

Government of India
Minority Scholarship Schemes:
*Assessing access and
mapping the way forward*

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TARRAQI  **FOUNDATION**

Improving GOI Minority Scholarship Schemes

Sachar Committee report (2006) highlighted how the Muslim community was way below the national average and other minority groups and were in fact comparable to SC/ST in terms of educational attainment and socio-economic status. Among several initiatives in The Prime Minister's new 15 point program in relation to minorities is the Scholarship initiative – Pre-matric, Post-matric and Merit-cum-Means Scholarships - that covers from Class I to technical/professional courses. Report of the Steering Committee on Empowerment of Minorities as part of its assessment in preparation for the 12th FYP pointed to several short-comings in the pre-matric, post-matric and merit-cum-means scholarship.

The Research study titled "**Assessing Access to GoI Minority Scholarship Schemes in Delhi and Mapping the Way Forward**" was conducted by the Tarraqi I Foundation supported by the Centre for Civil Society. Below are few recommendations emerging from the present study.

Design

- The scholarship amount should be substantially increased in keeping with the rising cost of living.
- The physical and financial targets should be increased for all the three scholarship schemes.
- In the spirit of the RTE, pre-matric scholarship (I-X Standard) should be given to all minority children studying in government schools. Only parameter should be parents' income, and not attendance, marks, residence requirements etc.
- Affidavit for religion certificate should not be asked at all and self declaration on the form should suffice. If essential, a one-time minority certificate (like SC/OBC) should be issued. If the affidavit is imperative then it should be required only the first time, and not for subsequent renewal of scholarship.
- Students should not be made to pay the fees upfront as it becomes a big barrier to continuing education. Instead the concerned institution should claim the fee amount directly from the nodal department.

Administration

- Advocacy strategy and the budget should be revised and upgraded on the lines of highly visible schemes like Pulse Polio or Bhagidari schemes of Delhi Government. Advertisements must be aired on popular radio stations and television channels and in case newspapers the ones which are read widely in the stakeholder community.
- Every year, the Government must initiate the process in April when the new academic year starts. Schemes must be publicised; forms must be given out; 3-4 months (May-June-July-Aug) time to be given for parents to fill and prepare the form; two months (Sep-Oct) for processing by the concerned departments. This would ensure that disbursal happens in Dec-Jan. Delay by more than one month should be penalised.

- All private aided schools and colleges must mention the scholarships in their schools profile (brochure and website) and should put up the notices to inform the parents.
- Efforts should be made to encourage and increase the empanelment of schools and colleges for MCM and post-matric scholarships schemes so that more students have access to the scholarships in their chosen course and college.
- Procedures of all scholarship schemes should be simplified with one-time collection of documents if any.
- Disbursal of scholarship funds should be made directly into zero balance bank accounts opened in nationalised banks or post offices with the help of the Education Department.
- A simple renewal process by a validation from the class teacher/school principal should be put in place to ensure continuity of support to students and reduce administrative burden and wastage of resources.
- Adequate resources should be provided to Ministry of Minority Affairs (MoMA) in terms of personnel and facilities so that it is able to do justice to its role as a coordinating, monitoring and review body.
- A separate and dedicated Department of Minority Welfare in Delhi should be set up or a Department with proportionate representation of minorities in its workforce should be established to implement all minority related schemes.

Introduction

The three scholarships - pre-matric, post-matric and merit-cum-means - cover from Class 1 to technical/ professional courses. The objective is to provide financial assistance to students belonging to economically weaker sections to form the foundation for their educational attainment and provide a level playing field in the competitive employment arena.

Report of the Steering Committee on Empowerment of Minorities as part of its assessment in preparation for the 12th FYP pointed to several short-comings in the pre-matric, post-matric and merit-cum-means scholarship. The scholarship schemes have been in existence for nearly six years now and there have been several issues and problems that have been highlighted related to their design content and implementation. But there have been no specific studies undertaken to collect empirical data from students and parents on their first hand experience of seeking scholarships, understand what meaning it has for them, what role scholarships play in the larger context of their struggle for education and what changes would they like to see in the design, content and implementation of scholarships.

The objective of this research is to give recommendations to the Central Government, State Government and the community for **improving the design, allocation, administration and utilisation** of the Government of India scholarship schemes for the Minority students.

This research study has tried to assess minority community's access to scholarship schemes particularly pre-matric, post-matric and merit-cum-means in the Delhi state, the efficiency with

which they are administered, understand community experiences and suggest recommendations for the way forward.

A thorough secondary research was conducted comprising of literature review to map the discourse around minority scholarship schemes through analyses of research studies, evaluations and reports was done. Thereafter, analyses of government documents available on the relevant ministry websites about the policies, the schemes, their guidelines and circulars was also done, followed by budgetary analysis for the last three years. As part of secondary data analyses, two RTI applications were filed with both - Ministry of Minority Affairs (Government of India) as well as the Department of SC, SST, OBC and Minorities (Government of Delhi) seeking the list of students for whom scholarships under pre-matric, post-matric and MCM scholarship schemes was sanctioned, pending and rejected for the period 2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2012-13 until December 2013. Utilization certificates and the review reports were also sought.

Primary research involved a survey of students and parents from 36 schools in the three communities (which are diverse in terms of class composition) to understand their experience of accessing scholarships, the barriers faced and their suggestions to improve the content, design and process of accessing the scholarship.

The final sample of the survey covered 96 students who had accessed scholarships and a sample of 47 students who had not. In addition 88 parents of students who had accessed the scholarship and 40 parents of those who had not were also interviewed. Altogether, 143 households were covered. It involved focus group discussions with parents and students, in-depth interviews with teachers and principals to understand systemic bottlenecks that they faced and seek their suggestions for improving the same, interviews with officials in the Ministry and Department in the state and central government and key informant interviews with representatives of NGOs who work with marginalized communities on issues related to scholarship.

Key Findings from the Study

Design

- 50% marks as an eligibility criterion is an excluding factor given that there would be many reasons why children from vulnerable families are unable to obtain the requisite 50% marks. Given that there are no exams till the 7th standard, this criterion seems an arbitrary element which is not in sync with the larger education policy.
- Regarding the 75% attendance, it is important to note that RTE Act doesn't lay any condition on attendance for promotion to the next class. Since children upto Class VII didn't appear for any exams and were promoted to the next class without ensuring any learning by the teachers, there is really no benefit in stating regularity as a condition.

- Parents and teachers felt that the threshold of Rs. 1 lakh per annum was really a subsistence level. So for pre-matric scholarship there was a suggestion to increase the ceiling to at least 2 lakh as was the case with the other schemes.
- Mobilizing documents for the scholarship was seen as a huge challenge. Parents and students felt that they spent a lot of time, effort and resources in getting the affidavits, attestations and proofs of residence. Also, guidelines do not specify the authorities who should be issuing the certificates. Students who are seeking to renew their scholarships have to submit these certificates every year and go through the entire application process all over again.
- To limit itself to only two per family runs counter to these stated objectives of the schemes. For instance if there are 4 children in a family of school-going age, to limit it to only two children knowing the family will be unable to support the others would not help to fulfill the objectives.
- The pre-condition that one has to pay fees upfront and later claim reimbursement is exclusionary in nature and acts as a barrier that prevents poor, meritorious students from seeking scholarship that they deserve.
- Getting through the empanelled colleges listed is tough for poor students due to lack of educational and financial support. In case of MCM, a student is required to refund entire amount if his study gets discontinued for whatever reasons which deters vulnerable students from marginalised communities to a great extent.

76% of scholarship and even higher proportion of non-scholarship parents felt that there is a need to make the process more community friendly. Close to 70% of non-scholarship stressed on changing the eligibility criteria.

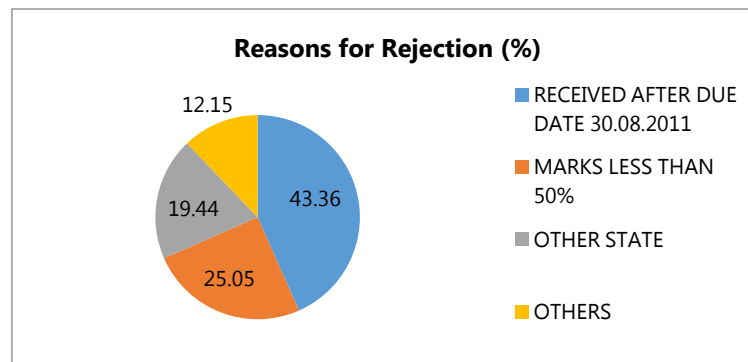
Allocation

- The maintenance amount offered by the scheme had not kept pace with the increasing costs of living, several curriculum-related expenses that included private tuitions which had become a necessity due to poor quality of teaching in government schools. Reduction in the maintenance allowance highlights that the rates of scholarship are not fixed based on a rational criterion that takes into consideration the costs incurred in progressive levels of study and thereby greater financial need.
- In terms of access to scholarship amount, there was a huge variation in amount disbursed under the same scholarship and indicates the extent of confusion and lack of clear information about the entitlements under the scheme.
- In comparing post-matric schemes for Minorities with SC and OBC, one finds that under the category of SC and OBC the scholarships disbursed are mostly for the professional and technical courses whereas for Minorities, out of 1030 scholarships, 835 are for 11th, 12th, BA, BSc and MA courses wherein the tuition fees is very low. The average amount per student for SC and OBC is approximately Rs 56,000 but for minorities, it is only Rs 5,350.

Majority of parents and students only 'somewhat agreed' that scholarships had helped them to continue education or eased the financial burden. However both students and parents were clear on the fact that the scholarship amount was inadequate and that they had not been able to use the amount as per their need on account of its inadequacy.

Administration

- There is no public information about the numbers and/or lists of applications made, rejected indicating reasons for rejection and application pending.
- Vital documents like utilisation certificates have been poorly maintained and are not publically accessible.
- Much discrepancy is found in the data accessed through RTI and what is publicly available on the relevant websites. E.g. data from RTI reveals a total of 600 post-matric scholarships were awarded in 2011-12 but the same from MoMA is 1061.
- There is laxity in advertising the scholarship to the masses through various mediums like internet, newspapers etc. 64% of scholarship and 88% of non-scholarship students felt that scholarships are not being publicised properly. Even among those who were presently availing of scholarships there was a lot of confusion about the amount available under each scholarship and the related rules.
- The reasons mentioned across pending applications include absence of residence proof, income certificate (affidavit), previous years mark sheets, student bank details, community declaration certificates, unattested documents etc, all of which can be made available if reminders are sent to confirm.



- On the other hand, reasons for rejection were mainly three (i) Marks of the student being less than 50%, (ii) Student belonging to another state and (iii) Form received after due date. On a careful scrutiny of the list of rejected candidates it was discovered that the reasons cited for rejection were mostly incorrect. Out of 134 cases rejected on grounds of having marks less than 50%, nearly 66 students had scored marks above the minimum limit. As for the 'late submission' reason due to which 232 applications were rejected one can't comment as the records do not mention the date on which the applications were received.

Finally, rejecting an application merely on the grounds of applicant belonging to another state is not rational because these are Central Government Schemes.

This highly publicised and popular scheme which is in their 6th year now and yet no review has been done so far. No one can justify the extent of demand/need unless there is a transparent process and a publicly accessible data of the number of applications made, rejected and sanctioned.

Utilisation

Year	Performance	Pre-Matric	Post-Matric	Merit-cum-Means
2012-13	Target	49418	3799	741
	Beneficiaries	21759	338	525
	Achievement in %	44.03	8.90	70.85
	Sanctioned amount INR (Cr)	6.64	0.17	1.26
	Average cost per student	3052	5030	24000

- Looking at utilisation of 44% (pre-matric) and 8.9% (post-matric) the effort should be to facilitate rather than reject the applications due to several reasons, as evident from proportion pending and rejected.
- For the year 2011-12, out of the total number of post-matric applications (awarded, pending and rejected) only 12% were renewals indicating little continuity in providing scholarships. Also, it indicates that of the total applications only 29% (600) were awarded scholarships.

	Fresh	Renewal	Total
Pending	775 (42%)	144 (58%)	919 (45%)
Rejected	521 (29%)	14 (6%)	535 (26%)
Awarded	513 (28%)	87 (36%)	600 (29%)
Total	1809	245	2054

- The utilisation of merit-cum-means scholarship has been more than 100% until 2012-13 when it came down to 70.8% (as targets were increased) which also establishes that the demand all these years was at least twice more than was being made available.
- In addition, the rejection rate of applications under the minority schemes is 70% which are mostly for professional and technical courses. Going through the list of awardees of the MCM scholarship, one finds that between 2009-10 to 2011-12 only 12 students had received course/tuition fee reimbursement which was higher than Rs. 30,000.

Mapping the larger Context of Minority Community's access to Education

- 67% of the students and 93% parents felt that family's poverty has been a serious barrier to children's education because of their inability to mobilise funds and help their children. In that scenario, scholarships are meant to achieve the desired objective.
- But community's present experience is marked largely by non-responsive, poor quality teaching in the government schools (with a few notable exceptions) that has pushed many families to seek education in private schools or supplement through private tuitions. This has placed an enormous financial burden on families which the scholarship at present is unable to alleviate.
- Further many parents and students felt that unless quality of government schools was improved the scholarship will lose its relevance because there will be no meaningful learning among children and whatever amount they get from the scholarship will be spent on private tuitions and fees of private schools. In fact this in itself was a violation of the RTE that makes free universal, good quality education a fundamental right of every child of this country. Government schools are bound by law to provide free, good quality education to all. In such a context the scholarship amount would meet students' additional learning needs which would make the scholarship much more meaningful and relevant.

The present study highlights the huge need within the Muslim minority community for education, the community's endless struggles in seeking it and the gap between what the community is seeking and what is on offer. However, scholarships, even though inadequate at best continue to be a source of support. Integrated, universal, comprehensive and easy to access scholarship schemes in the larger context of a functional, responsive government school system, providing good quality teaching, would ensure fulfillment of educational rights of children from the minority community and go a long way in bridging the inequalities and laying a strong foundation for the future.

Your support and suggestions will help achieve the desired impact of these much needed schemes. The final report can be made available by Amir Abidi (akabidi@hotmail.com)

Profile of Researchers

Amir Abidi is an educationist who firmly believes that inclusion, access and quality in education for marginalised children and youth is the key to national progress. He is the Founder-Director of Taraqqi I Foundation and also the Executive Director for India School Fund. He has done Masters in Management and Marketing from University of Arts, London and a one year Programme in Education Leadership from iDiscoveri. He has worked with organizations like Career Launcher, Education Development Centre on school curriculum, teacher training and educational management in various contexts, as well as at the strategic level to conceptualise, implement and monitor several path breaking initiatives. One such initiative, the MEGA SKY project, was selected as one of the five best practices in Youth enablement across the world, at the Youth Employment Forum, ILO, Geneva in May 2012.

Akhila Vasan has a post-graduate degree in Social Work from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and a doctoral degree from the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), Bangalore. She has been a Fellow, Health and Population Innovation Fellowship, Population Council, New Delhi. Her core areas of expertise include research, capacity-building, community mobilization in the areas of public health, reproductive and sexual health with specific focus on adolescents, gender and sexuality. She is presently an independent researcher based in Bangalore.

Umesh Babu is a Sr. Economist with Center for Monitoring Democracy and Human Relations. His expertise is in budget and policy research and advocacy of democratic institutions. His achievements include changes in the State budget manual of the states of Uttar Pradesh, Delhi Government, Central Government, Orissa, Punjab, Haryana and successfully bringing back allocated funds for Scheduled Castes and Tribes welfare (that were diverted to Commonwealth Games).



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