro-level Policy/ Programmes

First, a critical engagement by Muslim organisations and Civil Society groups with policies/ schemes/ legislation that affect all disadvantaged children, students and out-of-school/college youth under 25 years is needed. This includes the state roll-out of the NEP; the Central Government flagship Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan; ICDS, the RTE Act and Adult Literacy schemes. Sustained advocacy ensuring that all these government programmes and schemes are properly budgeted, monitored and executed affects all disadvantaged beneficiaries, including Muslims.

The second type of engagement, complementing the above overall initiatives, is advocacy by Muslim organisations and Civil Society Groups for policy interventions specifically targeting vulnerable Muslim groups. Increasing enrolment of Muslim students, for example, would require enrolment drives of Muslim students in districts with limited Muslim enrolment. What will make a significant difference to the enrolment of vulnerable Muslim students is an increase in available government scholarships, which could provide the necessary funds required for reducing the direct costs of education for many poor Muslim parents. For example, **2.4 million** fresh pre-matric scholarships and **1.7 million** were renewed for Muslims students in 2021.¹³⁰ Other types of activities for Muslim beneficiaries include engaging with government agencies to monitor the values content of language and history textbooks, and improving access of Muslim mothers and children to ICDS anganwadis, discussed earlier in Sections 2.4.1 and 3.1.5 respectively.

7.2.3. Micro-level Advocacy Activities for Security and Quality Education of Muslim School Students

Muslim students, especially, have been at the receiving end of emotional and physical bullying in schools. SMCS and PTAs need to be activated to play a proactive role in providing safe and inclusive schools, as well as other school-level initiatives that promote the provision of 12 years of quality education. This was discussed in detail in Section 2.4.1.

7.3. Limitations in Various Forms of Capital and the Need for Community- Based Learning Initiatives that Address Unmet Learning Needs and Information-Poor Environments of Disadvantaged Muslims - Implications for the Role of Muslim Organisations and Civil Society Groups

For all 3 groups of disadvantaged Muslims under 25 years, formal government and many private institutions are inadequate in outreach and lack of quality. They have consequently many unmet

learning needs which have been detailed in earlier sections. Moreover, as discussed earlier in Section 7.1.1., vulnerable Muslims also have grave limitations accessing information and mentors in their homes and neighbourhoods resulting in their limited aspirations, education and career choices. As Abdul Shaban has documented, more than **71%** of poor girl students and **62%** of poor boys in Urdu medium schools did not 'have clarity in their aspirations or no aspirations at all'.¹³¹ Wealthier Muslim girls were far clearer about their aspirations than their poorer peers and "significantly a higher proportion of them aspire to get jobs in non-traditional sectors like software engineering, civil services, engineering, and medical profession".¹³²

7.3.1. Illustrative Examples of Community Programmes for Unmet Learning Needs and Initiatives for Enriching Information-Poor Environments for Disadvantaged Muslims That Need Implementing by Muslim Organisations and Civil Society Groups

- Support classes for improving basic literacy and numeracy skills of students; support classes for English, Science and Mathematics for all school levels
- Programmes for building capacity among young Muslim caregivers to provide effective home-based child care, family planning and parent education for young Muslim couples, and adult literacy classes
- Career counselling and mentoring on a variety of employment options for disadvantaged Muslim school students and out-of-school and college youth, with particular attention to Muslim girls and young women.

A complete and more detailed list of recommendations is provided in the next and final section.

7.4. Conclusion

Clearly Muslim organisations and other Civil Society groups play an indispensable and complementary role to Government institutions and programmes in implementing the new education agenda. Enhancing the acquisition of financial, cultural and social capital of disadvantaged Muslims under 25 years is an optimum and sustainable strategy for comprehensively developing their human resources, and the promotion of intra-generational and inter-generational social mobility. This would constitute a vitally important break from the immediate post-liberalisation past, when as documented earlier in Section 1.3., opportunities for social mobility for poor Muslims, unlike SCs and STs, had substantially decreased.

It should be noted that most of the issues raised in this report, and the strategies that need to be adopted, applies to all disadvantaged Indian groups. Since India's working age population is much larger than its non-working age population, there has been much discussion on maximising this youth dividend by optimising the development and education of all its youth, which requires a variety of strategies. Though this report focuses on poor and lower income Muslims - the most vulnerable Indian group - many of its perspectives and recommendations can also optimise the development and education of all other vulnerable groups in India like SCs and STs. Therefore, maximising our youth dividend requires implementing an adapted, new education agenda for all poor and lower middle class disadvantaged youth under 25 years - disadvantaged infants and children, school students and youth outside schools and colleges in India.

8. COMPLETE LISTING OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT, MUSLIM ORGANISATIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS TOWARDS IMPLEMENTING ALL THREE GOALS OF THE NEW EDUCATION AGENDA

The following recommendations flow from discussions in earlier sections, and also proposals made in them. They delineate a range of concrete activities that can be undertaken by interested organisations and individuals, which were listed under the two broad categories of advocacy activities and community-based learning initiatives, discussed in the previous section.

The previous Section 7 articulated the indispensable role of Muslim organisations and Civil Society groups in implementing varying advocacy activities that pressured / engaged /collaborated with government departments, agencies and institutions at all levels – Centre, State, Sub-State, anganwadis and schools, and to a lesser extent - and more indirectly - influence the private low-cost school sector also to implement all three goals of the new education agenda. These organisations are also expected to start and institutionalise varied complementary community-based learning initiatives, to meet unmet learning needs and information-poor environments for disadvantaged Muslim communities.

It is important to highlight that both advocacy activities and community-based initiatives need to be implemented at present, keeping in mind the special challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, detailed in Section 6, as well as the omissions and deficiencies of the 2020 NEP articulated in Section 5.

8.1. Recommendations for Implementing Goal 1 - Advocacy Activities and Community-Based Learning Initiatives by Muslim Organisations and Civil Society Groups – Provide 12 Years of Quality Education for Vulnerable Muslim Students Leading to Relevant Learning Outcomes

8.1.1. Advocacy Activities – School Enrolment Policies and Programmes

1. Enable disadvantaged Muslims student to receive 12 years of quality education in ‘free’ regional medium government schools
2. Focus on ‘backward’ districts in which Muslim school enrolment is poor
3. Prioritise Bihar, Gujarat, Jharkhand, M. P., Rajasthan and U.P., which contain **45%** of Indian Muslims and the largest number of backward districts. Maximum attention to Uttar Pradesh.
4. Increase government secondary schools provision and access for male and female Muslim students
5. Increase provision of government scholarships for Muslim students
6. Publish official data on Muslim enrolment, scholarships, examinations, etc., including NCERT, Navodaya Vidyalayas and Kendriya Vidyalayas, similar in all respects to that currently provided for SCs and STs.
7. Maximise Muslim participation in local bodies (District Panchayats, Municipal School Corporations and SMCs/PTAs) to ensure the above schemes are properly funded and implemented .

8.1.2. Advocacy Activities – School Learning Policies and Programmes

1. Repurpose Muslim girls' education to enable employment options beyond the domestic front.
2. Further madrasa reform, and promote the Kerala model of part-time religious instruction in madrasas/maktabas, and separate mainstream schooling.
3. Strengthen school readiness, and foundational literacy and numeracy in Classes 1 and 2.
4. Provide remedial / support classes focusing at present on learning losses due to the pandemic.
5. Maximise teachers' professional development and subject matter competency - especially English.
6. Promote constitutional principles and values in textbooks and classroom transactions.
7. Increase Muslim participation in SMCs/ PTAS to promote student safety, enrolment and learning.

8.1.3. Community- Based Learning Initiatives Related to School Students

1. Run community centres for libraries, support classes, examination coaching and English courses.
2. Motivate vulnerable Muslim students to remain and excel in school, and provide extracurricular activities
3. Enable enrolments in Navodaya Vidyalayas, KGBVS, and private schools through RTE.
4. Provide education and career counselling, as widely as possible to Muslim students
5. Inspire and mentor all, especially Muslim girls, to aspire to education and careers off the beaten track.
6. Initiate parent discussion forums on schooling issues such as the importance of regular attendance and completion of schooling, learning and the pros and cons of Urdu /English / Regional medium schools, and enrolment in "free" government schools as opposed to low-cost private schools.

8.2. Recommendations for Implementing Goal 2 - Advocacy Activities and Community-Based Learning Initiatives by Muslim Organisations and Civil Society Groups - Ensure Vulnerable Muslim Children Between Birth - 6 Years Benefit From Access to Early Childhood Development and Care (ECCE) Programmes, Including 3 Years Of Pre-Primary Education

8.2.1. Advocacy Initiatives - Improving ECCE Access and Quality

1. Expand ICDS programmes in all states with a focus on states like U.P. and Bihar with limited ICDS facilities, and large Muslim populations
2. Provide qualitative inputs in ICDS including a focus on infants in the birth-3 years stage. Government and community efforts to promote the education of Muslim caregivers, involving good nutrition practices complemented by psychosocial stimulation of infants, and safe and nurturing home environments. This is particularly important in the BIMARU

region in which the vast majority of districts have extremely high stunting rates of Muslim children.

3. Provision of disaggregated data on ICDS beneficiaries, including Muslim women & children.
4. Ensure publicity of schemes and other measures to enable and improve access to ICDS facilities by poorly-served Muslim communities, women and children.

8.2.2. Community-Based Learning Initiatives – Promoting ECCE Access and Quality

1. Publicise and promote better utilisation of ICDS facilities by Muslim mothers and children.
2. Implement community-based programmes focusing on building capacities of Muslim caregivers to provide home-based holistic child-care, with a focus on psychosocial stimulation of infants in the birth-3 years age-group – a feature presently missing in ICDS
3. Run affordable quality preschool programmes and creches for Muslim beneficiaries.

8.3. Recommendations for Implementing Goal 3 - Advocacy Activities and Community-Based Learning Initiatives by Muslim Organisations and Civil Society Groups –Ensure All Poor and Lower Middle Class Muslim Youth Under 25 Years Outside Schools and Colleges Have Better Access to Quality Educational Opportunities and Vocational Training.

8.3.1. Advocacy Activities – Policies and Programmes for Disadvantaged Out-of School and College Muslim Youth Under 25 years

1. Provide programmes for formal education, literacy, women's empowerment and skill training, which are limited and underutilised by Muslims - need for expansion with a focus on young vulnerable Muslims.
2. Publish data on Muslim beneficiaries in all the above official programmes and schemes.
3. Raise participation of Muslims in NIOS to enhance formal educational qualifications
4. Expand currently limited participation of Muslim women and girls in empowerment and education programmes for disadvantaged females such as Mahila Samakhya (MS) and KGBVs.
5. Reduce Illiteracy in Muslim youth through literacy programmes focusing on the following six states containing **45%** of Indian Muslims – U.P., Bihar, Jharkhand, M.P., Rajasthan and Gujarat.
6. Enable access of young Muslim couples to government family planning information and services
7. Promote access of Muslim youth to short-term skilling courses of the NSDC, and the longer vocational training of the ITIs and the Craftsmen Apprenticeship Scheme, through measures such as subsidising admission

8.3.2. Community- Based Learning Initiatives for Out-of School and College Muslim Youth 1.

1. Optimise educational and employment opportunities for poor and lower middle class Muslim students and youth living in information-poor environments through education and career counselling, with a focus on engagement with suitable role-models and mentors.

2. Provide support classes and English courses for improving education and job prospects.
3. Provide community forums for discussions of youth-related concerns and challenges.
4. Provide family planning and parental education for young Muslim couples.

8.4. Recommendations - The Way Forward

Depending on their own interests and needs, Muslim organisations and Civil Society Groups can engage in one or more of the activities listed in the previous recommendations. All these initiatives need different forms of academic, pedagogic and managerial expertise; for example, working with government on policy and large-scale schemes, and implementation of community-level learning initiatives like running English classes, require different sets of knowledge and skills. It is therefore important for Muslim organisations and other Civil society groups to collaborate with other organisations and individuals when required that can provide the necessary expertise.

This agenda calls for a new compact between different groups— a collaboration of Muslim organisations and Civil Society Groups; government departments; training institutions and schools; sympathetic political parties; private enterprise; youth groups; funding agencies and vulnerable Muslim communities. Implicit in the agenda’s recommendation is that these disadvantaged Muslim communities are not mere collectives of passive beneficiaries, but that the active involvement of students, youth and older adults from these communities in discussing and implementing these proposals will make them more informed and active Indian citizens, carving out a better future for themselves. The impact of the pandemic on the recommendations makes this active participation even more consequential.

While facing serious existential and survival challenges in various parts of the country, it is difficult for Indian Muslims to articulate the paths that can lift them from the deepening quagmire they find themselves in, and visualise a future in which their security, material and social prospects will have visibly improved. However difficult the task may be, there is no alternative to a critical introspection about the enormous challenges and wide-ranging educational initiatives that need to be implemented to promote the development and education of **79 million** vulnerable Indian Muslims under 25 years. It is hoped that this report and the concrete reforms it advocates will catalyse this discussion on the way forward for Indian Muslims.

Seize the day, for as Shakespeare reminds us:

“There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves
Or lose our ventures”

FOOTNOTES

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TABLES

Table 1

Projected Population of Muslim Children, Students and Youth below 25 years, 2020

Categories	Total Number of Muslim Children & Youth Below 25 Years	Total Number of Poor and Lower Muslim Class Children & Youth at 80% of Muslim Totals Below 25 Years
Goal 1 - 0-5 years	2.56 crores (25.6 million)	2.1 crores (21 million)
Goal 2 – Enrolment Classes 1-12	3.4 crores (34.0 million)	2.7 crores (27 million)
Goal 3 – Below 25 Years not in schools/colleges	3.93 crores (39.3 million)	3.1 crores (31 million)
Total Goal 1 +2+3	9.89 crores (98.9 million)	7.9 crores (79.0 million)

Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation publication entitled Youth in India: 2017; DISE 2014-15 and 15-16; AISHE 2016-17 and 2017-18.

Table 1 - Note on Calculations and Projected Estimates of Muslim Children and Youth

The 3 goals of the education agenda corresponding to 3 different age groups: Goal 1 – Vulnerable Muslim children between 0-6 year; Goal 2 – Vulnerable Muslim school children enrolled from primary to higher secondary (approx. 6years and older; Goal 3 – Children and Youth below 25 years not enrolled in schools or colleges. There are no precise figures for any of these 3 groups of Muslim children and youth, and therefore the following projected figures are not meant, and should not be used, for any planning purposes. They are merely meant to be broadly indicative of the number of children and youth involved in implementing each of these 3 goals. The following demonstrates how these approximations were calculated based on the available data.

The following available data sets were used – 2011 Census of India figures on the Indian and Muslim population given by broad age-groups; World Bank 2020 estimate for the general Indian population by similar broad age-groups provided in a Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation publication entitled *Youth in India : 2017* ; the 2014 -15 and 2015-16 UDISE data providing Muslim school and general population enrolment figures, and similar higher education enrolment data provided for 2016-17 and 2017-18 by AISHE.

Since both the 2011 Census and the 2020 World Bank data was reported by broad age- bands 0-4 years, 5-9 years, 10-14, 15-19 and 20-24, the totals for the age-group 0-5 years for Muslims and Indians was extrapolated from the 2011 Census data amounting to **23.7 million** Muslim children and **17.17%** of the total population of children in this age-group. Using the latter percentage, it was calculated that in 2020 there would be **25.6 million** Muslim children below 6 years (Goal 1). Using

similar calculations and both data sets, Muslims in the 6-24 age-group in 2020 was calculated as **75.3 million**. Since AISHE data for Muslim students in higher education was **1.7 million** by 2016-17 and increased to **1.8 million** by 2017-18. It was projected that by 2020-2021, it would be roughly **2.0 million**. Therefore young Muslims enrolled in school but not in colleges, as well as those not enrolled, above 5 years and below 25 years would be **73.3 million** (75.3 -- 2.0). DISE data indicated that in 2014-15 the Muslim school enrolment up to the higher secondary level was **33.0 million** and had increased to **33.2 million** by 2015-16. It was projected that by 2020, it would increase at best to 34.0 million (Goal 2). Therefore, young Muslims above 5 years and below 25 years not enrolled in schools and colleges (Goal 3) would be **39.3 million** (73.3 minus 34.0), and the total number of Muslims between 0-24 years would be **98.9 million**. Based on expert estimates, that 80 % of all Muslims would be poor and lower middle class (vulnerable), the corresponding figures have also been provided for each of these 3 goals

Table 2

Proportion of Student Enrolment of Muslims, SCs and STs at Different Stages of Education and Their Respective Indexes of Social Equity for Each Stage, 2015-16

Category	% of Muslim Student Enrolment to Total Student Enrolment	% of SC Student Enrolment to Total Student Enrolment	% of ST Student Enrolment to Total Student Enrolment
Upper Primary Classes 6-8	12.6%	19.5%	9.8%
Index of Social Equity For Upper Primary Enrolment	89%	120%	120%
High School Classes 9-10	10.24%	18.68%	8.49%
Index of Social Equity For High School Enrolment	72%	115.%	104%
Higher Secondary Classes 11-12	8.05%	17.33%	6.77%
Index of Social Equity For Higher Secondary Enrolment	57%	107%	83%
Higher Education Enrolment	4.67%	13.91%	4.93%
Index of Social Equity Of Higher Education Enrolment	33%	86%	60%

Source: DISE 2015-16; AISHE 2015-16

Note – A meaningful comparison of enrolment ratios of different categories of the Indian population like Muslims, SCs and STs can only be made when their respective shares of the Indian population is taken into consideration, and the Index of Social Equity is calculated for each stage. According to the 2011 Census of India, Muslims compose **14.2%** of the population and SCs and STs constitute **16.2%** and **8.2%** respectively. The Index of Social Equity for any group is calculated at any stage of education as: Percentage of Student Enrolment /Percentage of Population x 100

Therefore, while the % of Muslim student enrolment is **12.6%** at the upper primary stage, and the corresponding figure for STs is lower at **9.8%**, it is the latter that has a better education participation because its proportion of the Indian population at **8.2%** is much smaller than Muslims at **14.2%**. Therefore, the Index of Social Equity for STs at the upper primary stage is **120%** and for Muslims is **89%** indicating that there are proportionately more ST students than Muslims at the upper primary stage in comparison to their percentage of the Indian population.

Table 3

Proportion of Student Enrolment of Muslims, SCs and STs in Prestigious School and Higher Education Networks and Their Respective Indexes of Social Equity

Category	% of Muslim Student Enrolment to Total Student Enrolment	% of SC Student Enrolment to Total Student Enrolment	% of ST Student Enrolment to Total Student Enrolment
Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan KVS Schools (As on 31-03-2016)	Not Provided	19.9%	5.5%
Index of Social Equity KVS Schools	No Data	123%	67%
Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya JNVS as on 31-03-2018	Not Provided	25.28%	19.79%
Index of Social Equity JNVS	No Data	159%	240%
Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBVs), 2015-16	7%	30%	25%
Index of Social Equity KBBVs	49%	185%	305%
Central University -2015-16	4.1%	11.6%	3.9%
Index of Social Equity Central University	29%	72%	48%
Institute of National Importance 2015-16	1.5%	13.0%	5.9%
Index of Social Equity Institute of National Importance	11%	80%	72%

Source: KVS – Annual Rep.2017-18 from website; JNVS source from Annual Report on website, KGBV from MHRD Annual Report 2015-16; and Higher Ed. data from AISHE 2015-16 from website

Table 4

Performance of States Ranked by Index of Social Equity for Muslim Students at Elementary, Upper Primary, High School and Higher Secondary Stage, 2014-15

	Index of Social Equity of Muslims at Elementary Stage	Index of Social Equity of Muslims at Upper Primary Stage	Index of Social Equity of Muslims at High School Stage	Index of Social Equity of Muslims at Higher Secondary Stage
Best 5 Performing States				
Kerala	126%	123%	116%	87%
W. Bengal	122%	114%	99%	81%
Tamil Nadu	100%	98%	93%	89%
Maharashtra	115%	109%	92%	65%
Karnataka	110%	107%	93%	59%
Next Best Performing 4 States				
Jammu & Kashmir	97 %	95%	89%	88%
Assam	111%	100%	72%	59%
Andhra Pradesh	102%	93%	83%	61%
Telangana	108	98%	85%	53%
Lowest 6 Performing States				
Bihar	90%	79%	68%	65%
Gujarat	90%	89%	69%	57%
Jharkhand	88%	88%	60%	42%
Madhya Pradesh	77%	70%	52%	51%
Rajasthan	86%	69%	51%	41%
Uttar Pradesh	69%	60%	36.3%	35.3%

Source: The Index of Social Equity figures calculated from DISE 2014- 15 state-level high school enrolment data, and population figures from 2011 Census district level Muslim and general population data.

Table 5

Performance of Districts by Index of Social Equity for Muslims at the High School Stage in 2014-15 - Fifteen States Ranked According to the High School Performance of Their Muslim Students

	Districts with Muslim ISE < 50%	Districts with Muslim ISE 50% - 79%	Districts with Muslim ISE 80%-99%	Districts with Muslim ISE 100 % >	Total Districts In State
Best 5 Performing States					
Kerala	Nil	Nil	3	11	14
W. Bengal	1	2	9	8	20
Tamil Nadu	Nil	2	25	3	30
Maharashtra	Nil	2	29	5	36
Karnataka	Nil	3	19	8	30
Total Districts	1	9	85	35	130
Next Best Performing 4 States					
Jammu & Kashmir	2	3	3	14	22
Assam	4	16	6	1	27
Andhra Pradesh	1	6	6	Nil	13
Telangana	Nil	4	6	Nil	10
Total Districts	7	29	21	15	72
Lowest 6 Performing States					
Bihar	2	19	15	2	38
Gujarat	2	19	12	Nil	33
Jharkhand	7	13	3	1	24
Madhya Pradesh	10	37	4	Nil	51
Rajasthan	7	21	5	Nil	33
Uttar Pradesh	45	27	3	Nil	75
Total Districts	73	136	42	3	254
Total Districts in Above 15 States	81	174	148	53	456

Source: The ISE (Index of Social Equity) figures calculated from DISE 2014-14 district level high school enrolment data, and population figures from 2011 district level Muslim and general population data.

Table 6**Muslim Student Enrolment and Muslim Student Net Attendance Ratios**

Category	Girls Enrolment as % of Total Enrolment	Boys Net Attendance Ratio	Girls Net Attendance Ratio	Urban Boys Net Attendance Ratio	Urban Girls Net Attendance Ratio
Upper Primary (Class 6-8)	51.3%	63.5%	66.0%	67.6%	68.3
Secondary (Class 9-10)	52.1%	46.7%	43.5%	49.1%	58.2%
Higher Secondary (Class 11-12)	51.7%	28.2%	31.0	33.3%	41.4%
Higher Education	49.3%	14.3%	10.6%	18.8%	15.8%

Source DISE 2015-16 ; AISHE 2018-19 ; NSS 75th Round, 2018

Table 7**Percentage of Total Enrolment of Students by Medium of Instruction in Sections in Schools**

Category	% of English Enrolment To Total Enrolment	% of Urdu Enrolment To Total Enrolment
Prim + U. Prim + Sec.+ H. Sec.	56.6 %	0.8 %
Prim + U. Prim + Sec	50.3%	1.0%
U. Prim + Sec + H. Sec.	9.2%	1.4%
Upper Prim + Sec.	21.6%	1.7%
Total Enrol. in School Sections	17.4%	2.0%

Computed from medium of instruction data in State Report Cards, DISE 2015-16

Table 8**Percentage Distribution of Students by Medium of Instruction for Different Languages Spoken at Home and Different Levels of Current Attendance at all Levels of School Education, 2017-18**

Language Spoken Mainly at Home	Same as that of Language Spoken Mainly at Home	English	Other Languages
Urdu	12.2.%	53.8%	34.0%
All Languages	64.7%	24.4%	10.9%

Source: NSS 75th Round, 2018

Table 9**Number of Muslim Students and Madrasas Students Enrolled at Different Stages of School Education and The Proportion of Madrasas Enrolment to Respective Totals of Muslim Students**

Category	Elementary Stage	High School Stage	Higher Secondary Stage	All School Stages
Enrolment of All Students	196,716,511	39,145,052	24,735,397	260,596,960
Enrolment of Muslim Students	27,149,228	4,008,453	1,991,199	33,148,880
Total Madrasa Enrolment Recognised / Unrecognised	2,210,145	234,870	108,836	2,553.851
Percentage of Madrasa Enrolment to Total Muslim Students	8.1%	5.9%	5.5%	7.7%

Source: Calculated from DISE 2015-16 publications

NOTES

Note 1. Derivation of Estimates that Poor and Lower Middle Class (Low Income) Indian Muslims Compose 80% of Muslims in India

Since the focus of the report was on the **80%** of Indian Muslims considered to be poor and lower middle class, the following details how this rough approximation was derived. The tables presented below is from the work of authors cited in Footnote1.

TABLES

Table 1. Class Distribution Across SCs, STs and Muslims in India, 2011 -2012

Category	Poor-Less than \$ 2 per day	Lower Middle \$ 2 - \$ 4 per day	Poor and Lower Middle Class Less than \$4 per day
SCs	59.1%	33.1%	92.2%
STs	70.5%	24.9%	95.4%
Muslims	54.0%	36.5%	90.5%
Total India	47.8%	37.1%	84.9%

Source – Based on NSS 65th Round and taken from : Sandhya Krishnan and Neeraj Hatekar, “Rise of the New Middle Class in India and Its Changing Structure”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 52, Issue No.2, (June 3, 2017), p. 44

Table 2. Economic Class Composition of Rural and Urban Indian Muslims, 2011-12, Using Consumption Expenditure Approach

Category	Poor and Vulnerable Rural	Poor and Vulnerable Urban	Middle & Rich Rural	Middle & Rich Urban
Muslims	Approx. 80%	Approx.80%	Approx.20%	Approx.20%

Source - R. Ahalya and Sourabh Bikas Patil, “ Identification and characterisation of middle class in India and its comparison with other economic classes, Based on authors’ calculation from 68th round of NSSO consumption expenditure data,2011 -12, using Consumption Expenditure Approach

Table 3. Economic Class Composition of Rural and Urban Indian Muslims, 2011-12 Using Mixture Models Approach

Category	Lower Class Rural	Lower Class Urban	Middle Class & Upper Class - Rural	Middle Class and Upper Class - Urban
Muslims	Approx. 80%	Approx.80%	Approx.20 %	Approx.20%

Taken from R. Ahalya and Sourabh Bikas Patil, “ Identification and characterisation of middle class in India and its comparison with other economic classes, Based on authors’ calculation from 68th

round of NSSO consumption expenditure data, 2011 -12, using the mixtures model approach to identify three economic classes, namely, the lower class, middle class and upper class among rural and urban households. This approach clusters households on the basis of durables ownership, monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) and possession of land in rural areas and on the basis of durables ownership and MPCE in urban areas.

Table 4. Percentage Distribution of Population by Poverty Status and Social Groups (2004-05)

Category	Poor and Vulnerable including Extremely Poor, Poor, Marginal and Vulnerable	Middle and High Income	All
All	75.3.0%	24.7%	100%
Muslims	82.8%	17.2%	100%

Computed by authors from NSS 61st Round, 2004-05. The poor and vulnerable were based on a nation-wide daily averages per capita consumption expenditure (DPCE) of about Rs 9.-Rs.20 for extremely poor, poor, marginal and vulnerable income groups. The middle income group is identified as people with an average DPCE of roughly Rs 37 and the high income group as those with an average DPCE of Rs 93. Tables and data extracted from ; Arjun Sengupta, K.P. Kannan and G. Raveendran, "India's Common People: Who Are They, How Many Are They and How Do They Live?", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 43, Issue No. 11, March 15, 2008, p. 52;

Table 5. Estimated Number and Proportion of People in India in Each Income Tier in 2020 Before and After the Global Recession

Categories Income Tiers (Dollar figures expressed in 2011 purchasing power parities in 2011 prices. Indian rupee purchasing power parities (PPPs) in 2011 was Rs.15.55 per US \$	India Before 2020 Pandemic	India After 2020 Pandemic
High Income (> than \$50 daily and > than Rs.778 per capita)	3 million 0.2%	2 million 0.1%
Upper Middle (\$20.01 - \$50. or Rs.311-Rs.778 per capita)	22 million 1.6%	16 million 1.2%
Middle Income (\$ 10 - \$ 20 or Rs.156 – Rs. 310 per capita)	99 million 7.2%	66 million 4.8%
Low Income (\$2.01 - \$10 or Rs.31 –Rs.155 per capita)-	1,197 million 86.7%	1,162 million 84.2%
Poor (< than \$2 daily or < Rs.31 per capita)	59 million 4.3%	134 million 9.7%
TOTAL	1,380 million 100%	1,380 million 100%

Source: Based on tables in Rakesh Kochhar, "In the pandemic, India's middle class shrinks and poverty spreads while China sees smaller changes", Pew Research Foundation, March 18, 2021

Table 6. Estimated Number and Proportion of People in China in Each Income Tier in 2020 Before and After the Global Recession

Categories Income Tiers (Dollar figures expressed in 2011 purchasing power parities in 2011 prices.	China Before 2020 Pandemic		China After 2020 Pandemic	
High Income (> than \$50 daily per capita)	26 million	1.9%	23 million	1.6%
Upper Middle (\$20.01 - \$50)	260 million	18.5%	242 million	7.3%
Middle Income (\$ 10 - \$ 20)	504 million	35.9%	493 million	35.1%
Low Income (\$2.01 - \$10)	611 million	43.5%	641 million	45.7%
Poor (< than \$2 daily per capita)	3 million	0.2%	4 million	0.3%
TOTAL	1.404	100%	1,403	100%

Source: Based on tables in Rakesh Kochhar, “In the pandemic, India’s middle class shrinks and poverty spreads while China sees smaller changes”, Pew Research Foundation, March 18, 2021

Discussion of Note 1

Using mainly consumption expenditure approaches by different authors, Tables 1-4 estimate that **80%** - or a little more - of Indian Muslims are poor and lower middle class (lower income). It is important to note that while India has made great progress in reducing significantly the numbers and proportion below the poverty line, there is a far large number of people –the lower middle class – who continue to be vulnerable. The corresponding 2020 post-pandemic figure according to the World Bank was **94%** - the poor to be **10%** and the lower income group **84%** of India’s population.

According to Sandhya Krishnan and Neeraj Hatekar, the occupational structure of the lower middle class are more like the rural poor engaged in agriculture and construction activities, and the urban poor involved in manufacturing, trade and construction activities. On the other hand, the middle and upper middle classes are more often engaged in typical middle-class occupations of trade, manufacturing, education and health. And as various sections of this report has documented in detail, disadvantaged Muslims have additional multiple vulnerabilities including poorer education, nutrition, health, and employment outcomes as a result of limited financial, cultural and social capital

Tables 5 and 6 providing World Bank estimates, both in US dollars and Indian rupees, expressed in purchasing power parities in 2011 prices indicate the following.

1. The estimates of the World Bank for the entire poor and lower income (vulnerable) Indian population in 2020 before the pandemic was **91%**, and after the pandemic was **94%** respectively. As Muslim are among the poorest in India, this data suggests that the rough estimate in this report of **80%** of Indian Muslims being vulnerable may be on the lower side.
2. Moreover, the 2020 World Bank noted that there were **75 million** more poor, and **35 million** more low income people in post-pandemic than in pre-pandemic India. This vividly highlights

the perennial vulnerability of India's disadvantaged to unexpected events in life which affects their limited earnings and savings: accidents and sickness, hospital and related medical expenditures, failure of crops, dowry and marriage expenses, etc. These events catapult many from middle class to the lower middle class, and from the latter to the poor.

3. The 2020 World Bank post-pandemic data for China for the vulnerable and middle class/populations illustrate what a long way India has to go to come close to the Chinese economic transformation that occurred after Mao's Cultural Revolution. With China having only a slightly larger populations now (**1430 million** to **India's 1,380 million**), the former now has **645 million** poor and lower middle class people composing **46%** of its population. India correspondingly has more than double this size - **1,296 million** vulnerable Indians making up almost **94%** of India's population. While the majority of China's population at **758 million** or **54%** is middle class and richer, the corresponding India's population at **84 million** and **6%** is far lower - about **10%** of China's middle and upper classes.

Note 2. On Estimates of Completion Rates of Elementary Schooling for Muslims

Based on 2011 Census data by using methodology suggested by UIS-UNESCO, it was calculated that the completion rate of eight years of elementary schooling for SC and ST 16-18 year olds by 2011 were **60%** and **50%** respectively. The corresponding figures for 2001 were **42%** and **33%**. Muslim completion rates were not provided. However, since both enrolment and attendance data for Muslims is far lower than SCs or STs, it would be safe to estimate that by 2020 - almost a decade later - at best about **67%** of the subset of poor and lower middle class Muslims in the age-group 16-18 years would have completed eight years of elementary schooling – an estimate that may decrease in the immediate future due to the pandemic.