

Research Article

Language and Vocabulary of Muslim Political Activism in the Post-Colonial India

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary political discourse, legitimating vocabularies have come to occupy an important place in capturing the imagination of the political structures and institutions. The language with which any social group voices the demands determines the public opinion about these demands and therefore their legitimacy or illegitimacy. This paper specifically focuses on the language of the demands voiced by the Muslim minority community after the inauguration of the Constitutional republic and argues that Muslim leadership has primarily failed in providing their demands with a legitimating vocabulary in which the demands should have been voiced. The leadership primarily argued in terms of an entitlement in the form of a fair share in the enterprise of the state instead of claiming the fair share as a democratic right of the community and informing their claims with the notions and principles of democracy, development, citizenship, rights, welfare, and a citizen-oriented public philosophy.

Keywords: *Identity, Muslim- Question, Minority, Backwardness, Rights*

INTRODUCTION

In the constituent Assembly, the claims made by minority groups representing their various demands contained a normative justification as to why their group

was more eligible or deserving of greater entitlements than any other group. The demands voiced by different minority groups carried a justification that they were more backward than others, more distinct from the majority in its cultural practices and so on (Bajpai, 2000). Therefore, the different demands voiced by the minority groups were particularistic in nature and scope and were marked by the specificities of culture, religion, caste, class and other social cleavages. The demands of Muslim masses and various Muslim pressure groups in the post-colonial Indian state for more share in the enterprise of the state for the Muslims, were often dismissed as 'Muslim grievances', or as a 'minority cause' (Hasan, 2001). This emerges as one of the most important factors for the persistence of the 'Muslim question' that was inherited by the Indian state into its post-colonial and independent era as one of the most important and contested issues that the modern India remains confronted with. If the issue has remained unwanted in rhetoric, for the problematic nature of the question has never been found wanting, it however remains equally strange in reality since the corrective measures in the form of policies and programs that should have followed such realisation, have been far from satisfactory. The Post-Colonial State has thus largely failed to answer substantively over the Muslim question as to how Muslims should be incorporated as the part of the Indian nation. On the contrary, 'Muslim grievances have increased but channels of protest have constrained' and as Noorani continues to say

till as late as 1961, any expression of their grievances was regarded as obscenity ... Emotional integration was surely not to be achieved by denial of the minority's handicaps (Noorani, 2003).

The grievances are, in part, a translation of their demands that have been made by them from time to time, and almost consistently refused to be conceded by the state. The consistent denial of their handicaps has led to an upsurge in their frustration and has more often reflected in the claims of discrimination, distrust, inequality, and denial of equality of opportunity against the other groups. Muslims in post-colonial Indian state have been persistently discriminated against in and through the shifts in balance between the competing notions of citizenship, and the 'Muslim question' continued to couch its presence as an issue of integrity so as to inhibit other, more critical threats to the integrity of the nation-mainly to restrain the lower and backward castes, or the poor, and to prevent an intensification of class unrest (Shani, 2010; Alam, 2003). The paper focuses on the demands which have been voiced by the Muslim community in the post-colonial Indian state. It primarily remains focused on the kind of language and vocabulary

constituting the articulation of the Muslim leadership in favour of the concession of these demands.

NATURE AND LANGUAGE OF THE DEMANDS

All the sectional demands voiced by Muslims into their post-colonial stint have reverberated in the discourse over Muslim question. The demands voiced by Muslims on the national level have always been made within the strict limits of the secular-democratic setup and the myriad concerns of national unity and communalism. In what can be called as the first of its kind in Independent India, the All India Muslim Convention held in July 1961 demanded what was due to them but were denied for the most part in the Post-colonial India-a rightful and proper place in the enterprise of the state and in the sphere of the national activities. This treatment, resonated the convention, accrued from a prejudice and an anti-Muslim bias that emanated from considering them as ‘foreigners’ or ‘aliens’. The convention symbolised the continuance in the prevailing frustration and dissatisfaction amongst the Muslims as the ‘symbol of the ill health of the nation’ (Noorani, 2003).

The obvious necessity of defining a proper place for Muslims which constituted the largest minority, was inextricably linked to the national integration because emotional integration was hardly possible if Muslims were barred from attaining a definite and proper place in the new state and prevented from playing their role in the sphere of national activities. Although, the convention refrained from reiterating any sectional demand like the reservation and didn’t outline any specific framework for attaining these goals, the convention however, suggested some electoral and Constitutional changes, which included:

1. The abrogation of the autonomy of the states and a strong central government that enforces its will through administrative subdivisions
2. All the Constitutionally specified fourteen languages should be given equal treatment and encouraged equally and discrimination against Urdu should be stopped.
3. Caste politics should be banned along with other unfair electoral practices.

The educational system should be devised as such that it inculcates patriotism and tolerance so that the new generation recognises cultural pluralism and is not hostile to a particular community (Noorani, 2003).

While the convention expressed its firm belief that the marginalisation and economic backwardness was the culmination of the prejudice among the people and

officialdom, it also suggested the Muslim community to indulge in introspection that allows it to free itself from the negative approach and ponders carefully over the causes of their backwardness (Ibid).

The convention finally passed some resolutions asserting that it remains the moral responsibility of the state to devise new ways and means by which Muslims can get their due share and allows them to participate in the economic progress of the country and finding a place in the matters of trade, industry and other national activities on the basis of mutual understanding. The resolutions broadly highlighted the need to evolve measures to achieve national integration, and minimise the communal disturbances, efforts for restoration of homes, and mosques to the Muslims and a general guideline for securing the adequate share for the community in services, trade, and commerce besides the protection of Urdu language and the establishment of Urdu university.

In continuance of the earlier Muslim activism, another convention-All India Muslim Consultative Convention was organised in 1964 on the grounds that the secular-democratic state had failed to redress the grievances of the Muslims and therefore Muslims should entrust upon themselves the task of securing and preserving their interests. The community, it was construed, had been subjected to 'manifold injustices and prejudices in the cultural, political, and economic aspects' and therefore the purpose of the convention was to evolve a redressal mechanism (Mahmud, 1964). It was reiterated in the convention that the hostility meted out to Muslims in the public sphere has prompted Muslims to isolate themselves from the social and political currents of the country and the need of the hour is to provide a leadership that connects to these social and political currents (Ibid). The convention expressed its concern about the rapidly growing Hindu nationalism that it believed was responsible for the deteriorating position and the increasing alienation of the Muslims in India (Ibid).

Once again, the convention refrained from making any sectional demand, but however, it did pass some resolutions to highlight the subsidiary demands and pressed for their redressal, which included among others the necessity of taking Muslims along in the national activities and integrating them with the nation at large. The convention also called for the efforts to bring about an immediate end to the communalism and the ongoing riots against the Muslims.

In order to create and sustain the pressure on the government and to bring to the notice of the government, the problems they are facing and their grievances and of

others, this convention established the All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mashawarat. The Majlis, it was construed, was formed with a purpose of bringing about better understanding and to promote unity amongst various communities and sections besides attempting to promote communal harmony and goodwill. Originally designed to act as a watchdog that Muslims as a community do not let themselves drift from the mainstream of the social, cultural, economic, and political progress of the country into the oblivion, the Majlis remained very active in the early years of its formation but failed to achieve any substantial results. To let their efforts come to fruition, the working Committee of Muslim Majlis-e-Mashawarat decided to constitute a new political party called Muslim Majlis on the grounds that Congress had failed to secure the interests of the Muslims and redress their demands. This new political party convened an All India Muslim Political Convention, which would setup an All India Muslim Political Consultative Committee that structurally was a federation of Muslim political organisations formed in the country during the last four years. The grounds were repeated in the resolution of the party which castigated the rightist and leftist parties equally in failing to help Muslims and instead, have only accentuated them. This organisation was instituted to serve as an 'authentic and authoritative forum', where political and other issues concerning the Muslim community and other minorities and other weaker sections could be addressed and discussed (Tyabji, 1967). Badruddin Tyabji while making his Presidential Address reiterated that, 'Political history of the post-Independence India had made it necessary that without such an effort, minorities will be unable to secure or even preserve their legitimate rights' (Ibid).

What emerges as important here is the fact that these conventions were organised by Muslims and could only gather some intellectual support from the progressive and secular non-Muslims. The secular solidarity which was intended to be set within the context of national conception during the Constitution making was lost in oblivion for much of the first three decades in Independent India since the civil society and other secular and progressive political parties largely maintained a distance, if not indifference, from seeking initiatives for the redressal of the demands of the Muslims and their proper upliftment. This secular solidarity came from a convention organised by Delhi State Council of the Communist party in October 1976. The Convention unlike other preceding Muslim conventions demanded a direct involvement of the state in the proper upliftment of the community and didn't pipe down its resolutions to a mere advisory character but demanded job reservation for Muslims in government services and public sector and the recognition of Urdu under Article 345 or 347 of the Constitution (Noorani, 2003). The general secretary

of the CPI Rajeswara Rao along with Mr. M Farooqi highlighted different forms of discrimination that the Muslims meted out particularly in the denial of jobs in the government and private sector services and regarded the redressal of their grievances as a matter of justice for the Muslim community. Reservation, it was construed, would make the discrimination against them highly improbable, and would provide an upward social mobility through the egalitarian currents contained in the mechanism.

Denial of jobs and denial of equality of opportunity represent few of the manifold grievances and redressal of the grievances; sometimes of denial of equality of opportunity and sometimes of insecurity that they live under, primarily constitutes the nature and scope of political activism among Muslims in India. The thread that knits together the essentials of their political activism, thus, resonates only between their demands upon the state and the redressal of their demands. Keeping with this kind of activism, Muslim representatives in the Parliament submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister in 1982, demanding certain effective arrangements for the security of the Muslims in the continuously vitiating communal atmosphere. The memorandum asserted that the communal forces were swelling rapidly and were gaining their ground against the secular forces and have penetrated deep into the political and administrative system (Noorani, 2003). The insecurity, that the Muslim community was subjected to, stemmed from the connivance of the administration with the communal forces that was responsible for the destruction of the property of Muslims and their places of worship (Ibid). The memorandum demanded the restructuring of police and intelligence machinery to provide an adequate representation to all the sections of the society that obscures the communal bias in the law and order machinery against a particular community and restores the security of the life, property, and dignity of the Muslim community (Ibid).

In response to the societal pressures from in and outside of the Muslim community, the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi issued a 15-Point Plan for the redressal of their grievances. The plan addressed, in part, the reservation demand by issuing a general directive to the central and state recruiting agencies to give special consideration to the minority groups in order to ensure their proper representation in the police and other public services. The emphasis, however, was more upon the security-related issues of the minorities including the security and safety of their life and property. This 15-Point Plan along with the Report of the Second Backward Classes Commission and Prime Minister's High-Level Committee could not stimulate any constructive restructuring of the public sphere and of the public services which

again prompted the Muslim community to fall back and keep going with the tradition of organising conventions to highlight their demands and grievances.

Within this galaxy of attempts to seek the redressal of their demands through conventions, the All India Muslim Convention organised in 1989 remains one of the most important and comprehensive charter of demands. The convention was unique in the sense that it went beyond conventional arguments and reverberated with some unconventional arguments, at least quite distinct and unconventional from the arguments, which emerged from the preceding conventions. This convention went beyond communal cleavages and reflected upon communalism as the product of a class struggle and attributed the growing Muslim marginalisation as its byproduct (Shaabuddin, 1989). The growing communalisation of the polity, Shaabuddin asserted, necessitated that Muslims move beyond their sectional demands like Protection of Urdu language, Muslim personal law, reservation in jobs. Although they are also important, he continued to argue, but the exigencies of time demanded that their focus remains on the secularisation of the polity (Ibid). The convention linked the struggle of the Muslims for the redressal of their demands with the larger democratic movement and suggested that the empowerment of Muslims lay not in the redressal of their sectional demands, which although have a role to play, but in the redistribution of wealth and power¹. The recent democratic movements, Shaabuddin continued to argue, fashioned an upsurge in favour of an egalitarian and welfare state that necessitated certain structural organisation of the society which the Hindu elites thought was detrimental to their interests. As an important instrument of their resistance, Hindu elites decided to take refuge in the name of religion and inject fear in the minds of common masses and seek the permanence of their power in the name of Dharma and Sanskriti and fashioned Hindutva as a veil that insulates them from these structural changes in the society and precludes their overthrow from the corridors of power (Ibid). Therefore, one of the most important arguments that the convention reverberated with was the need for the unity of the deprived groups in the fight for their rights and privileges.

This convention, as has been stated above, issued one of the most comprehensive charters of demands that included among others:

¹Ibid. He emphasised that the struggle of the Muslims should be seen as a part of the common struggle of the 85 per cent of the people against the elite minority of 15 per cent who dominated the state institutions like executive, legislature and judiciary which is why the society in India has been bereft of any structural change even after the Independence.

1. The overhauling of Constitutional safeguards with the grant of statutory status to the Minority Commission at the centre and in the states and establishment of such commissions in other states where religious and linguistic minorities together exceed 10 per cent of the population and of Minority boards in other states U.T's, besides, the introduction of the system of proportional representation in election at all levels.
2. The convention also called for political and administrative reforms that among others included the delimitation of parliamentary and assembly constituencies so that minority concentration areas are not divided and don't work to the disadvantage of the minority groups; the fact which was later duly recognised and recommended by Sachar Committee Report. The system of proportional representation which was recommended in the Constitutional safeguards were again reiterated but not as a system of election but as a convention for the nomination of the minorities as party candidates at elections at various levels in minority concentration areas.
3. The convention also emphasised upon the issues of physical security of the minority communities particularly Muslims and demanded the reorganisation of police and intelligence machinery with a representation for the minority groups that is commensurate with their population and the Constitution of anti-riot police force both at the centre and the state levels and around 50 per cent representation in that anti-riot force. It also demanded a ban on all the militant and extremist organisations and Senas and the display of force in public by private organisations.
4. As for educational promotion of Muslims, although, the convention didn't demand any reservation for Muslims in the educational institutions, it did, however, demand the establishment of primary and secondary schools and ITIs in all the localities by the government and demanded an active encouragement of the minority groups in establishing educational institutions by the government by issuing prompt recognition and affiliation to the established institutions.
5. Furthermore, the convention demanded the linguistic protection for all the minority groups by providing a recognition to all the languages that was declared as their mother tongue by at least one million people and their recognition at the state level as the additional official language of that state for specified purposes. The provisions containing linguistic protection demanded a special protection and promotion of Urdu language by demanding to establishment of

a Central University with Urdu as the medium of the instruction. It also sought the reorganisation of the bureau for the promotion of Urdu language as the apex organisation of the Urdu academies and institutions.

6. The economic development of the community constituted the highest preferences of the convention and therefore, demanded the implementation of the recommendations of Dr Gopal Singh Committee Report. In accordance with the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, it also sought the declaration of the whole of the Muslim community as a Backward community along with its other recommendations. The convention demanded a system of universal reservation in the public employment and higher education for all the social groups including minority and caste groups whose educational and economic level is below national or state average in proportion to their population. The due share in the economic enterprise that the convention defined in terms of government loan and bank credit, the allocation of surplus land and house sites in rural areas and public housing in urban areas, anti-poverty and self-employment programmes, and grant of dealerships under the public distribution system should be protected. Besides, the convention also demanded the equality of opportunity to all the districts in recruitment to large public sector undertakings such as police force, railways, army, and paramilitary forces.

Taking cognisance of the prevailing apathy towards Muslims and indifference of the secular and progressive political parties towards the demands voiced by them and hence, assuming that they have used Muslim community only as a vote bank, and finally, disillusioned with the secular and progressive political parties; two of the Muslim political parties of the South-the Indian Union Muslim League of Kerala and Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen of Andhra Pradesh felt the necessity of rallying around Muslim issues and initiated to constitute a Muslim political Convention at the national level called as Milli Jamhoori Mahaz. The justification to this convention flowed from the assertion that all the secular and progressive political parties had lost the mandate to represent Muslims who made use of the community to further their own interests while paying a lip service to their demands (Atif, 1998).

The growing Hindutva underpinning the swell of nationalism in India, particularly in the North, allowed the rightist forces to emerge as a second powerful block after the secular forces, making it imperative for the Muslims to unite and organise themselves and rally around a Muslim political party (Ibid). While it was possible for no minority group to emerge as a leading power wielding agency, it was however,

possible to emerge as a powerful force. The real objective of this political party was to emerge as a third block of power after the 'secular' and the 'Hindutva' forces in the country (Ibid).

The party, however, could not gather any political clout and the demands voiced by them in the form of resolutions that they passed including the demand for proportionate reservation in the services, legislatures, and the parliament passed into the oblivion. The formation of a political party of the Muslims was intended to introduce new trends in and widen the scope of Muslim politics and create a space for them in the sphere of national political activities. This, however, turned out to be largely elusive, for, the lack of political clout didn't allow the party a sustained presence in the national political arena. As a result, the bargaining process which the Muslim leadership seemed sanguine about entering into failed before they could even reach a bargaining position which ultimately compelled them to fall back and enter the familiar terrains of organising conventions and using these conventions for voicing their demands and seeking their redressal.

In the national convention of Muslims organised in 1999, the movement for the empowerment of Muslim Indians was launched. The convention highlighted the sharp decline of Muslim representation in the services, legislatures, and the parliament and asserted that this decline was responsible for causing a deep frustration and alienation among the Muslims (*Muslim India*, 1999). This alienation constituted an obvious necessity, in the interest of the community and the nation at large, of empowering them. The empowerment, resonated the convention, could only be achieved by the direct involvement of the state in the social, political, economic and cultural framework of governance (Ibid).

Therefore, the demand for reservation in educational institutions was once again reiterated in the convention. Besides, the convention also urged the government to establish more and more educational institutions that secure the legitimate interests of the community. While providing reservation to the community as a whole, a major portion was demanded to be earmarked for the backward sections of the community who have already been declared as 'Backward' and included in the category of Other Backward Classes. The convention also demanded proportionate reservation for the Muslims in various state services including paramilitary and police, public enterprises, autonomous bodies, judiciary, banks, and other financial institutions. The demand for the support to their business enterprises in the form of a continuous flow of credit so that the chances of surviving and competing in the market are enhanced was also reiterated. The convention also urged for a

special development plan for the Muslims and a monitoring system to ensure that Muslims receive proportionate share in various socio-economic development schemes and welfare programmes. The convention, although, refrained from demanding any reservation of seats in the parliament, legislatures, and other local bodies, it however, campaigned aggressively for the directives from the government to ensure their proper representation in the political institutions. It also appealed to the discretionary powers of the government and urged for the adequate nomination of the community to various commissions, Committees, boards, tribunals, and other administrative bodies.

Apart from the major sectional demands which, empirically or as an idea, have been purported to be associated with the peculiar position of the community in relation to the majority community and were considered to be representing the special interests of the community, essential for the reconciliation of their peculiar position with the new political and social order; Muslims in the new Indian state have widened the nature and scope of their demands and voiced them according to the exigencies of time and need and in accordance with the emerging contours of their social, political, and economic position. As a result, only few of the demands were reiterated and emphasised by the Muslim leadership which were considered as necessary for securing a proper place for the Muslims and empowering them in the social, political, and economic planes which in turn connects and integrates them with the mainstream social, political, and economic currents of the country. These demands which have persisted in the Muslim discourse since the inauguration of the Constitutional republic and have found mention in all the important conventions, memorandums, and have been reiterated time and again by Muslim community can, therefore, be briefly summarised as:

1. A proper share in the Public services and a general directive to that effect, securing a proportionate representation in the services that imparts a sense of active participation in the administration.
2. Establishment of educational institutions particularly primary and secondary schools and ITIs in minority concentration areas and an adequate representation with regard to admission in various educational, medical, and technical institutions and an active encouragement of the minority groups in establishing educational institutions by the government by issuing prompt recognition and affiliation to the established institutions.
3. Participation in the economic progress of the country and a place in the matters

of trade, industry and other national activities and integration with the nation at large.

4. Minimising the communal disturbances by putting in effective measures for suppressing the riots.
5. Restructuring of the content of text books, especially for schools and a strict ban on the communal publications that incite communal hatred against a community.
6. End to the discrimination against them and provision for equality of opportunity to be provided to them.
7. Restructuring of police and intelligence machinery to provide an adequate representation to all the sections of the society so as to inculcate a sense of security among the minorities and particularly Muslims and the Constitution of anti-riot police force both at the centre and the state levels and around 50 per cent representation in that anti-riot force.
8. Creation of department of minority affairs both at the centre as well as in the states under the direct supervision of the Prime Minister or the concerned Chief Minister.
9. Delimitation of parliamentary and assembly constituencies so that minority concentration areas are not divided and don't work to the disadvantage of the minority groups.
10. A special scheme for the Muslims that provides the artisans and craftsmen and the peasantry the government loan and bank credit at cheaper rates.
11. Proportionate share in the anti-poverty and self-employment programmes and a special development plan for the Muslims and a monitoring system to ensure that Muslims receive a proportionate share in various socio-economic development schemes and welfare programmes.
12. Support to their business enterprises in the form of a continuous flow of credit so that the chances of surviving and competing in the market are enhanced.
13. A general convention for the adequate nomination of the community to various commissions, Committees, boards, tribunals, and other administrative bodies
14. Defence of the life, property, and dignity of the Muslim community. (Muslim India 1988).

What emerges as important from these conventions, memorandums, and resolutions is that the demands voiced by the Muslims were always voiced within the myriad concerns of national unity and larger national interest. Their claims representing their various demands contained the normative justification that they were socially, economically, and educationally backward and this backwardness constituted a necessity of providing access to more and more resources to the community through the state's direct intervention that provides an anchorage to the amelioration of their social, economic, and educational status. However, what emerges as most important is the rebuttal to the accusation against the Muslims that they are unwilling to integrate with the mainstream and the larger national community. The demands voiced by them make it increasingly clear that the integration with the larger national community has occupied the paramount concern of the community and was reiterated and emphasised by the Muslim leadership on multiple occasions. Yet they refrained from allowing their adversities to penetrate deep down and get translated into separatism or organising for the revolutionary restructuring of the political order.

CONCLUSION

Within the liberal individualist paradigm, the particularistic criteria of the religion for the allocation of rights and resources is not recognised and therefore, for the Indian Muslims along this liberal conception of citizenship, the demands voiced by them were often dubbed as the emotional demands and hence intolerable. But a paradox emerges from the force of Anna Barbauld's argument wherein she asserts that a right should be claimed as a right and should not take the form of a request and to exclude certain people from civil office, from position, place, and influence is to deny those people their citizenship rights (Anna Barbauld quoted in Clarke, 1994). Therefore, while an argument from liberal individualistic paradigm is invoked to justify the rejection of a demand from a certain section of the citizens, the same paradigmatic force never gets invoked to constitute a basis for the redressal of their demands through policy alterations. This is to say, that within the paradigmatic lexicons of liberalism, if the exclusion of the people from civil office, from position, place, and influence constitutes the denial of basic citizenship rights to the people, their entitlement upon a community or their demand by a community which has hitherto been denied becomes a matter of right and should be seen in that particular context. However, the demands voiced by the Muslims were always made in the context of a due share in the enterprise of the state and never ever claimed as rights by them. That is primarily where the evolution or the determination of a

legitimizing vocabulary was precluded as the demand for the fair share in the enterprise of the state never took the form of claims but were sought as entitlements by the community leadership.

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