



Initiating equality and equity of opportunities in society with reference to historical Urdu literature

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Abstract

The issue of equality and equity of opportunity has been debated for decades and been part of the community's key principle. According to Syed, Jawad (2009) an equal opportunity has objectives related to the creation of conditions where women and men are treated alike and do not have precedence over each other on the basis of their gender. However, research alerts us against an uncritical adoption of cultural practices which are consistently inscribed by patriarchy, and which have resulted in gendered structure of states and religions, such as restrictions on female education or confinement of women with the four walls of the house. Scholars have suggested that different socio-political approaches towards gender are largely the result of historic developments as well as outcomes of political, economic, and cultural conflicts.

This article attempts to develop a context-specific framework for equal opportunity in society which is consistent with historical Urdu literature context. Urdu, in the words of Markandey Katju (2008), is a great language, which has produced perhaps the best poetry in modern India -Mir, Galib, Firaq, Faiz, etc. - and is a shining gem in the treasury of Indian culture. Urdu is loved by Indian because it has grown among the people and its literature is a literature of protest, protest against the afflictions of the common man and against injustice, ritualism, formalism, and oppressive or antiquated social customs.

Keywords: opportunities, Urdu literature, economic, cultural conflicts

Introduction

Urdu literature has a history that is inextricably tied to the development of the Urdu language. While it tends to be dominated by poetry, especially the verse forms of the Ghazal and Nazm, it has expanded into other styles of writing, including that of the short story, or afsana. Urdu literature is mostly popular in India and is widely understood here. In Bihar, Urdu is the second official language, from this site we are trying to popularize this language and Bihari Urdu Adab.

Increasingly, Urdu poets were concerned not only with form and stylistics, but also with the impact of poetry and the role of the poet. Muhammad Hussain Azad (1830–1910) was impressed by the important social and political role accorded to poetry and poets in the West. Poetry, he felt, had been utilised more than prose to express complex and important themes. In a lecture to the Anjuman-i-Punjab (Society of Punjab), which was established in 1865 with the aim of developing vernacular literature, Muhammad Hussain Azad called for reforms that would allow for Urdu poetry and poets to play a similarly constructive role in India. Apart from opening themes, imagery and forms of Urdu poetry to criticism and scrutiny, calls were also made for a re-evaluation of the role of the poet and the purpose of his work. Sevea Iqbal Singh (2012:75)^[8].

Through his poetry and prose, Iqbal sought to provide a message of renewal. Literature or art was not just a reflection of the conditions of society; it was a means of shaping a regeneration. In line with this, Iqbal argued that the role of the poet and intellectual was not to wallow in lamentation but to chart a path of action, to blaze the path of regeneration. In Iqbal's "*The Secrets of the Self*" he wrote:

*Create a new style for thy song,
Enrich the assembly with thy piercing strains!
Up, and re-inspire every living soul!
Say 'Arise!' and by that word quicken the living!
Up, and set thy feet on another path;
Put aside the passionate melancholy of old!
Become familiar with the delight of singing;
O bell of the caravan, awake. Sevea Iqbal Singh (2012:78)
[8].*

Purpose of the research

This research attempts to develop a context-specific framework for equal opportunity in India which is consistent with India's socio-cultural and historical Literature context. This paper tries to explore some of the ideas of equality of opportunities and education in the works of some Urdu writers including Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), the man who has been credited with the ideology of Indian subcontinent are presented in his book entitled 'The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam' and with reference to his poetry.

Gender and Equal opportunity in education

Equal opportunity has objectives that are related to the creation of conditions where women and men are treated alike and do not have precedence over each other on the basis of their gender. In employment contexts, as an example for equality in opportunities, equal opportunity implies the implementation of human resource management practices based on explicit policies and strategies to promote equality of opportunity for all individuals without any discrimination. Syed, Jawad (2009)^[10].

During Iqbal's time, there were two broadly interconnected movements for gender reforms in the Indian subcontinent: 1) the social reform movement which was based on Islamic values of family and morality; and 2) the growing Muslim nationalist movement which came as a reaction to the colonial rule. "Muslim reformers struggled to ease some of the restrictions on women's activities, to introduce female education, and to ensure women's rights under Islamic law. Among the predominantly male participants were many of the earliest proponents for an improved social status and education for women, such as Deputy Nazir Ahmad and Maulvi Mumtaz Ali". Syed, Jawad (2009:437)^[10].

Syed, Jawad (2009)^[10] argued that one possible approach to developing a context-specific framework for equal opportunity in Muslim societies is through an in depth engagement with Islamic scholarship on social reforms and thoughts. He studied some of the ideas of Muhammad Iqbal through an analysis of Iqbal's 1928 lectures as an attempt to understand the history of Muslim feminism in the Indian subcontinent and exploring how Iqbal was calling for equal opportunities in society.

Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), is the man who has been credited with the ideology in the Indian subcontinent in general and Urdu society in particular. His literature presents a historical overview of Muslim feminism in British India and Iqbal's perspectives on women's rights. About female Education: Iqbal does not criticize female education but in this respect he follows the famous proverb that "the hands that move the cradle, rule the world".

This shows that how much importance is the guidance and training of the child by the mother. About his own mother Iqbal, in *Bang-e-Dara*, says that only due to her guidance he had achieved the honoured and respected position and great fame and glory. "It's due to your care that I got fame in the world.

Iqbal's views upon female education are apparent in his poems. To him the creation of woman and their presence is a great blessing of God as a woman is an inspiration of life. He pays great tributes to woman, although she had not produced high intellectual and scientific works but she can, and has given birth to great personalities.

Nazir Ahmad Dehlvi was also concerned with Muslim women's education, and their lot in general. Most of his novels revolve around the idea of the perfect woman, who is both practical and learned, and are seen as guides for young girls.

Impact of socio-political inequality on education

Commenting on education of muslims, Rafiq Zakaria (1995)^[11] argues, Muslims have not been able to take advantage of various government schemes, particularly groups such as small farmers, marginal farmers, agricultural labourers, landless labourers, etc. This owes to discrimination and indifference on the part of planning and implementation authorities as well as lack of awareness and knowledge of such schemes among the Muslims themselves.

Concerning women education, Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon studied the condition of Muslim women's education in five cities in India: Delhi, Aligarh, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Calicut (Kozhikode). They found that 75% of Muslim women are illiterate. They recommended to take a pro-active role in this

regard in order to promote social justice and empowerment of Muslim women and to remove the barriers that systematically reinforce their marginalization.

Urdu, Education and Muslim Society

Farouqui A. (1994)^[2] discussed that Urdu has been so neglected in India that it has become the language of only the Muslims. In other words, Urdu education has become synonymous with Muslim education. He observed that the cause of Muslims' backwardness in India is mainly associated with their religious and social complexities. But this analysis will remain incomplete and one-sided until it is admitted in principle that the Muslim backward sections are not very different from the other backward Indian communities. Though at some levels it is easy to recognize the difference between Indian Muslims and the other backward communities in India, an analysis of the social and educational condition of the Indian Muslims is essential at various levels, especially comparing them with other communities because the circumstances and educational condition differ at every level.

Markandey Katju (2008)^[4] wrote about Urdu: "Urdu is loved by the people of India because it has grown among the people. Urdu literature is a literature of protest, protest against the afflictions of the common man and against injustice. Urdu poetry has protested against ritualism, formalism, and oppressive or antiquated social customs (in this sense it can be said to be a successor to Kabir's poetry, though of course it is much more sophisticated. Being the language of the common man in modern India Urdu is almost entirely secular, an exception being the later part of Iqbal's poetry when he went over from nationalism to Pan Islamism". Moreover, Urdu is not a language used by one religion or targeting single religious society. He observed that "some of the Urdu writers like Mir and Nazir have written beautiful poems on Holi, Diwali, Raakhi and other Hindu festivals and customs, which shows that Urdu was not the language of any particular religion. A large number of Hindus have made their names in the front ranks of Urdu literature e.g. Firaq, Chakbast, Ratan Lal Sarshar, etc. In Vali's poetry the words Ganga, Jamuna, Krishna, Ram, Saraswati, Sita, Lakshmi, etc. appear frequently".

Women rights and Equity in the light of Urdu Literature

The Unity of Human Origin. 'And We have created you all from one breath of life', says the Quran. But the perception of life as an organic unity is a slow achievement, and depends for its growth on a people's entry into the main current of world-events. This opportunity was brought to Islam by the rapid development of a vast empire. No doubt, Christianity, long before Islam, brought the message of equality to mankind. Iqbal, (1986)^[86].

Iqbal brings the attention of Muslims towards a serious problem and has drawn a vivid and hauntingly truthful picture of how our youth has become denationalized through an education which neither strengthens their individuality nor stimulates their originality.

The issue of the struggle for women's rights and forequal opportunities can be observed through three phases. 1) The traditional Islamic knowledge and literature first reflected upon Muslim family life, rituals and customs and proposed

education programs for women within tightly private domains of religion and the four walls of house. 2) by the mid-19th century, a blend of Islamic and Western education, where skilled religious and social controversialists, who first founded books, journals and schools for women's education. 3) Women are trained in schools along with men and contributed in public life through teaching in schools and writing on women's issues.

Iqbal was an active supporter of Muslim women's education. In his capacity as the President of the 'Anjuman-e-Himayat-e-Islam', "Iqbal suggested the idea of founding girls' schools and colleges in order to improve female literacy rates within the Muslim population. Such education system would include Islamic as well as general and technical education for women". Syed, Jawad (2009:437) ^[10] Iqbal had liberal perspectives in his interpretation of religious law with respect to women's issues. In his lectures and letters, he frequently referred to gender reforms in Turkey and supported the idea of similar experiments in India, though with some customization. Iqbal has acknowledged that from a Western feminist perspective, particularly from a radical feminist perspective, some of Iqbal's ideas may appear less than gender egalitarian. For example, Iqbal seems to believe that a materialistic education system, devoid of religious values, can do little good to Muslim women and Muslim society. For example in the poem Woman and Education ('aurat aur ta'lim):
tehzeeb-e farangi hay agar marg-e amomat
hay hazrat-e insaan k leye is kasamarmout
jisilmkitaseersezyanhoti hay nazan!
kehteyhainusiilm koarbaab-e nazarmout
beganaraheydee.nsey agar madrasa-e zan
hay ishq-o mohabbat k leyeilm-o hunarmout (Iqbal,1936: Aurataurtaleem).

Woman and Education (aurat aur ta'lim)

*If from european civilization is the death of motherhood,
for the presence/dignity of man, the fruit of this is death!
The knowledge through the effect of which woman
becomes non-woman-- this knowledge, the possessors of
insight call death!
If the madrasah of woman would remain a stranger to
faith, then for passion and love, knowledge and skill are
death!*

In the above lines of poetry, Iqbal suggests that a Western-centric education system, focused on technology but detached from religion, may deprive Muslim women from their femininity.

Iqbal's perspective on gender relations seems to be based on diversity not sameness of women and men. It is therefore no surprise that in his poetry, Iqbal appears to be supporting some kind of affirmative action to safeguard women's rights. For example in the poem The Protection of Woman (aurat ki hifazat):

*A living truth/reality is hidden in my breast,
how would he understand, in whose veins the blood is cold?
Neither pardah nor education, whether it be new or old--
the guardian of the femininity of woman is only man*

*The community that didn't realize this living truth/reality--
that community's sun very quickly became yellow [and
faded]*

In the above extract, Iqbal suggests that neither veil nor education, whether conservative or modern, has the capacity to protect women. He claims that only men have the capacity and the responsibility to safeguard women's femininity. On one level it seems that Iqbal's ideas are less than salutary to the cause of gender equity. However, Muslim women in Iqbal's time faced extreme seclusion and were lacking in education and awareness of their rights, he expected men to play a more proactive role in improving gender relations in the society. Syed, Jawad (2009:438) ^[10].

In Iqbal's verses entitled 'Aurat' ('Woman'), he emphasized the role of women in society and acknowledges and laments women's suffering. This poem suggests that Iqbal is deeply saddened by women's plight and considers that challenges faced by women are extremely intricate and complex. In the poem Woman (Aurat) we read:

*The spirit of man can display its self without obligation to
another,
But the spirit of woman cannot fully reveal its self without
another's help.
Her desire is the secret of her fever of sorrow:
Her existence is full of fire with the wish to create.
Here is the fire which opens the secrets of life;
That is the heat which sustains the struggle between to be
and not to be.
I too feel sad about the oppression of women,
But this knotty problem cannot be resolved.*

Iqbal envisaged that his main role as an intellectual and poet was to resist colonial hegemony and to help shape the re-empowerment of the Muslim community and the East. By exploring Iqbal's perception of his role as an intellectual and locating him within the spectrum of modern thought, this research has sought to lay the basis for an analysis of Iqbal's reconstruction of religious and social issues and his interaction with western socio-political ideals and his views on the development of the Muslims in particular and society in general. Sevea Iqbal Singh (2012:92) ^[8].

Conclusion

The issue of equality and equity of opportunity has been debated for decades and been part of the community's key principle. Reducing gender disparities can lead to improved macroeconomic performance. However, research alerts us against an uncritical adoption of cultural practices which are consistently inscribed by patriarchy, and which have resulted in gendered structure of states and religions, such as restrictions on female education or confinement of women with the four walls of the house. Scholars have suggested that different socio-political approaches towards gender are largely the result of historic developments as well as outcomes of political, economic, and cultural conflicts. Syed, Jawad (2009) ^[10].

It is interesting to conclude with this extract by Iqbal:
Through the existence of woman there is color in the picture

of creation, from her instrument is the inner burning of life. In dignity her handful of dust is higher than the Pleiades, for every dignity is the hidden pearl of that casket. She was not able to write the dialogues of Plato, but from her flame burst out the spark of Plato!

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