Mainstreaming Muslim Women

What is the issue?

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- Indian Muslim women evidently live in a maze of stereotypes that in turn perpetrate socioeconomic inequalities.
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- Concerted efforts on educational and economic advancement are crucial for liberating Muslim women from ignorance and backwardness.
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What are the notable injustices?

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- **Recognising Disparity** - Sadly, to the disadvantage of many, there is often lack of recognition of the obvious divisions between Muslim men and women and between upper-class and other Muslim women.
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- By equating the needs of poorer women with privileged Muslim women, a great disservice is done to the former.
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- This brings into light the issue of educational under-representation and low political participation rates among disadvantaged Muslim women.
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- It applies particularly to those belonging to the lower castes and classes.
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- **Education** - As per the 2011 Census, around 50% of Muslim women were illiterate and only 3% were graduates.
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- Parents now are increasingly considering it important to send their daughters to mainstream schools.
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- However, this effort is largely limited to the privileged upper class Muslim women.
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- Lack of resources, discriminatory attitudes in schools, and the declining faith

in the public schooling system have left poorer Muslim women excluded from the mainstream.
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- Such issues have brought girls closer to locally available, niche schooling options like nearby madrasas that are limited to a religious curriculum.
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- The government commissioned study in 2007 with an aim to frame a 'National Plan of Action for Advancement of Muslim Women's Education in India' is yet to see the light of the day.
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- **Representation** - There has been a considerable decline in active civil society engagement of Muslims post-Independence.
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- Bodies like the All India Muslim Personal Law Board or the Ulema have stepped in, claiming to be the spokespersons for Muslim women.
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- On the other hand, feminist groups like the Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan have tended to get silenced in addressing issues that concern Muslim women.
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- The representation of Muslim women has been abysmal across political institutions.
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- Evidently, the Lok Sabha has had only 13 Muslim women MPs since Independence.
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- And there has been only one Muslim woman in the Union Council of Ministers in the last 25 years.
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How do private Islamic schools come in aid?

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- There is an emerging trend of private Islamic schools within less privileged Muslim society.
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- Such schools not only offer training in Islamic subjects, such as value-oriented literature, but also follow the CBSE curriculum.
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- Combining both modern and religious curriculum, these hybrid schools offer new educational opportunities for many marginalised adolescent Muslim girls.

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- The entry of girls into these schools is a bold step towards mainstreaming.
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- Graduates from these schools are increasingly opting for higher education in central universities like Jamia Millia Islamia.
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- The model conveys the idea that education policy must account for such community efforts.
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What lies ahead?

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- Private Islamic schools are a great help, but mainstreaming Muslim girls will require more.
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- For Muslim women to change their socio-political circumstances, political representation and civil society participation is a must.
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- Policy measures should aim at improving the presence of Muslim women in deliberative bodies like the National Commission for Women and the National Commission for Minorities.
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- Affirmative action through parliamentary laws to bring into force the pending Bills seeking to reserve half the seats in rural and urban local bodies for women can give better representation.
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- For a vision of ‘new India’ to be successful, the questions of inclusion and equality of Muslim women should have to be given due focus.
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Source: The Hindu

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