Scholarship Schemes for Religious Minorities

Why in news?

The Centre discontinued two key educational schemes for religious minorities, and cut down on the expenditure incurred on multiple programmes of the Ministry of Minority Affairs.

Why were the scholarship programs for religious minorities introduced?

- **Rajinder Sachar Committee** - It was constituted in 2005 to look into the social, economic and educational standing of the Muslims in India.
- **Report -** It concluded that the minority was deprived and neglected in almost all dimensions of development and behind the mainstream in several social and economic sectors.
- Muslims rank somewhat above SC/ST but below Hindu OBCs, Other Minorities and Hindu General in almost all indicators considered.
- **New Ministry -** In 2006, the Ministry of Minority Affairs was carved out of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- **Mandate -** To formulate policy & planning, coordination, evaluation & review of the regulatory framework & development programmes for the benefit of the minority communities.

What are the welfare schemes for the educational empowerment of minorities and their status?

Scheme	About	Status
Pre Matric Scholarship Scheme	It is awareded to minority students from class 1 to 10.	The scheme now only covers class 9 and 10.
Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme	It is given to students of class 11 to Ph.D.	The funds increased during this fiscal year.
Merit-cum-Means based Scholarship Scheme	It targets professional & technical courses at UG & PG levels.	The scholarship scheme saw a major reduction in funds in 2023-24.
Maulana Azad National Fellowship	The scheme provided financial assistance to research scholars pursuing M.Phil and Ph.D.	The scheme was scrapped in 2022.
Padho Pardesh	It was launched to provide better opportunities for higher education abroad.	The interest subsidy scheme was discontinued from 2022-23.
Begum Hazrat Mahal National Scholarship	It is awarded for meritorious girls for higher secondary education.	The scholarship had zero allocation this year.
Naya Savera	It provides free coaching to minority students for competitive examinations.	The scheme saw a drop in budget.

Nai Udaan	It supported minority students preparing for competitive exams.	No funds were allocated in the ongoing financial year.
Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram	The Scheme provides infrastructure in identified minority concentration areas.	Reduction of fund allocation.

How the schemes have impacted the beneficiaries?

- **Drastic fund decline** - Scholarships awarded to minority students steadily increased from roughly 75,000 to over 70 lakh between 2006 and 2013.
- **Data analysis** - It shows that beneficiaries of the first six central educational schemes mentioned above dropped by around 7% in three years, between 2019 and 2022.
- **Worst hit** - The Maulana Azad National Fellowship and the Begum Hazrat Mahal National Scholarship took the biggest hit during this period.
- **Drop in educational aid** -
    1. **Pre-matric scholarship**, which has benefitted the maximum number of minority students.
    2. **The merit-cum-means scholarship** for professional and technical courses, one of the few schemes that saw a rise in the number of beneficiaries also faced funding cuts this year.
    3. **Grants-in-aid** to the Maulana Azad Education Foundation, established to promote education among educationally backward minorities also dropped.

Why does educational aid need to be strengthened?

- **Education gap -** It is due to reduced budgetary allocation and underutilisation of funds.
- **Disparity in education accessibility -** There is a significant disparity in education accessibility between Muslims and the general population.
- **Decreased enrolment rate -** Scrapping scholarships and limiting the scope of others affect the community and impact their enrolment rate.

As per Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Data the highest proportion of out-of-school children in the country belong to Muslim communities (4.43%), followed by Hindus (2.73%), Christians (1.52%) and others (1.26%).

What lies forward?

- **Niti Aayog -** It suggested enhancing pre-matric, post-matric and merit-cum-means scholarships as well as the Maulana Azad National Fellowships and national overseas scholarships.
- It recommended a 15% annual increase from 2019-20, also increasing the number of scholarships for girls from minority communities by 10% every year.
- **Scholarships -** It should be made demand-driven, along with additional financial resources to enhance unit costs.

References

1. The Hindu- Reality of Scholarship schemes for religious minorities
2. Ministry of Minority Affairs- About the Ministry

