

**STATUS OF URDU MEDIUM SCHOOLS
IN KARNATAKA**

Imparting Inclusive Orientation to Instructions

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Introduction

Muslims make up 12.92% of population in the state of Karnataka. As such they are the biggest group among the religious minorities with Christians constituting 1.87%, Jains 0.70% and the Buddhists having a 0.16% share in the total population^a. Besides being a religious minority, a considerable number of them also fall into the category of linguistic minority. They are the second largest linguistic community after Kannada-speaking people who constitute nearly 65% or 2/3rd of the state population*. The Directorate of the Urdu and Minority Language Schools under the Department of Public Instructions also runs schools of Marathi, Tamil, Telugu and Hindi medium. States having been carved out on the basis of language (which is the basis of culture too), Kannada enjoys the unquestioned primacy in the State. It has rightly been given the official status and is the language of the administration.

It is a general perception that more than religion, it is the lack of proficiency in market-linked languages that is the bane of Muslim education and mars their prospects of employment or effective integration with the life and development of the State. For instance, Urdu medium of education, which attracts sizeable component of teachers' salaries and infrastructure expenditure from the allocation for education in the State, does not endow the community with linguistic skills relevant for administration or market. A person educated through Urdu medium is not sufficiently skilled to apply for a Government job. He can neither read a newspaper in English or Kannada, nor can file an FIR in a police station, nor 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 the mainstream

life and development and also hinders its access to positions of power, profit and privilege which lend assertiveness to them.

This research study attempts to look into the socio-economic background of the students who attend Government Urdu schools, their infrastructure, **learning process, quality of monitoring and learning outcome and environment**, initiatives to improve their standard, and the organic relationship with the life and development of the State. It brings to light the changes that have happened in urban and rural demography, altered equation of languages in terms of their official status and patronage and the pressures being exerted by the market forces as well as new technology in a fast globalizing economy. It suggests measures as to how these schools could be aligned to modern needs and changes that are required to be introduced in curriculum and content.

Relevance of Language

Language is **primarily** the vehicle of communication. It is an important tool for socialization. While it serves to be the means to link with the past, **it also enables one to live in the present and link with the future**. It is also the conduit of access to the frontiers of science, technology and law and humanities. While it may be the medium of religious knowledge and worship, it also serves as the medium of expression in the field of art, literature, film, and journalism. Such being the diverse role of language in one's life, in a plural society like India insistence on learning and using one single language (which in most cases taken to be the mother tongue) cannot adequately equip an individual to be an effective part of the society.

The Constitution of India guaranteed protection and provides safeguards for minority communities to preserve and promote their language. The following

Articles in the Constitution protect the Minorities' right to receive education in the mother tongue:

Article 29. (1) Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same. (2) No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them.

Article 30. (1) All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. 1[(1A) In making any law providing for the compulsory acquisition of any property of an educational institution established and administered by a minority referred to in clause (1), the State shall ensure that the amount fixed by or determined under such law for the acquisition of such property is such as would not restrict or abrogate the right guaranteed under that clause.]

Article 30. (2) The State shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language.

Now we need to take a good look at the Muslim situation in the limited context of Karnataka. Muslims while being religious minority are also a linguistic minority. Nearly 9% of state's population has recorded Urdu as its mother tongue. It is a fair guess that all these people are Muslims. This effectively means that nearly three-fourths of Muslims in the State speak Urdu language while one-fourth of them use languages other than Urdu. These may be people belonging to Beary community, mainly concentrated in Dakshina Kannada and other coastal districts. Some even speak Malayalam, Navayathi and even Kannada in various parts of the

state. There may be pockets of Tamil and Malayalam-speaking Muslims too. Obtaining picture says that Muslims are as linguistically diverse as is the general population in the state.

It is natural for any linguistic community to be fond of its language and culture. When their numbers are substantial in a particular region, they even insist on their language be recognized as the medium of instructions or even as a vehicle of administration. It was this aspect that led to the makers of the Indian Constitution to recognize the right of linguistic minorities to have primary education in their mother tongue or a language of their choice. Urdu-speaking Muslims are a spatially scattered linguistic community and a linguistic minority in Karnataka as they happen to be in several states of the country. Their substantial numbers have prompted several states to recognize Urdu to be the medium of instruction in schools in areas of their concentration. Some have even given the second official status in limited number of districts.

Though Urdu is an Indo-Aryan language and emerged as the lingua franca in military cantonments of Mughal India and still later in British administration, it has somehow come to be deeply associated with Islam and Muslims. Some even go to the extent of considering Islam and Urdu to be synonymous. This was mainly because it is written in Arabian and Persian script and came to be the medium of instruction in madrassas (Islamic theological schools) all across India. Its script has allowed the writers, authors, poets, playwrights, and even lyricists and filmmakers to draw upon the rich vocabulary and imagery in Arabic and Persian literature. Regardless of the personal religious affiliations, the Urdu writers have also drawn inspiration from history, poetry and heritage in those languages and regions to enrich their writings. An Urdu writer effortlessly alludes to Farhad-Shireen and Laila-Majnoon as he does with Heer-Ranjha. But the language has also promoted

secular ethos with writers like Krishan Chander, Kashmiri Lal Zakir, Munshi Prem Chand, Brajnarain Chakbast, Ram Lal, Malik Ram, Zafar Pyami, Manorama Dewan, Bisheshar Pradeep, G. D. Chandan, Som Anand, Khushtar Grami, Jaswant Rai Naqsh Layalpuri, Raghupati Sahai Firaq Gorakhpuri, Siddiah Puranik, Muddanna Manzar, etc contributing enormously to the Urdu literature and poetry.

Urdu's rootedness in Indo-Aryan culture and its role in unifying the freedom struggle by lending a common vocabulary (remember *Inquilab Zindabad! And Saare Jahan se Acchha Hindustan Hamara...*) led to its being recognized as one among the National languages in the 8th schedule of the Indian Constitution. These factors lend the language official legitimacy in India whereas the presence of substantial communities within States have prompted the State Governments to recognize it as a medium of instruction wherever such demand exists. It will not be out of place to mention that the Union Government had appointed a special committee under Mr. Inder Gujral (who later became the Prime Minister of India) to report on the status of Urdu language and recommend measures to protect, preserve and promote the language. The Union Government set up the National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language (NCPUL) under the Ministry of Human Resource Development to strategise the Urdu's cause and development on the pan-Indian level.

Now when looked at from the angle of what kind of education the community needs, perhaps there will be a consensus that it should be such that it should serve the following objectives:

- 1- To link the younger generation with its religion, culture, history and literature.
- 2- To allow them to connect to people around them, in bazaars, bus stands and railway stations, hotels, police stations, courts et al, and in all places where interactions is required with common folk.

- 3- To enable them to equip themselves with languages that help them earn livelihood whereby they could access the cutting edge technology, higher education.
- 4- Allow and make them capable of seeking participation in the administration and governance and access their entitlements.

The picture emerging from the above suggests that the Muslim community needs proficiency in diverse languages. Encouraging children to learn in their mother tongue may be an ideal because of the global research on the issue. However, the other link languages need to be learnt at the competency level. For instance, Urdu medium schools should teach English, Kannada etc to such competency level that these students could continue their studies till such level that they emerge out as good professionals and have the capacity to effectively integrate with the larger society. Ways must be found out to see that the children from minority communities enjoy parity when it comes to learning outcome in matters of the State's official language and English. Insistence on mother tongue alone will not serve the purpose and may deter their progress in higher education and integration with the life and development within the State. Now let us take a look at the language formula a traditional Muslim family may like to opt for:

Urdu: Because it is mother tongue and preserves most of their cultural and literary heritage and considerable religious literature exists in the language. Beside intra-community communication (in Friday sermons, marriage and death ceremonies, religious congregations etc) too requires them to develop profound knowledge of this language. There is a gender angle too. Muslim families in rural areas would like their daughters to attend Urdu medium schools where, it is felt they would gain some religious knowledge and cultural moorings in company of the Urdu teachers (who would presumably be Muslims only).

Kannada: This being the language of the state administration, any negligence towards it would marginalize the individual from the mainstream. They can ignore it only at their own peril.

English: It is necessarily the medium of higher education and professional courses and provides access to jobs outside the state as well as opportunities in overseas education and employment, and is essentially the media of approach to advanced ideas in sciences and humanities. It is also a marker of high social status.

Now let us take a look at the Constitutional and legal position. Every citizen of India, of course has freedom to get educational instructions in his or her mother tongue. So government of India and the state governments make arrangements regarding this in the schools run with the official expenditure. But one's capacity to avail this right or privilege is limited by several factors. These may be:

- 1- Whether the relevant medium schools are in the walking or commuting distance from home.
- 2- Whether this medium of instruction will allow the child to continue in higher, professional and technical education.
- 3- Whether or not the primary school medium weaken the base of the child and hamper his/her progress further ahead, and
- 5- What quality of instructions are imparted in those schools?
- 6- Whether or not the children coming out of such schools will have acceptability in the job market.

Secondly, it has to be borne in mind that the Government is Constitutionally bound to provide education in mother tongue medium in primary schools. It is also true that mother tongue medium facilitates better comprehension of concepts and allows the education to be effective. But one also needs to be reminded that Government is not duty bound to provide jobs and guarantee employment in mother tongue medium. Nor the job market uses the same language as is the mother tongue of the majority of the people in a particular state. Therefore

educated parents conscious of the employment prospects decide the medium of instructions for their children even before they start attending the [nursery](#) classes. And they determine the choice based on the affordability and accessibility of such schools as well as the infrastructure and socio-economic profile of the kids attending them. As far as Karnataka is concerned, it must be borne in mind that the State's administration is mainly carried out in Kannada. The private sector job market primarily looks for high proficiency in English in sectors like banks, Information Technology companies, logistics, tourism, hotel, sales and accounts. Knowledge of other languages only acts as a bonus for niche markets.

Why Urdu Medium Schools?

Most Urdu-speaking people while demanding or cherishing recognition of Urdu and its schools, want these schools to continue because the teaching jobs in these schools are exclusive preserve of Muslims and they face no competition from other linguistic groups in this sector. But at the same time all these Government Urdu teachers know too well that the future of their own children would be bleak if they enrolled their kids in these schools. [In reality](#), 98% Government Urdu school teachers avoid the choice of very same schools for their kids where they teach as well as the Urdu medium¹. This dichotomy of approach is witnessed among the Kannada-speaking communities too.

Thirty years ago when the Gokak Report had given primacy to Kannada and Kannada was introduced as compulsory language under three language formula, Muslims had shown a lot of sentimental attachment to Urdu and it had led to some communal polarization too. It does not seem to be the case today. It is because of several factors. 1- Most Muslims have begun preferring technical and professional courses for their kids and know that Urdu medium instruction serves little purpose

in this regard. They have therefore switched over to English medium schools. 2- Urdu schools' social and economic profile has declined miserably and middle class with stars in its eyes has begun to shun them². 3- Gulf jobs for boys and matrimonial alliances for girls from the US, Canada, Australia and other Western countries etc act as major factors that urge them to equip their younger generation with professional degrees together with gaining proficiency in English. These factors prompt them to send their wards to English medium schools. In 1982, Muslims were running about a dozen high schools in Bangalore. Today, according to my own rough reckoning, they run about 450[&] English medium high schools in the City. This author was recently told in a conference of the Minority-run, unaided schools organisation that Muslims run about 400 English medium high schools in the City. (I am yet to confirm it). About 50 of them are A-grade schools where 75% kids are from non-Muslim families. **Evidently, higher education, employment and** entrepreneurial opportunities have been the prime motivator behind this trend. Bengaluru has been a major magnet for employment of the youth in its Information Technology, Biotechnology, and Nanotechnology industries during the last quarter century. Newcomers to the city drawn from all quarters of the country look for English medium schools for their kids. **In the confusion of the languages spoken by the city dwellers, a newly arrived family feels English to be the most familiar medium which also offers better prospects of livelihood in a cosmopolitan City like Bengaluru.** So it will be wrong to attribute these many schools to mere social service and out of the concern for educational upliftment. However, this transformation can be seen only in cities of Bengaluru, Mysuru, Mangaluru, Tumakuru and some bigger towns. The Urdu-speaking minority in other parts of the State depends mainly on Government schools. The Government has sanctioned Urdu medium schools in villages and towns **wherever** Urdu population is in considerable number. However, thin spatial spread of the Urdu-speaking

community does not make it feasible for the official machinery to meet the need of every individual family. Such families opt for nearest Kannada or English medium schools. This also results in Government Urdu medium schools enrolling few students outside the urban centres.

A Look at the Government Urdu Medium Schools

The statistics available from the Directorate of Urdu and Other Minority Languages Schools put the figure of Lower Primary Schools (1st to 5th std) at 2,276 in the State, Higher Primary Schools (6th to 8th standard) at 2,425 and High Schools (9th to 10th std.) at 561. The figures pertain to the academic year 2014-15. These together make up for 5,262 schools. A total of 4,78,679 students were enrolled in these schools at the end of 2014-15 academic year. A total of 24,587 teachers were working in these schools against 27,248 sanctioned posts. As for performance in the SSLC examinations conducted by the Karnataka Secondary Examination Board, the pass percentage in the 10th standard Board results, these schools scored 79.27 per cent passes in 2013-14 and 84.03 per cent in 2014-15.³

While these changes have taken place on the education front on one side, on the other end, standard of Government-run Urdu-medium lower primary, higher primary and high schools has declined still further.[?] The middle class generally shuns them. They are mainly catering to lower-middle class or low-income families and are located in slums or near them. Standard of instructions is pathetic. Parents admit their children there to avoid their naughty mischiefs at home. Barring exceptions, teachers are careless⁴. Absenteeism in rural areas is high. The buildings are dilapidated and have no decent infrastructure to aid the teaching.⁵ Due to unavailability of separate toilets, the post-puberty girls avoid attending these schools.⁶ Inspection and monitoring is lax. Teacher-student ratio is

adverse and does not help effective teaching⁷. Due to unavailability of separate rooms, students from several classes sit in groups in common halls and what they get by way of lessons is cacophony⁸. In rural areas, senior teachers (whose salaries exceed Rs. 30,000 and so) feel it embarrassing to teach in the pathetic surroundings and they ‘depute’ someone else to take their place and pay them a pittance.

An Essential Difference

It is generally pointed out that the state of the Kannada medium Government schools is not dissimilar. The general picture could be summed up thus: “Government schools are in distress while Urdu schools are in shambles.” Invariably, all Government schools turn out students who do not seem to be equipped with knowledge and skills desired of the level they have studied up to, regardless of the medium of instructions. However, there is an essential difference between Government Urdu and Kannada medium schools in that a Kannada-speaking student becomes at least a Kannada literate and can effectively integrate with the life and development in the State. Even if it is presumed that an Urdu school student has gained similar competency in Urdu, he remains deficient in a language that is medium of the administration of the State. While a 7th std dropout from a Government Kannada School may read an electricity bill, a water bill, a *Kandaya* (Property) notice, instructions from the Regional Transport Office, a Government circular or GO or signboards on streets, Government offices, etc. the Urdu dropout from a similar level will be totally handicapped in integrating with the life and development of the State. This advantage or disadvantage of competency in official language of a State must be understood to fully perceive the deficiency that Urdu medium students inherit. This is where perhaps the Government Urdu schools need to enhance the competency level of the students in Kannada as well as English. It should lead us to the conclusion that the Directorate

of Urdu and Minority Schools should upgrade assessment of learning outcomes in these schools in a manner that the children are left with no deficiency in any of the three languages they study as part of the curriculum.

It is also necessary from another angle too. It is generally observed that Muslims are a ghettoized minority. Ghettoisation is an essential corollary of education, language one speaks, worries and concerns a community is engrossed with and residential and housing pattern in which he physically exists. In a multicultural society like India, one could break the shibboleths and cultural monoliths only by coming out of his /her own shell, questioning absolutes inherited from his own faith and culture, and through exposing himself to the ideas and ideals of the larger society. The three-language formula, if implemented seriously and sincerely, has been envisioned in order that an individual while gaining felicity in his cultural language, also develops competency in the State (or administrative) language and proceeds to acquire basic skills in a global language that is conduit to the emerging frontiers of knowledge.

Community Intervention

There are complaints galore about low quality education offered by the Government Urdu schools. But it is observed that coordination with the community around and positive interventions by NGOs have also shown improvements. This is sought to be done under a decentralised legal institutional mechanism for community participation in all Urdu Government Schools under ‘School Development and Monitoring Committees’ (SDMC). At a few places, serious-minded and efficient Educational Coordinators from the Department of Public Instructions (who work in coordination with the Minority Welfare Department) have produced excellent results and improved the learning outcome. Cases of two schools could be cited in this regard:

A School Revived

Active community participation has saved a Govt Urdu School and its grand premises.

The Government Urdu Higher Primary School, Kalasipalyam (established in 1946) is located opposite to the KIMS Hospital in Kalasipalyam. It stands on a premises that measured half an acre in the busy area with a building that could be matter of pride for an institution and envy for modern schools in the neighbourhood. The school gradually lost patronage of the local community, kids from surrounding Urdu-speaking families having chosen English medium institutions. The strength of students gradually declined to 12 in 2011 with two teachers. The callous environment of the school had led the surrounding institutions (NSS, KIMS and even the DPI) to plead for the schools to be closed and property to be given to them. But then the local youth formed a Trust, namely Hind Citizens Welfare Trust and mobilized the local community into turning the school around. Their efforts have borne fruit and the strength has gone up to 122 now. They vacated the encroachments, raised boundary walls, repaired the structure that had developed cracks and fissures, reinforced the roof, laid marble floorings, and provided drinking water facility and separate toilets for boys and girls. However, some portion of the land encroacher by a neighbor could not be retrieved. Students were brought from surrounding Urdu-speaking localities by a van. An activist kind of Educational Coordinator also chipped in. He persuaded the Department of Public Instructions to provide two more teachers. The Trust appointed another four teachers at its own cost. Educational aids such as smart boards, computer e-learning facilities were provided by the DPI. The Trust provides the necessary stationery and uniforms. The Trust has introduced the English medium and remedial coaching from 6th standard onwards and efforts are

on to turn it into an English medium school. In this case the community youth were primarily motivated with the concern to save an old institution.

Yet another case in point is of Government Urdu Model Primary School, Farooqia Nagar, Padrayanapura on Mysore Road which is rendering yeoman's service in providing education to extremely poor children in Mysore Road slums. Here is the saga of service and sacrifice by a clutch of well-meaning individuals:

Challenging Illiteracy amid Poverty

A Govt school adopts innovative ways to retain children in the school. Government Urdu Model Primary School, Farooqia Nagar, Padrayanapura on Mysore Road was started in 1959 and has student who go upto 8th standard on its rolls. Around the turn of the century this school had only three rooms. The teachers were imparting lessons to 270 students crammed in this space. The local mosque formed a School Adoption Committee and mobilized funds and other resources from the surrounding community. Today the school has 748 children studying from LKG to 8th standard. The school has a three floor building with 27 rooms. The DPI has provided 18 teachers while the committee pays for another six teachers. An NGO 'Teach for India' has provided another three teachers. The committee spends Rs. 60,000 a month towards salaries of these additional teachers, maintenance of the infrastructure etc. They ask the Education Department to pay them the allocation for the uniform (at the rate of Rs. 200 each pair) and supplement it with another Rs. 200 for each student to get them uniform that could be compatible to cultural needs of the students. They even provide their own midday meals with additional nutritional calories. Toilet and drinking facilities have been improved. Computer lab, CCTV cameras and smart boards have been provided for e-learning. Since most homes in the area have extremely constricted space, the school engages the children for additional one hour of coaching to finish

their homework before they return home in the vicinity. English has been reinforced through remedial coaching being provided by the Minority Welfare Department.^{8A}

Deficiency of English Knowledge

Though for the namesake the English has been introduced from first standard in Government schools, the syllabus is so light that they are not expected to learn this language in any substantial measure to aid them in high schools. When these children from Urdu schools graduate up from 7th to 8th standard, they also undergo transition of medium of instruction, mostly from Urdu to English. At this stage, terms in core subjects like mathematics, natural sciences and social studies become tougher to understand. If in mathematics *kasar* will become ‘factor’, *zu’azaf Aql* will be ‘LCM’, *daira* becomes ‘Circle’, *mustateel* becomes rectangle, scientific terms like *maqnaates* becomes ‘magnet’ and *hyatiati gas* will be ‘biogas’. Not having been taught sufficient English till 7th std, and deficient in comprehension, they develop disinterest in education and drop out. For high school drop-outs, the market has no jobs other than errand boys, chaprasis, attenders, gardener, chauffeur, courier boys and bartenders. It is useful to remember that the Government of Karnataka has introduced SSLC as the minimum qualification for issuance of a Driving Licence for an auto driver, although a minister or an MLA does not require an educational certificate for contesting an election or entering the legislature.

Remedial Coaching

However, the Government’s Minority Welfare Department’s Remedial Coaching classes—around 2,000 in numbers, employing unemployed graduates—for reinforcing knowledge of English at 7th standard level (also at 10th standard

level wherever Urdu medium high schools exist, mainly in northern districts of the State) has led to some improvement. For instance, in Chitradurga district, some 65 such centres (within school premises) impart English teaching to students {60 centres at 7th standard and another five centres at 10th standard level}. The Department has prepared a booklet consisting of selected terms from Mathematics and Science textbooks that would need to be provided with English alternatives. These centres engage unemployed graduates for the purpose and are paid a remuneration of Rs. 1,200 a month. This intervention has led to improvement in English comprehension and communication thereby helping these students continue education further up.

Dropouts

Studies have shown that minority (mainly Muslim) students tend to drop out of the school education between 5th to 7th standard. This has been brought out clearly in the Report titled *Socio-Economic Conditions of Religious Minorities in Karnataka: A Study Towards Their inclusive Development* published in 2015⁹ leading to severe deficiency in higher attainments in education (e.g., the share of graduates among Muslims is half of what obtains in the general Hindu population in the State as well as across the nation.). Weak economic conditions compel the families to withdraw children from the schools to be introduced into the labour market. However, with regard to Karnataka, three trends have become discernible during the recent years viz, 1- Children from the Urdu-speaking (this is also among Kannada-speaking people too) families even in northern Karnataka districts are turning towards English medium. Consequently, the enrolment in Urdu and Kannada medium schools at the first standard level has been declining year after year. This is partly owing to implementation of the [Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 \(RTE\)](#) that enables 25 per cent reservation for

Disadvantaged and Economically Weaker Section under section 12(1) (c). As a result, even the poorer families have been enabled to get their children enrolled in the privately managed schools. 2- Most boys prefer to migrate to English medium or Kannada medium Government or private high schools after 7th standard due to the better and brighter employment prospects. Notwithstanding the beneficial impact of the legislation, there is strong criticism about this provision in the civil society which alleges that the state is abdicating its constitutional responsibility under Article 21A by siphoning money to private schools instead of improving its own schools from all aspects. 3- Muslim or Urdu-speaking girls continue to remain with the Urdu medium as families in rural areas find these schools culturally compatible and safer for females. This naturally brings down the enrolment of children in Urdu medium high schools in these districts.¹⁰ The second drastic drop occurs at 8th standard level when children migrate to schools of Kannada and English mediums.^{10A}

Enrolment-Attendance Gap

While enrolment figures only show the admission of children at the beginning of the academic year, the daily attendance could a much more credible index to determine the learning outcome. The data obtaining from Akshara Foundation survey of 171 Government Urdu Schools in Bengaluru showed a gap of 27% between children's enrolment and attendance on the day of the visit. The study shows that in about 45% of schools, more than 30% of children were absent. Eleven per cent of Urdu schools have a students' strength of 25 and below. About 35% of schools have a students' strength of 150 and above. Interactions with teachers of the schools reveal that children show enthusiasm in attending the schools in the initial period after commencement of the academic session when uniform, shoes, textbooks and stationery supplied by the Department of Public

Instructions are distributed. They gradually start playing truant as days advance and giveaways diminish. It is where schools need to adopt innovative ways to enhance learning environment and retain children's interest in education.

But the Department officials also attribute the enrolment and attendance to waxing and waning population of migrant labour from Hindi states. The labour families enroll their kids in several of these Urdu schools but shift out when their projects they are working for such as construction, infrastructure, road laying, etc are over. It is pointed out that several Urdu schools have considerable number of these children from Bihar, UP and West Bengal.

Falling out of Favour

Unpopularity of the Urdu medium education in Bengaluru has led to a queer situation. Several known and prominent schools which have seen their halcyon days and are located in core areas of the City now appear to be derelict shells of their former selves. The aforementioned Kalasipaylam school was one such institution. Their buildings appear to be impressive but the schools as the learning institutions have fallen out of favour for the community around. For instance Government Higher Primary School in Arab Lane (Richmond Town) is now left with only 37 students and three teachers. Two decades ago this school had over 500 kids. The Government Urdu Higher Primary School in Chinnanpalya used to have over 3,000 students twelve years ago. The strength has now dwindled to mere 60 with four teachers. The Urdu school in Neelasandra had 500 students a decade ago. Now adopted by Mamoor Trust, it has only 62 students. Similarly, the strength of the Hajee Sir Ismail Sait (HSIS) Government Urdu Higher Primary School in Frazer Town had gone down to 125. Located diagonally opposite to the magnificent Ismail Sait Mosque, the stone building of the school is a heritage

structure. A School Adoption Committee formed a few years ago has turned around its fortune and the school is back in favour with enrolment having gone up to 400 now. The Department has now posted 10 to 12 teachers. The Government Urdu Higher Primary School on Thimmaiah Road in Blackpally also was a victim of the trend. The school is run from a pleasant-looking, heritage building. It used to have over 300 children two decades ago. But the numbers came down to a pathetic 17 a decade ago. It has been adopted by Mehfil-eNisaa, an Urdu literary association. The Government Urdu Higher Primary School in Hegganahalli in Peenya Second stage was adopted by the Muslim Industrialists Association. Its strength had dwindled to 115 some ten years ago. But proactive measures taken by the Association have revived the school and has now 415 students. However, what is observable is that the promise of an Urdu school being turned into an English medium one after 5th standard keeps alive the prospect of it remaining a living and useful institution.

While schools in the core areas of the city with impressive edifices have lost favour of their communities, the relatively newer Urdu schools in fringe area operate out of buildings near mosques or annexes rented out by mosques. They suffer from insufficient space, cramped classrooms, interference by mosque managements, and constrains on drills and sports by schoolchildren especially girls.

The transformation seen in the above instances is a sufficient indication of what could be potentially achieved through meaningful intervention of the community. Children need an engaging atmosphere where learning appeals to all their senses and responds to their instincts. This calls for changes in pedagogy whereby teachers could involve them in diverse activities with plethora of teaching aids as well as skills. Incorporation of smart classes had helped in several of the

abovementioned schools as children could see, hear and experience movement, colour and visuals of what was being taught to them. Storytelling sessions and visits to labs are also considered effective options for enhancing the learning environment.

Lack of Accountability

‘No Detention Policy’ (up to 8th standard) was introduced as a measure to achieve and ensure education up to 8th standard. The spirit and rationale behind was to see that examinations should not be used as a tool to eliminate children from the system on the pretext of poor performance. These children were asked to repeat the same class and enhance their performance and stigmatize them as ‘failures’. This came to be recognized as a new system to deny education.

The ‘no detention’ provision under RTE Act does not imply abandoning the procedures needed to be followed to assess the child’s learning from time to time. Nevertheless, Section 24 (d) and (e) of the RTE Act as part of teachers’ duties, place the responsibility of assessing the learning ability of each child and accordingly supplement additional instruction if required. Further, it places onus on the teachers, to hold regular meetings with parents and guardians to appraise them about the regularity in attendance, ability to learn and progress made in learning in order to keep a constant vigil on the progress of learning of every child. Moreover, the RTE Act provides for ‘comprehensive and continuous evaluation of child’s understanding of knowledge and his or her ability to apply the same’ under section 29(h).

The reason for this is not the policy but the failure of the system. Failing students is not the solution to enhance learning, contrary to this, adequate facilities, subject wise/class wise teachers, additional support for children lagging behind and

above all accountability of teachers to ensure Minimum Learning Levels is the key issue.

This being the prospects, it is clear that as more and more Urdu-speaking Muslims would move into middle class bracket, Urdu medium education will become that much more irrelevant to them. However, there is bound to be resistance if one pleads for turning the Government (and Aided too) Urdu medium schools into either English or Kannada medium schools. Basically, those who want to preserve the Urdu medium schools, do so for the following reasons:

- Love for the language and the attendant culture.
- They perceive that Urdu is closer to their faith, so students would learn at least some basics of faith and manners dear to the parents. It is a guarantee for cultural continuity.
- These schools provide jobs to Muslims and women which could be called the sole preserve of Muslims. They face no competition in this sector. Their apprehension is that if Urdu schools close, even those 24,000 jobs which are up for grabs for Muslims through their women, will slip out to other communities in future. A survey of 171 Urdu Schools in Bengaluru in 2012 revealed that 92% of the 982 teachers employed there were women.
- Education in these schools is inexpensive and even poor can afford to send their children.

Conversely, those of Urdu-speaking families who do not want to send their kids to these schools have the following reasons to offer:

- 1- Urdu medium mars the prospects of higher, professional and technical education in future.

- 2- Urdu schools attract children from low income background and it does not help the kids to have a higher vision of life and they miss out on perception of upwardly mobile culture. In short, they breed social inferiority.
- 3- At some stage the switchover of medium will be inevitable, so why not opt for English medium from the beginning so that foundation is strong.
- 4- Free and cheap education is low quality, useless and irrelevant.
- 5- Teachers have no motivation.
- 6- Location of the Urdu schools is detestable.
- 7- Since all children are Muslim, it is feared that children will not develop secular ethos which are essential for surviving in a plural society. Children coming out of the Urdu high schools will feel cultural shocks once they join English medium schools or find some jobs where people from all other communities share the work space.
- 8- Infrastructure is invariably substandard and does not help academic excellence.

A comparative study of the above would make it abundantly clear that Urdu medium schools are bound to fall out of favour of Muslims themselves notwithstanding the love for language, culture, history, heritage. People are not deficient in their love of *Iqbal ki nazmen* (Iqbal's poems), *Saadi ki hikayaat* (Narratives of Saadi), *Krishan Chandra aur Munshi Premchand ke afsaney* (Short stories by Krishen Chander and Munshi Premchand), *Agha Hashr ke dramay* (Plays by Agha Hasher) and *Qurratulain Haider ke novels* (Novels by Qurratul Ain Haider) and *Rubaiyat by Omar Khayam* (Sonnets of Omar Khayam). But they are afraid of clinging to the cultural vestiges of bygone days in lieu of future which is aligned with languages that offer brighter prospect of employment and entrepreneurship through learning of new sciences and technology and thereby to higher education, research and migration to greener pastures overseas . But the whole attitude could be summed up in this couplet:

*Jaanta hoon sawabe ta'ath o zahd,
Par tabiyat idhar nahim aati.*

(There is no denying the rewards for obedience and piety. But so perverse is my love for taboos that I do not feel sufficiently persuaded to opt for that virtuous life.)

Taken together, the above situation poses grave dilemmas for the community. It is realized that a community should not lose touch with its language and culture nor should compromise on things that would brighten its future prospects. Urdu-speaking Muslims have to prepare themselves for the twin challenges. Fear is not that English-using Muslims would become irreligious. Religion has almost been entirely transferred into English and other languages. Moreover, Internet has made the access much easier. The real fear is that they will lose touch with their culture which is embedded in *Ghubar e Khatir* of Maulana Azad, *Bang e Daraa* of Iqbal, *Rubaiyat of Ghalib*, *Aag ka Darya* of Qurratulain Hyder, *Al-Farooq* by Shibli Nomani, *Aur Talwar toot gayi* by Nasim Hijazi and *Patras Bukhari ke mazahiya mazameen*. These carry the essence of composite culture, or what has come to be characterized as *Ganga-Jamuni tahzeeb* and ethos in a subcontinent ruled by the Muslims for nearly 650 years.

Distance of the elite class from Urdu has grown in recent decades. It results in decline in Muslim contribution to literature, films, music and other performing arts like dramas etc. These media were vital in building bridges with other communities and helped neutralize the communal venom being injected into the body politic of India by print media. The Muslim representation in Bollywood helped check the communalization of a very vital medium like films in India. This happened through literary contribution of Urdu as well as the presence of Urdu-speaking literary figures in film industry. It indirectly helped Muslims gain a

toehold in social sphere and be champions of some of the social causes besides positively portraying their past.

Now what can be done?

From the above discussion it is clear that Urdu medium is falling out of favour for the very community which should have opted for it. Downslide of the Urdu medium education is of such great magnitude that there does not seem to be any prospect of revival. But at the same time Urdu medium schools, besides being the institutions of learning for nearly half a million population as of now, also provide employment to nearly 24,000 teachers who may be supporting nearly 1,25,000 people. Following steps could be suggested:

- Let all Government Urdu medium Lower Primary schools continue till the community itself does not realize their irrelevance.
- These schools should be adopted by community NGOs everywhere and strict monitoring of learning be made by School Development and Monitoring Committees.
- Pressure should be mounted on the government that they should be made English medium schools from 6th standard onwards and teachers should be able to converse with students in English as well as Urdu in order to achieve better comprehension of the concepts and subjects and improvement in their communicative skills. The textbooks of social science, environmental science and mathematics for 5th std should provide English equivalents for terms in brackets and the teachers should be trained to use them while teaching in the classrooms.
- New English syllabus from first standard should be adopted whereby a child learns at least 5,000 words and around 1,000 sentences of English by the time he passes 5th std.
- A bridge course in English should be introduced for those being promoted from 5th to 6th std where he or she (student) learns to speak a smattering of English.

- Possibly English should be assigned two periods each day in pre-primary schools.
- The Government should improve the infrastructure like drinking water, toilets, sanitation, and provide teaching aids, smart boards and computers. The School Development and Monitoring Committees (SDMCs) should act as watchdog bodies in management and monitoring of academic performance and catalyst for improvement in learning outcomes.

The government should be persuaded to allow these students to have Urdu as the third language from 6th standard onwards while the schools completely switch over to English medium. The schools should be provided teachers for English medium regardless of their faith and religion. Similarly children from other linguistic communities too should be admitted into these schools and there should be provision for adopting Kannada or English as the first language for them.

Thereafter Urdu should be taught as one of the languages under three-language formula. The fact is that Urdu school students are so very weak in all subjects including Urdu that a 5th std. student cannot read the text of 2nd std. This is really pathetic and speaks of the indifference and negligence of Urdu teachers. Teachers and students should be asked to read at least 25 Urdu books other than their curriculum every year in order to enhance their grasp of language. (This could, in fact, be recommended for all the three languages being taught to the students). The advisors for Urdu language textbooks should urge the State Textbook Committee to develop a glossary of Deccani Urdu words and prepare a converter to Standard Urdu as is spoken in the Indo-Gangetic plain. This could be done more effectively if the audio aids could be provided in schools to impart accurate phonetics of the Standard Urdu that goes into Urdu literature.¹¹ Urdu teachers must be trained in word coinage through use of Persian prefixes and

suffixes in higher classes in order that the ones who study Urdu as a paper till Pre University develop greater felicity in Urdu.

Conclusion

What emerges clearly is that while Urdu could remain the medium of instruction at the primary level (1st to 5th standard), the children should be taught all the three languages with such meticulous care that they develop competency in all of them and transition to either English or Kannada medium becomes less cumbersome and without the least risk of discontinuity of education.

There is no gainsaying the fact that mother tongue is the best medium for developing comprehension and identification with the social and cultural environment for the child. There cannot be a better medium for speedier learning as the child inherits a readymade vocabulary from his mother, siblings and other members of the society. Ideally the mother tongue medium should extend to as late a stage as possible.

But in a plural society like India's, insistence on mother tongue being the sole medium of instruction is neither feasible nor practical. Most of the urban centres in South Indian states have switched over to English as the medium of instruction all through the schools. While children from the entire elite class have opted for English medium schools, the State Governments have adopted a policy of imposing a policy of regional language or mother tongue (in case of linguistic minorities) for schools run at the state's expense. It is perhaps where one needs to understand that compulsion of mother tongue could also be detrimental for the progress, development and inclusion of these communities with the mainstream population. If indeed inclusiveness is the desired goal, the State must initiate effort to see what medium will facilitate the effective integration of these communities

with the mainstream. Of late, English has emerged as the dominant choice for medium of instructions for members of all those communities who have been moving into urban and industrial centres. In fact, English more than Hindi, has become the medium of intellectual consensus across the nation. As far as cultural continuity is concerned, it could even be ensured through effective coaching of the minority language as a subject under the linguistic formula.

While undeniably Urdu-speaking students should ideally be educated through Urdu medium, a look at the spatial spread of Urdu population works to its disadvantage in matters of clinging to the language. Urdu does not own a territory or region. Since Urdu-speaking people are spread thin all over the country, no state offers the language the official status. Of course, a few states have conferred second official language status for Urdu for limited use and in a limited number of districts. The language faces lack of geographical contiguity. This deprives the Urdu-speaking people a choice in matters of medium of instructions. They are compelled to access education in nearby schools regardless of its medium of instruction. It even does not seem feasible for the official machinery to cater to the educational needs of a linguistic minority by setting up schools in a medium of instruction of their choice, unless their numbers are substantial in a specific area. It would therefore be wiser to save the existing Government Urdu medium schools, mount an effort to improve their quality of education, and enable their forward linkage by enhancing the competency of these children in Kannada and English in order to check dropout of minority children.

Notes and References

The author met or interacted with the following persons to collect information and gather opinion with regards to this research study. **1-** Ms. Zohra Jabeen, Additional Director, Directorate of Urdu and other Minority Languages, Dept of Public Instructions(DPI), Govt. of Karnataka, Bangalore; **2-** Ms. Waheeda, Assistant Director, Directorate of Urdu and Minority Languages, DPI; **3-** Ayesha Firdose, Asst. Director, Minority Welfare Department; **4-** Yaseen Sali, Education Coordinator, DPI, Bagalkote district; **5-** Zakirullah Shariff, Education Coordinator, DPI, Chitradurga District; **6-** Abdulqadir Yaseensab Mulla, Education Coordinator, DPI, Haveri District; **7-** Abdul Aziz, Cluster Resource Person, Govt Urdu Model Primary School, Farooqia Nagar, Padrayanapura, Mysore Road, Bangalore; **8-** Shabbir Ahmed, Cluster Resource Person, Govt. Urdu Higher Primary School, Kalasipalyam, Bangalore; **9-** Mr. Sajid Ali, Educational Coordinator, Bangalore South District, DPI, Bangalore; **10-** Ms. Tahira Nusrat, Education Coordinator, Bangalore North District, DPI; **11-** Mr. Sirajullah Khan, President, Executive Committee, Muslim Orphanage, Dickenson Road Bangalore (The Orphanage has an Urdu medium Higher Primary School which they are trying to turn into English medium school, so far without success.) **11-** Mr. B. S. Ziaullah, President, School Adoption Committee, Urdu Model Primary School, Farooqia Nagar, Padrayanapura, Mysore Road, Bangalore

a: <http://www.census2011.co.in/data/religion/state/29-karnataka.html>

1: Some educational coordinators from the district of Northern Karnataka admitted that their campaign to canvass for enrolment of Muslims children in Government Urdu Schools proved a failure as people pointed out that the very same teachers who came to their doors to persuade them to enroll their kids in their schools, had chosen privately managed English medium schools for their own family children.

&: 450 Muslim Managed English high schools in Bengaluru

The Millath Pages Karnataka 2015-16 carries a list of 150 Muslim managed high schools. The list is incomplete in that it leaves out those schools that do not bear Muslim sounding names or have not registered themselves as minority-run schools. The *Islamic Voice* English monthly carries survey of around 200 Muslim-managed high schools in Bengaluru in its June issue every year. Both these publications carry only the name of the principal unit of a group of institutions. For instance,

each of the schools grouped under Jawahar Memorial, Subhash Memorial, Presidency, Florence, and Delhi Public School have six to 12 schools in the group.

2- A comprehensive survey of Government Urdu schools in Bangalore urban district by Akshara Foundation does not paint a very happy picture about the quality of education and the ones who are taught there. The Foundation covered all the 171 Government Urdu medium schools in Bangalore where a total of 32,823 children are enrolled. It was found that 45% of households (pertaining to Urdu school kids) lived in asbestos covered houses and 36% in katcha structures, 14% in concrete structures and remaining 5% in huts. About 70% had an average size family of 4 to 6 members. 44% of households reported casual labour as the occupation of their bread-winner. Twenty eight per cent households did not have a ration card. But among the 72% who had ration cards, 41 percentage points owned yellow (or BPL) ration cards. The survey result was published in a booklet titled *A Study of Government Urdu Primary Schools in Bengaluru* by Akshara Foundation, Deepam, 633-4th C Main, 6th B Cross, OMBR Layout, Banaswadi, Bengaluru-560043, www.akshara.org.in, Ph: 080-25429726/27. The study was carried out K. Vaijayanti with assistance from Divya Vishwanath and Shreedevi S. Sharma.

This author had reviewed this report in Islamic Voice, English monthly in its January 2015 issue. (For detailed review log onto : <http://islamicvoice.com/November2011/Muslimeducation.>)

3: Statistics supplied by the Directorate of Urdu and Other Minority Languages, Dept. of Public Instructions, Government of Karnataka, Bengaluru.

4: I had found a teacher getting her hands applied with mehendi while inspecting a classroom on a Friday afternoon in an aided Urdu school in Bengaluru. The Akshara Foundation report also cites finding teachers of an Urdu school engaged in buying bangles from a vendor in the school premises during study hours. A conscientious lady teacher (who is now retired) related her experience of working in an aided Urdu Medium School in the City Market area of Bengaluru. According to her, the teachers would sleep after lunch on the benches and would ask the students to return home assuring them of their attendance remaining marked. This school was closed in the shortly after the turn of century due to gradual decline of enrolment.

5: The survey of the Govt Urdu schools in Bangalore has the following to say for the physical infrastructure of the Govt Urdu schools: “Physical facilities and overall ambience of the schools is a key element in attracting and retaining the children in the school. It was found that 51% schools functioned in their own

buildings while 49% ran in rented structures. About 9% of schools function in a shed like structure; 13% of schools operate in a structure that is part-pucca and part-shed. Overall 20% schools do not run in a proper school buildings. About 60 % of Urdu medium schools in Bangalore had a boundary wall which is considered essential for safety and security of kids. Twenty per cent toilets were not in usable condition. 74% Urdu schools had a drinking water facility and 81% said they had electricity connection and 95% were reportedly using it. Forty percent of schools had an adequate number of classrooms and 12% of them had a room for the library while 13% reported that they had a separate staff room.

6: Akshara Foundation report cites the case of a school where a toilet was kept locked and students being asked to clean it before the teachers used them.

7 : Most Government Urdu Lower Primary School in northern Karnataka are provided only two teachers to teach all classes from first to 5th standard. One among the two happens to be a Kannada teacher while the other is an Urdu teacher. Abdul Qadir Yaseen Sahib Mulla, Educational Coordinator for Haveri district informs that the District has 136 Government Urdu LPS schools and invariably all of them have only two teachers. As per the Government norms one teacher is posted for each ten students, regardless of the number of classes. Similarly, two teachers are posted for 30 to 60 students regardless of the number of classes they are studying in.

8- M. A. Siraj, Little Room to Learn, *Deccan Herald*, Bangalore dt. May 18, 2001

8A- Major credit for improvement school in Kalasipalyam should go to Educational Coordinator Mr. Sajid Ali, Mr. Afsar Pasha of the Hind Citizens Welfare Trust and Mr. Shabbir Ahmed, Cluster Resource Person. The school was about to be taken over by the DPI for setting up its own offices. The Trust is now building an Urdu hall and some classrooms for starting the SSLC section in a portion of the vast school ground. The building which was built with community funds was about to get out of the control.

9: Prof. S. Japhet, Socio Economic Conditions of Religious Minorities in Karnataka, National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bengaluru, 2015 (Ref. page 96 for ‘Age specific attendance ratio’)

10: For instance, 94 Govt Urdu Primary High Schools in Chitradurga district recorded enrolment of 4,498 student in 2015-16 and 4,448 in 2016-17. But those appearing for SSLC exams in 2015-16 numbered only 155 from six Govt. Urdu High Schools. Their number during 2016-17 stood at 167. The drastic fall could be

attributed to students migrating to other medium schools as well as high rate of dropout in the community. Haveri district does a little better in this respect. According to Mr. A. Y. Mullah, Education Coordinator in the district, nearly 6,000 children enroll annually in 251 Govt Urdu Primary School in the district. But around 1,200 students appear for SSLC exams from the 11 Urdu medium high schools (6 aided plus 5 unaided high schools). He says girls comprise 80% of the students among the SSLC candidates which points to boys migrating to other mediums of instructions after the higher primary education.

10A: The St. Joseph's College in Bengaluru used to have an Urdu department decades ago for those students who would opt for Urdu as a subject in the Pre University and Degree classes. But gradually it ceased to receive students who opted for the language, ultimately leading to closure of the Department. It could be either due to students from Govt Urdu schools failing to reach that stage of education or the Urdu-speaking community itself shunning the option of the Urdu language as a subject.

11: This author had highlighted this need in a piece appearing in *The Hindu* dt. April 17, 2006 titled "The Message is in the medium"
