

Research Article

Inclusion of Socially Excluded Muslims: A Review of Government Initiatives

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ABSTRACT

The term 'Social Exclusion' has its origin in France in the work of Rene Lenoir in 1974 (Vani, 2010) and later on it developed under the former French President of the European commission, Jacques Delors who connected this notion with the poverty programmes of the union in the beginning of 1990s (Ziauddin and Eshwarappa, 2009). This economic interpretation of exclusion continued in the work of Amartya Sen in a multidimensional view of poverty. He argued that the function of the concept of social exclusion was not to widen or otherwise alter our concept of poverty, but rather to highlight the relational aspect and processes which reinforce poverty (Sen, 2000). Social Exclusion deals with the areas which are related to poverty such as unemployment, homelessness, poor health, low educational qualification, etc. Social exclusion evolved from this economic aspect to become the concept of all social scientists from 1990s. The broad aspect of exclusion refers to lack of participation in social life. It discriminates people from social, political, economic, cultural, educational domains of societal life. Social exclusion can be broadly defined as the process through which individual or the group of individuals are discriminated from full participation in the society in which they live (Hann, 1997). So, generally, exclusion is the inability of an individual to participate in the basic political, economic and social functioning of the society. This article is an attempt to review the various initiatives of the government to include the socially excluded Muslims into the main stream of the society.

Keywords: Social exclusion, Poverty, Social discrimination, Societal life

INTRODUCTION

In its broadest aspect exclusion refers to lack of participation in social life. It discriminates people from social, political, economic, cultural and educational domains

of societal life. Social exclusion can be broadly defined as the process through which individual or the group of individuals are discriminated from full participation in the society in which they live (Hann, 1997). So, generally, exclusion is the inability of an individual to participate in the basic political, economic and social functioning of the society. (Buvinic, 2004) defines social exclusion as ‘the denial of equal access to opportunities imposed by certain group in the society upon other’. From the above definitions, emerge three distinguishing features of social exclusion (1) it affects culturally defined group (2) it’s embedded in segregation between them (3) it results in deprivation or low income for those excluded (Thorat, 2007). The concept of social exclusion has two defining characteristics. *Firstly*, it is a multidimensional concept which is not only economic but also social, cultural and political. *Secondly*, it focuses on the relations and processes that cause discrimination. Social exclusion is considered as a discrimination which refers as the process through which groups are wholly or partially restricted from full participation in economic, educational and social institution that defines membership. Exclusion involves both the act of restricting access and consequences that follow basically from exclusion (Thorat, 2007).

STATUS OF MUSLIMS IN INDIA

India prides itself on being a pluralistic secular democracy. It is often pointed out that India is home to the world’s largest minority. India’s 138 million Muslims are poorer and less educated and suffer from higher unemployment and greater mortality than other religious groups. It is unclear how far the government can go to improve Muslims’ status in a country that has been torn apart by Hindu–Muslim riots, and has witnessed acts of terror widely blamed on Muslims (BBC News).

Table 1 shows the community wise breakup of minority population in India. As per 2011 Census, the ratio of Muslims in total population is 14.23% which implies that total Muslim population in India is second after Indonesia. The states with large number of

Table 1: The Community-Wise Breakup of Minority Population in India as per 2011 Census

S.No.	Community	Population	Percentage of Minority Population
1	Muslims	17.22 crores	70.42
2	Christian	2.78 crores	11.37
3	Sikhs	2.08 crores	08.50
4	Buddhists	0.84 crores	03.43
5	Jains	0.45 crores	01.84
6	Others	0.79crores	03.23
7	Not Stated	0.29 crores	01.18

Source: The Report on Religious data ‘Census of India 2011’

Muslim population are Uttar Pradesh (38.4 million), West Bengal (24.6 million), Bihar (17.5 million), Maharashtra (12.9 million), Assam (10.6 million), Kerala (8.8 million), Jammu and Kashmir (8.5 million), Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (8.1 million). In Jammu and Kashmir and Lakshadweep, Muslims are in majority. There are 43 districts in Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Haryana and Uttarakhand where the Muslim population is substantial (over 30% of total population in most of these districts). Within these districts, 10 are in Uttar Pradesh, 5 in West Bengal, 4 in Bihar, 10 in Assam and Jammu and Kashmir, 2 in Jharkhand and 1 each in Haryana and Uttarakhand.

As per the provisions under the National Commission of Minorities Act, 1991, five religious Communities—Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Zoroastrians (Parses) have notified as minorities. Among all socially excluded groups minorities are shown very poor socio-economic conditions. Among minorities, Muslims are at the lowest level in all developmental indices though they have large population than other religious minorities. According to the Census 2011, 19.32% of our population belongs to minority communities of which Muslims constitute a large share at 14.23%. In absolute numbers, Muslims (172 million) account for 70.42% of the total minority's population of 193 million. Geographically, there is a large concentration of Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Maharashtra. Among the minorities, Muslims, especially Muslim women, need special attention compared with other communities they have remained socially, educationally and economically backward.

DEVELOPMENT OF MUSLIMS: AN OVERVIEW

As the well-being of the minorities has been a deep concern of the government. A high level commission to study their conditions was set up in 1980 under the chairmanship of Gopal Singh. The committee, in its report, concluded that the poor among the Muslims could not avail opportunities in education, employment and economic activities because of isolation and various historical factors. In view of this, in 1983, the Prime Minister's 15-point programme was launched to provide a sense of security to minority communities and ensure their rapid socio-economic development. This programme was based on these three points:

- To tackle the situation arising out of communal riots;
- To ensure adequate representation of the minority communities in employment under the Central and State Governments as well as Public Sector Units and;
- Other measures, such as ensuring flow of the minority communities under various development programmes, maintenance and development of religious places, waqf properties and redressal of grievances.

In 1989, an autonomous non-political, non-profit organisation Maulana Azad Education Foundation (MAEF) was set up to promote education among educationally backward Muslims in general and Muslim girls in particular, with a corpus fund of Rs. 100 crores. It undertook activities like establishing and expanding schools/residential schools/colleges/hostels, purchasing laboratory equipment and furniture, setting up/strengthening vocational/technical training centre/institutes; providing scholarships to meritorious girls' students; opening Maulana Azad Sadbhavana Kendras; (since discontinued) and announcing Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Literacy Awards.

EDUCATION

Table 2 shows that literacy rates among Muslims, both men and women, have been the lowest among all the religious minorities.

Table 2: Percentage of Illiterate People in Religious Communities in 2011

Communities	Females	Males	Total
All religious communities	44.02	30.24	36.93
Hindus	44.02	29.22	36.39
Muslims	48.10	37.59	42.72
Jains	15.07	12.14	13.57
Christians	28.03	23.22	25.65
Sikhs	36.71	28.68	32.49
Buddhists	34.40	22.13	28.16
Others	58.62	40.62	49.65

Source: The Report on Religious data 'Census of India 2011'

The Sachar Committee Report found that enrolment of children aged 6–14 years at all–India level was 85.3% for all communities. The enrolment figures for Muslims was lower (81.8%) than the national averages as well as relative to 'All others' (89.9%), but higher than SCs/STs (79.3%). The gap between Muslims and other socio-religious communities (SRCs) increase as the level of education advances. The literacy rate of Muslim girls is particularly low.

OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY

The Muslims and Buddhists both comprise 20% each of the cultivator category; Sikhs were highest at 32.4% followed by the Christians were 29.2%. The Sachar Committee Report clearly shows that due to limited land ownership, most Muslims are engaged in non-agricultural occupations. They are usually merchants, sales persons, shopkeepers, shop assistants, dress makers, transport equipment operators, tobacco prepares, tobacco products makers, dyers, machinery fitters, assemblers and precision instrument makers.

Being self-employed and often in unorganised sectors, they lack any kind of social security. Furthermore, Muslims have traditionally been engaged in skilled occupations like weaving, spinning, artisanship and tailoring. A large proportion of them are also street vendors.

HEALTH

The census data of 2011 indicate that Muslims have the highest sex ratio of any social group in the country (951/1000). However, among other minorities like Sikhs, who incidentally have better female literacy figures, the sex ratio is alarming (903/1000). Muslims have the second lowest infant and under five mortality rate of any SRC in India. Infant mortality is lower for Muslims (59) than Hindus (72), for every 1,000 births in 1998–1999 (NFHS-2). Muslims are, however, worse off than most other groups in terms of child under nutrition; for instance, Muslims children suffer from the second highest rate of under-weight children among all social groups. This can be primarily attributes to lack of access to Primary Health Centres (PHC) and Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) centres.

Violence against Muslim community is on the rise worldwide. India too has seen various instances of communal violence which lead to trauma and growing fear and suspicion in the mind of people. This is combined with economic and social backwardness that has resulted in the alienation of large segments of the population, many of whom belong to the minority communities. Provision of adequate social and physical infrastructure, economic opportunities, justice and counselling services are thus vital.

HISTORICAL BACKDROP OF VARIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPOWERING MUSLIMS

The Sachar Committee Report of the Government of India provided information on the social, economic, educational status of the Muslim community of India. With regard to education, it found that enrolment of children aged 6–14 years at the all India level was 85.3% of all communities (GoI, 2006). The enrolment figure for Muslims was lower (81.8%) than the national average as well as relative to ‘All others’ (89.9%), but higher than SCs/STs (79.3%). The gap between Muslims and other SRCs increase as the level of the education advances. Only one student out of every 25 undergraduates and 50 postgraduate students in premier colleges is a Muslim (GoI, 2006).

A Minority Commission was established in post-independent India in 1978, and subsequently in 1980. A high-powered committee was formed under the chairmanship of Dr V.A. Syed Mohammad. Later Dr Gopal Singh (parliamentarian and a noted diplomat) took over as the chairman with Khurshid Alam Khan as the secretary. This Committee

submitted its 119-page Report on 14 June 1983. This Report discussed the condition of minorities as well as other backward sections of our society. Dr Gopal Singh Committee made wide-ranging short and long-term recommendations, but the Report never saw the light of the day. Then in 1995, the Minority Commission on its own collected substantial amount of data and information which reflected the fact that the condition of Muslims was quite deplorable and their representation in jobs is much disproportionate to their population in various states. Again in 1996, a 12-member strong Sub-Committee of the Planning Commission while raising the concern over the deplorable condition of minorities observed that,

...the representation of minorities, especially Muslims, in the states and at the central level is disproportionate to their proportion and to correct the imbalance till now no specific action has been taken.

THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR MINORITIES RECOMMENDATIONS ON SACHAR REPORT

The Union Minority Affairs Minister, Shri AR Antulay, has stated that the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) has forwarded recommendations of Sachar Committee on the following five items:

(1) Education (2) Economy and Employment opportunities (3) Access to bank credit (4) Access to social and physical infrastructure and government programmes and (5) Public employment and recruitment procedures.

EDUCATION

1. Emphasis on providing a minimum level of school education by the State is necessary. Regular affordable school education that is available to any other child in India should be made available to Muslims in all localities. Primary education in mother tongue is equally important.
2. Access to government schools for Muslim children is limited. This is particularly in regard to girls for whom the non-availability of schools within easy reach hampers access to education at the primary level.
3. More schools for girls should be set up in localities of Muslim concentration, particularly for the 9–12 standards. This would facilitate higher participation of girls in school education. Induction of more female teachers, provision of hostels for girls and transport facilities would be helpful.
4. Institution of more scholarships for professional and technical courses would encourage students to avail in greater measure of opportunities in higher education.

5. Skill development initiatives for those who have not completed school education may also be particularly relevant for some section of Muslims given their occupational structure. The pre-entry qualifications for admission to ITI courses should be reduced to Class VIII. The scope of ITI courses should be expanded to focus on emerging market needs. The eligibility of such programmes should also be extended to Madras a educated children.

ECONOMY AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

1. Specific programmes for self-employed or home-based workers to provide skill, credit, technology and market support in backward districts are needed. These programmes should effectively combine modern managerial, technical and design skills with artisanal skills to create effective intervention strategies.
2. ITIs, polytechnics and other institutions that provide skill training to non-matriculates need to be located in backward and minority concentration districts.
3. Alternative mechanisms, including but not confined to micro financing bodies, should be identified and charged with the task of providing institutional support like market linkages, skill up-gradation and funding of trades being run by Muslims artisans.
4. The Small Industrial Development Bank of India (SIDBI) should set aside a dedicated fund for training for minorities under its Entrepreneurial Development Programme.
5. Imparting skills both to those who have completed school education, and those who have dropped out of school but have completed middle education, needs to be reassessed. Most existing technical training programmes require higher secondary education. Given the school completion rates of Muslims and the significant need for skill up gradation, provision of certain types of skill training after middle education may be useful.
6. Given the risky conditions of self-employed persons in the informal sector, especially the home-based workers, it is desirable to have a mandatory social security system for such workers.

ACCESS TO BANK CREDIT

1. Non-availability of banking facilities should be addressed on a priority basis by providing incentives to banks to open more branches in backward districts.
2. Economic empowerment of Muslims is necessary to ensure smooth flow of credit/micro credit and Priority Sector Advances. Steps should be taken to specifically direct credit, create awareness of various credit schemes, organise entrepreneurial development programmes, and bring transparency in reporting of information about provision of banking services.

3. A policy to enhance the participation of minorities in the micro-credit schemes of NABARD should be laid down. This should spell out the intervention required by NABARD and could be a mix of target and incentive schemes to enhance the participation of Muslims in micro-credit.
4. The practice of identifying the negative geographical zones where bank credit and other facilities are not easily provided needs to be reviewed to enable people to benefit fully from banking facilities in the light of government socio-economic objectives of inclusion.

ACCESS TO SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND GOVERNMENT PROGRAMMES

1. Public investment in infrastructure in Muslim concentration areas is urgently required to promote socio-economic development and access to public services.
2. A focus on backward districts and clusters where special artisanal groups exist will ensure a sharp reduction in disparities of access and attainment.
3. Central Government should introduce a few schemes with large outlays for welfare of minorities with an equitable provision for Muslims.
4. A periodic monitoring and assessment of welfare and development programmes, and the extent to which the benefits add to Muslims, is imperative. The monitoring mechanism should be multi-level and should have a civil society component. This would enhance public confidence.

PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT AND RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES

1. It would be desirable to have experts drawn from the Muslim community on relevant interview panels and Boards. This practice is already in fashion in the case of SCs/ STs.
2. The earlier Government instructions about the inclusion of minority community members in Selection Committees/Boards have either not been implemented or implemented inadequately. Therefore, an imperative need to reinforce these instructions and introduce a punitive clause for non-compliance.
3. Measures like undertaking a visible recruitment process in areas and districts with high percentage of Muslims, job advertisements in Urdu and vernacular newspapers and other media, or simple messages like ‘women, minority, and backward class candidates are encouraged to apply’, should be undertaken to promote participation in public employment.

HOW TO BRIDGE THE GAP?

A majority of the Muslims workforce is self-employed and engaged in artisanal work. These occupations have been under stress due to the radical changes in the economy. Development projects have also led to loss of livelihoods for street vendors, most of them are Muslims. As a result, deskilling is taking place and artisans and vendors are being forced to move to unskilled, informal work. The integration of economic and social inclusion needs to be taken cognisance more seriously than done by the current policy makers. Still a large proportion of Indian population depends on agriculture, ineffectiveness of distributive and welfare schemes, wide spread poverty and hunger co-exist with increasing income of those gifted with land and other assets. On the contrary, poor are suffering more with rise in inflation rate and their inability to use resources available through various schemes. The more capable groups are able to influence policies and their implementation in their favour and on the other side the poor minorities lack voice and influence. They also need to ensure basic minimum consumption and education to all sections of the population particularly to the minorities. Attention to minorities' welfare and their inclusion for the growth is very essential to bridge the gap between Have's and Have-not's in India.

CONCLUSION

Muslims are concentrated in location with poor infrastructural facilities. This affects their access to basic services like education, health facilities, transport, etc. Although there are many Sponsored Schemes and Central Plan Schemes available for the welfare of SCs, STs and OBCs. Such schemes for the welfare of minorities are very few, are inadequately funded and have not benefited many Muslims. Analysis of data has shown very limited participation in government employment and other programmes. Lack of access to regular salaried jobs, especially in the public sector, has been a major concern. The deficit in regular employment, especially in salaried jobs in the public sector or much larger private sector, needs to be corrected. It is imperative to increase the public employment share of Muslims particularly in areas requiring a good deal of public dealing. To achieve this, efforts should be made to increase the employment share of Muslims in teaching community, health workers, police personnel, bank employees and other similar professions. The marginalisation of Muslims in India has brought into focus the issue of affirmative action for Muslims by the state. There is a need for community centre mobilisation of Muslim to mainstream the community in India.

The Government's Muslim package is not sufficient. Indian Muslims still struggling for the due share in social and economic outlay. Muslims are more or less at the same level of backwardness as the SCs/STs and has not even given a hint of an alternative scheme

for positive affirmation to raise their level in government employment, higher education, etc. The integration of social and economic inclusion needs to be taken cognisance more sincerely and seriously than what has done by the policy makers.

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