

REVIEW ARTICLE

Identity, Knowledge, and Autonomy: A Study of Minority Educational Institutions in India

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the crucial relationship between identity, knowledge, and autonomy within the context of minority educational institutions in India. Minority educational institutions hold a unique position in India's educational landscape, protected under Article 30 of the Indian Constitution, which grants religious and linguistic minorities the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. This research paper investigates how these institutions guide the dual pressures of maintaining their religious and cultural identities while adhering to national educational policies and standards. By employing a critical approach, including qualitative analysis of published primary and secondary data, the study examines the operational challenges, governance structures, and educational outcomes of minority institutions. Key areas of focus include the impact of religious affiliation on curriculum development, teacher recruitment, and the institutions' role in promoting social cohesion and cultural preservation. The findings show that minority educational institutions often serve as crucial strongholds of religious and cultural identity and educational autonomy for marginalised communities. This study underscores the need for nuanced policy frameworks that respect the autonomy of these institutions while ensuring educational equity and quality. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader discourse on the role of education in fostering inclusive governance and social harmony in pluralistic societies. It highlights the potential of minority educational institutions to act as agents of positive social change, provided they are supported by policies that recognise and accommodate their unique needs and contributions.

KEYWORDS

• Minority Educational Institutions • Knowledge • India • Autonomy • Identity

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between identity, knowledge, and autonomy is a critical arena for understanding the dynamics of educational institutions in multicultural societies. In India, a country characterised by its immense diversity, minority educational institutions play a pivotal role in preserving cultural identities while contributing to the broader educational outlook. This study explores into the multifaceted dimensions of minority educational institutions in India, examining how they negotiate issues of identity, knowledge and autonomy while striving to provide quality education. The Indian Constitution recognises the significance of safeguarding minority rights, notably through Article 30, which grants minorities the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice (Basu, 2012, p. 192). This constitutional provision underscores the importance of educational institutions as bastions of cultural preservation and identity assertion for minority communities. However, practically implementing these rights often encounters many challenges, ranging from regulatory hurdles to socio-political dynamics (Pandey, 2014, p. 58). In governance, minority educational institutions must balance adherence to national educational standards with maintaining their unique cultural and religious ethos. This balance is crucial, as it impacts the quality of education provided and the broader societal perception and integration of minority groups (Hasan, 2009, p. 104). Therefore, effective governance structures within these institutions are essential for ensuring compliance and cultural integrity. The role of minority educational institutions extends beyond mere cultural preservation; they also serve as crucial agents of social mobility and empowerment for historically marginalised communities. Providing access to education in a culturally affirming environment, these institutions help bridge socio-economic gaps and foster inclusive development (Nambissan, 2010, p. 85). However, the extent to which these institutions succeed in this dual mandate of cultural preservation and socio-economic upliftment is contingent upon a supportive policy framework and robust governance mechanisms. This study explores the sophisticated relationship between identity, knowledge, and autonomy within the framework of minority educational

institutions in India. It seeks to answer critical questions: How do these institutions manage the tension between cultural identity and regulatory compliance? What governance models are most effective in balancing these dual imperatives? Moreover, how do these dynamics significantly influence the educational outcomes and social integration of minority students? By addressing these questions, this research intends to contribute to the broader discourse on minority rights, educational equity, and governance in India, offering insights that may inform policy and practice in other multicultural societies.

1. Minority Institutions: A Closer Look

The Central Government of India officially recognizes six religious minority communities: Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Parsi, and Jain. To cater to their distinct educational needs, members of these communities have established Minority Educational Institutions (MEIs). These institutions aim to preserve their communities' cultural, linguistic, and educational heritage, ensuring that their traditions and values are passed down through generations. MEIs are not just educational entities; they are vital for maintaining the unique identities of minority groups within India's diverse society. By providing an education that integrates the cultural narratives and languages of their communities, these institutions contribute significantly to the country's cultural diversity. Moreover, MEIs create environments where minority students can succeed academically while staying connected to their cultural roots. This dual focus helps students flourish in a multicultural society without losing their identity. The existence of MEIs highlights the importance of educational inclusivity and reflects India's commitment to its multicultural ethos. By supporting the intellectual and cultural growth of minority students, these institutions ensure that the values, traditions, and contributions of minority communities continue to enhance India's national narrative.

2. Legacy and Continuation of Identity-based Educational Institutions:

In India, minority educational institutions have been around for ages, even before the British came. Back then, religious groups like Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs established their schools. They wanted to ensure

their cultural and religious identities stayed strong, especially during times of significant changes in society and politics. These schools did not just teach subjects; they also passed down traditions and values necessary to each community. After India gained independence, laws were legislated to protect these schools and colleges, recognizing their importance in keeping our education system diverse. They are even crucial in preserving our country's rich cultural legacy.

1. Christian Educational Institutions: Christian missionaries, like those from the Serampore Mission in Bengal beginning in 1818, were more than religious ambassadors. They served as catalysts for education across India. By establishing schools and colleges, they aimed to spread Christianity, Western knowledge, and modern science. These institutions were not merely about imparting lessons; they were gateways to new possibilities. Teaching in English and employing progressive teaching methods provided access to broader vistas and brighter prospects. However, their impact extended beyond academics, emphasising character development and moral values. Their enduring influence is palpable in India's educational and ethical tapestry, with their establishments continuing to shape minds and hearts today (Laird, 1971, p. 89).

2. Muslim Educational Institutions: Sir Syed Ahmed Khan led the Aligarh Movement, founding the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College in 1877 and later transforming it into Aligarh Muslim University in 1920. The aim was to modernize Muslim education by merging Western scientific knowledge with Islamic teachings. This approach sought to nurture scholars proficient in various subjects while remaining rooted in their cultural lineage. It marked a significant shift in balancing tradition with progress within Muslim communities, stressing the importance of embracing change while preserving identity (Robinson, 2003, pp. 172-174).

3. Hindu Educational Institutions: Hindu reform movements like the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj also emphasised the establishment of educational institutions. The Gurukula Kangri Vishwavidyalaya, founded in 1902 by Swami Shradhdhanand, aimed at imparting education rooted in Vedic traditions. Annie Besant, a prominent key figure in the Theosophical Society, played a

vital role alongside Madan Mohan Malaviya in establishing the Central Hindu College in 1898, later Banaras Hindu University, in 1916. It aimed to revive the essence of Hindu education. They envisioned a place where ancient wisdom and modern knowledge could harmonize, where students would acquire knowledge and develop morally and spiritually. For Besant, this initiative was more than just about academics; it was about nurturing individuals in alignment with Hindu culture and principles (Renold, 2006, pp. 29-30).

4. Sikh Educational Institutions: Similarly, Sikh communities established schools and colleges, such as Khalsa College in Amritsar, founded in 1892, to preserve Sikh cultural and religious identity. (Jones, 1976, pp. 65-67). These institutions offered curricula that included the study of Sikh scriptures, history, culture, and modern subjects. Khalsa College also became a centre for cultural and intellectual discourse, fostering a sense of pride and identity among Sikhs. The institution's alumni played significant roles in various cultural and political movements, contributing to preserving and promoting Sikh culture and values.

3. Post-Independence Developments:

In 1947, India was finding its path as a nation, incorporating secular values into its identity. When we adopted our Constitution in 1950, we made it clear: India is a place where everyone, regardless of religion, is treated equally. We wanted to protect the rights of all minority groups, ensuring they could keep their traditions and beliefs alive. By saying we are a secular republic, we promised to celebrate our differences and make sure everyone feels at home here. It is about building a country where diversity is not just accepted; it is celebrated.

1. Constitutional Provisions for Minority Educational Institutions:

Article 29 of the Indian Constitution guarantees the protection of the interests of minorities. It ensures that any section of citizens having a distinct language, script, or culture has the right to conserve the same. It also provides that 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 (Austin, 1999, p. 138).

Article 30 of the cornerstone of the rights of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions. It explicitly states that all minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. Furthermore, the state shall not discriminate against any educational institution on the grounds that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language (Austin, 1999, pp. 139-141).

2. Judicial Interpretation and Landmark Judgments:

The judiciary has been crucial in interpreting and reinforcing constitutional protections for minority educational institutions. Landmark Supreme Court cases have clarified and expanded the rights guaranteed under the Constitution. These decisions have upheld the autonomy of such institutions and protected their cultural and religious identity. They have also promoted equality and non-discrimination in education. The judiciary's role in safeguarding minority educational institutions has been vital, ensuring they thrive as diverse centres of excellence.

3. T.M.A. Pai Foundation vs. State of Karnataka (2002): In this landmark case, the Supreme Court of India interpreted the extent and limitations of Article 30. The judgement clarified that the right to establish and administer educational institutions includes the right to decide the admission of students and the recruitment of staff, albeit subject to regulatory frameworks that ensure educational standards and the welfare of the students (Baxi, 2005, pp. 217-218). The Court emphasised that the regulatory authority of the state should not destroy the minority character of the institution.

4. Inamdar vs. State of Maharashtra (2005): The Inamdar case further elucidated the scope of Article 30 by affirming that while minority institutions have the right to administer their affairs, they cannot disregard the broader regulatory framework intended to maintain educational standards and fairness. The judgement reinforced that state regulations must be reasonable and must not infringe upon the minority rights guaranteed by the

Constitution (Baxi, 2005, pp. 222-223).

4. Importance of Government Support for Minority Institutions:

The Indian government supports minority educational institutions through financial aid, infrastructure development, and capacity-building initiatives. Grants, scholarships, and subsidies ensure affordability, while infrastructure schemes upgrade facilities. Faculty training enhances teaching standards, and specialized curricula cater to cultural needs. Research grants foster innovation, and partnerships encourage collaboration. Policy advocacy ensures equitable representation and support. These efforts aim to empower minority institutions to provide quality education, fostering community development and societal progress.

1. Prime Minister's 15-Point Programme for the Welfare of Minorities: This initiative focuses on reshaping educational strategies to increase opportunities for minority groups. It prioritizes equitable participation of minority communities in economic endeavours and job opportunities. Scholarships are vital in broadening educational access and empowering individuals from minority backgrounds. Further, financial aid is allocated to improve the infrastructure of minority educational institutions, promoting better learning environments and academic excellence. Through these targeted measures, the program aims to address systemic disparities, promote diversity, and foster socio-economic progress among minority communities (GOI, 2013, pp. 34-36).

2. Maulana Azad Education Foundation: Established under the Ministry of Minority Affairs, the Maulana Azad Education Foundation extends grants-in-aid to non-governmental organizations and educational institutions founded by minorities. Its primary objectives include enhancing the educational standards within these institutions, facilitating infrastructure development, and providing scholarships to students from minority communities. By prioritizing these initiatives, the foundation aims to foster educational empowerment, uplift socio-economic conditions, and promote inclusive growth among minority groups nationwide (GOI, 2013, p. 37).

5. Criteria for Granting Minority Status to Educational Institutions: The guidelines outlined in the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions Act of 2004 specify the following criteria for obtaining certification for minority institutions:

1. An educational Institution established by member or members of the minority community.
2. The primary aim of establishing the educational institution is to serve the interests and needs of the minority community.
3. The educational institution is managed and administered by the members of a minority community.
4. If a trust or registered society is running a suitable Minority Educational Institution, the majority of trustees or society members must belong to the minority community. Similarly, the trust deed or Articles of Association should explicitly state the objective of serving the interests of the minority community.

6. Advantages provided to Minority Educational Institutions:

1. Minority institutions enjoy various forms of administrative autonomy and preferential treatment in admissions. These privileges enable them to establish educational settings that cater to educational requirements and preserve cultural and community identity among their students.
2. A minority educational institution retains its status regardless of whether the government officially recognizes it.
3. Minority educational institutions are exempt from the requirement to reserve seats for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), or Other Backward Classes (OBCs), unlike other educational institutions.
4. Minority educational institutions have the authority to reserve up to 50% of their seats for students who belong to their respective communities.
5. In terms of employee control, minority educational institutions possess more extensive authority compared to other institutions. For example, minority educational institutions can form a selection committee without university representatives when selecting teachers and principals. Similarly, unlike regular schools where principal appointments are typically based on seniority, minority management

retains the freedom to appoint a principal based on their preference.

6. The NCMEI amendment bill grants the right to establish a minority educational institution. Furthermore, it specifies that if a “no objection certificate” for establishing such an institution is not granted within 60 days, or if there is no communication regarding the decision within that period, the minority educational institution can proceed with the establishment as if the certificate had been granted.

7. Minority Educational Institutions (MEIs) have the prerogative to seek affiliation with any of the six universities listed in the schedule.

7. Contemporary Prominent Identity-Based Universities in India:

An identity-based public university in India is established to support the educational progress of distinct social or cultural groups. These institutions focus on increasing access to higher education for marginalized communities, promoting equity and inclusivity while tackling systemic differences and encouraging academic representation. The following institutions are referenced from their official websites.

Aligarh Muslim University (AMU): Founded in 1875 by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Aligarh Muslim University located in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh. It is administered by the Muslim community as a minority institution, with a strong focus on advancing modern education and fostering intellectual growth, particularly among Indian Muslims.

Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI): Established in 1920 in New Delhi by leaders of the nationalist movement, Jamia Millia Islamia is a central university recognized as a minority institution. It is committed to academic excellence and cultural diversity, striving to promote social equity and national unity.

Xavier's Colleges: Operated by the Jesuit order, Xavier's Colleges include prominent institutions in cities like Mumbai and Kolkata. While primarily serving the Christian minority, these colleges offer education to students from all backgrounds, prioritizing values such as social justice, academic excellence, and community service.

St. Stephen's College: St. Stephen's College, founded in 1881 and affiliated with the

University of Delhi, is a Christian minority institution known for its academic distinction. While rooted in Christian values, it is open to students of various faiths, offering an inclusive and rigorous educational environment.

CONCLUSION

The inquiry of minority educational institutions in India uncovers a nuanced interplay between identity, knowledge, and autonomy. Protected by Article 30 of the Indian Constitution, these institutions serve as crucial strongholds for preserving the cultural and religious identities of minority communities while simultaneously enriching the broader educational topography. Research into these institutions reveals a multitude of significant findings. Firstly, they act as vital gateways for marginalized groups, offering educational opportunities as pathways for social mobility and community empowerment. By providing access to education rooted in cultural heritage and religious values, they not only foster academic achievement but also instil a sense of cultural pride and identity among students. However, despite their invaluable contributions, minority educational institutions encounter various challenges. Financial constraints, regulatory compliance pressures, and the delicate balance between religious instruction and secular education pose significant obstacles. It underscores the pressing need for supportive policy frameworks that respect the autonomy of these institutions while ensuring they meet national educational standards. Similarly, research underscores the pivotal role of minority educational institutions in promoting social cohesion and fostering inclusive values. They create a more harmonious and pluralistic society by celebrating diversity and bridging cultural divides. Through their inclusive ethos, they cultivate an appreciation for differences and nurture an environment of mutual respect and understanding. In navigating the tricky topography of minority education, policymakers must recognize these institutions' unique contributions and challenges. By offering adequate support and implementing fair regulatory practices, policymakers can ensure that minority educational institutions

continue to serve as vital instruments of cultural preservation, educational equity, and social progress. Ultimately, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on the role of education in achieving inclusive governance and underscores the importance of nurturing minority educational institutions within India's diverse societal fabric. By acknowledging their significance and addressing their needs, policymakers can uphold the principles of equality and diversity enshrined in the Indian Constitution, thereby fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

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