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Social Exclusion among Muslims: A Case Study of Aligarh Lock Industry

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines social exclusion among Muslims in Aligarh Lock Industry. Social exclusion has been defined as a process by which Muslims are deprived or denied access to satisfy their basic needs. It is also extended to education, employment, and health. Eighty per cent of Muslims in Aligarh are engaged in the lock industry. Majority of them are ajlaf. However, due to globalization, the lock industry is undergoing change. Products based on new technology, which is capital-intensive in an organized sector (as opposed to labour-intensive in an unorganized sector) are flooded with products at very low cost than the traditional Aligarh products. Consequently, the lock industry workers are either getting low wages against their work or losing jobs due to stiff competition in the market. This kind of market regulation is adversely affecting the marginalized section of the society. The lock industry of Aligarh is under tremendous threat from the Chinese locks. Artisans and small-scale entrepreneurs especially Muslims are not in a position to compete in the competitive market. The present state of the Muslim artisans and small-scale industry appear to be bleak and their future is uncertain. Many have discontinued sending their children to schools. On the contrary, they have started sending their children to work in the lock industry due to impoverishment and poverty. If adequate measures are not taken by the government to protect the interests of the Muslim Lock workers especially in the unorganized Lock Industry, thousands of skilled and semi-skilled workers and small entrepreneurs who are ajlafs will be reduced to the level of casual workers.

KEYWORDS: Ajlaf, Exclusion, Globalization, Lock Industry, Muslims

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines social exclusion among Muslims in the Aligarh Lock Industry. Social exclusion may be defined as a process by which Muslims are deprived/ denied access to satisfy their basic needs, education, employment, health, etc. Social exclusion is used here to mean the systematic exclusion of individuals and groups from one or more dimensions of society, such as structures of power and privilege, opportunities and resources (Radhakrishnan, 2009). Muslims of Aligarh may be categorized as ashraf (noble born) and ajlaf (mean and lowly) former claim to be the descendants of early Muslim immigrants, either, Sayyad, Shaikh, Mughal or Pathan, and later those of indigenous origin whose ancestors were converted to Islam.

Muslims form the largest minority in India and they are at over 138 million according to 2001 Census (GoI, 2006:29). Muslims of India have contributed tremendously in the evolution, development and transformation of society, culture and civilization of India. Their role in the freedom struggle of the country is unparalleled. This significant minority community has been reduced to the lowest socio-economic stratum in post-independent India. They have lagged behind (and are continuously lagging behind day by day) the scheduled castes in many walks of life. They are educationally most backward, economically poor and politically a powerless community of the country (Waheed, 2007:1).

Aligarh is a district of western Uttar Pradesh, situated in the middle portion of Doab, or the land between the Ganga and Yamuna rivers. The principle town in the Aligarh district for the last many centuries has been its headquarters, Aligarh, 126 km south east of Delhi. It is known till the 18th century by the earlier name of Kol. After the British occupation of Aligarh in September 1803, the present Aligarh district was formed in 1804 (www.aligarhdirectory.com/history.php).

BACKGROUND OF ALIGARH LOCK INDUSTRY

The history of lock manufacturing in Aligarh is interesting. In 1870, a gentleman from England established a firm Johnson and Company to import locks from England for sale in Aligarh. In 1890, Johnson and Company started the normal production of locks on a small scale by cutting the sheets and manufacturing it with the process of molding. Besides England, the locks made of sheet metal began to be imported from Germany for its sale in Aligarh (Saha, 2006:216). There are numerous lock works in the city, as many as 27 being in existence in 1907, and others are to be founded at Iglas, Hathras and elsewhere in the district. Two firms at Aligarh employ over two hundred hands, and one is a joint stock company, known as the Pioneer Lock Works and General Metal Foundry, started several years ago by Messers Johnson and Company; while the other is known as the sparking lock works. The locks are of a high quality, and are imported in very large numbers to all parts of India. Other well known firms are those of Nabi Bakhsh and karam Ilahi and of Hafiz Inayatullah and Abdullah. The output at Aligarh is estimated at about 500,000 locks per annum valued at Rs. 2, 76,000, Iglas works produced locks to the value of Rs. 30,000 (Nevill, 1926:6162). However, a real impetus to the development of the lock industry in Aligarh city came in 1926 when the Government of the country established a metal workshop to train artisans in lock making. Soon many artisans began manufacturing locks and its components at their homes with the help of their family members including children. Many families living in the adjoining villages of Aligarh city also took up this work out of their economic compulsions of insufficient income from agriculture. With this the lock industry spread to surrounding villages too. A majority of lock makers at that time were Muslims. With the partition of the country in 1947, most of Muslim master craftsmen are artisans migrated to Pakistan leaving a void and creating a slump in the lock industry. However, this situation did not continue for long. The Punjabi Hindus migrated from Pakistan to Aligarh soon realized the potential of this industry and started producing locks with the help of locally available skilled labour (Wahab, 2001:31).

In 1930, Johnson and Company and some small scale units started manufacturing locks from sheet metal by duplicating German locks. These locks, which were manufactured in Aligarh, are known as Aligarh locks. In 1950, Surendra Kumar an advocate by profession and the son of a barrister started manufacturing locks in a very systematic way by importing machines and techniques and even foreign engineers. However, this globally famous lock manufacturing unit has closed down due to family dispute. In 1975 when the company collapsed, the engineer, contractors, mechanics, labourers employed in this large concern setup their own small scale lock units. And now Aligarh turns to the biggest lock-manufacturing hub of India.

It is true that from 1950–1975, many Muslims made significant contributions in manufacturing of locks from share metals with the help of machines. Prominent among these were Jemco & Rose lock brands, which became very popular in those days. Around 1970, Aligarh manufacturers stepped into the fields of manufacturing locks for scooters and motors.

PROBLEM AREAS OF ALIGARH LOCK INDUSTRY AND MUSLIM WORKERS

Aligarh a town of western Uttar Pradesh is famous the world over for the Muslim University and the lock industry. Nearly about 2 lakh people are associated, directly or indirectly, with at least 5,000 lock manufacturing units. Majority of artisans in this industry are Muslims, whereas ownership of big manufacturing units and units and business houses are both of Hindus and Muslims. Muslim artisans manufacture about 80% of the locks of Aligarh. They are labourers and produce goods for big players. However, the industry has contributed to the economic development of Muslims in this town. It has also contributed significantly to the state and national economy (Saha, 2006:216).

1. **Lack of technological upgradation to produce locks for the global market:** Owing to conservative techniques of lock preparation and the unaffordable rate of higher technology lead the lock industry to cut a sorry figure in the international market. Owing to this technological barrier, the Aligarh lock industry

still focuses on lever locks, which is having less global demand.

2. **Poor Infrastructure:** To become a globally competitive manufacturing hub, the lock industry needs steady supply of electricity at an economic rate, which is missing in Aligarh.
3. **Corruption:** Corruption is the area of labour, sales tax, electricity and pollution has endangered this industry.
4. **Inconsistent Government policy and unprofessional implementation:** Aligarh was declared once as the Tala Nagri by the Chief Minister to make available plots for industrial purpose at low rates but later the government, from a different ruling party, sold the plots at a very high rate as if it were real estate business. Even the National Small Scale Industries Corporation, which was established with a view to promote the business of locks in Aligarh, did not add too much value toward this industry's development.
5. **Inappropriate market development plan:** As a manufacturing hub of 115 years, very less effort was made to increase the awareness of the Aligarh lock industry globally. Neither the government nor the industrialist has generated any systematic brand image development program. Apart from its innovative product development according to the consumers' needs, efficient distribution management to make the product available to the consumer needs serious attention.
6. **Non-availability of cheap finance:** High-end technology for innovative products, market development for global awareness needs money. This small-scale industry does not have adequate money or source of money with less interest rate to meet this need.

Apart from this low level of research and development, poor adaptability in changing situations, non-availability of technologically trained human resource, less concern on production cost, lack of access to technological information are the other reasons for dismal performance of Aligarh Lock Industry (Saha, 2006:217–218).

PROBLEMS OF ALIGARH LOCK INDUSTRY AND GLOBALIZATION

Manuel Castells (2000:71) defines social exclusion as "the processes by which certain individuals and groups are systematically excluded/barred from access to positions that would enable them to lead an autonomous livelihood with the social standards framed by institutions and values in a given context." Exclusion in the Indian context is complex, widespread and multi-layered. It may be the result of a lack of social and economic opportunity, as in the case of the urban poor, denial of legitimate social space thus causing social segregation and ghettoization, as in the case of the lower castes, or social insecurity, as in the case of Muslims. Exclusion may also be the result of the disappearance of well-organized industrial structures. Multinational corporations and their compradors in globalization have dismantled and replaced much local industry with business process outsourcing. In the process they have fragmented industrial labour and weakened the organizational ability and bargaining power of the working class. While social exclusion is an extreme form of vulnerability, it is also both a cause and consequence of it. Even as India struggles to grapple with this problem, the impact of globalization has made it worse. The globalization has added new dimensions to the vulnerability of India's downtrodden by exacerbating their social exclusion, and making large segments of other social groups also vulnerable and excluded.

All revolutions disrupt the traditions and customs of a people. Indeed, they threaten a people's very security, safety and even identity. The world revolution that is globalization in some measure threatens the security of every people on the globe. It is only to be expected that the impact of such disruption and threat exacerbates the conditions of groups that are already excluded, vulnerable and are at the margins of society (Radhakrishnan, 2009). This observation is particularly valid in the Indian context in general and Aligarh's context in particular.

Aligarh is on the verge of losing its tag of city of locks as several other cities have started manufacturing them. In addition, with several multinational firms entering this field, the lock industry in Aligarh is close to winding up. During the last 10 years this industry faced a sudden downfall and the present turnover is merely Rs 2 crore. The reason is obvious: Lack of facilities and help from the government. The Aligarh lock industries are still lacking modernization in lock technology and are reeling under incorrect policies of the government, heavy power shortage and a complex tax system of the Uttar Pradesh government. More so the business of locks in Aligarh, which had an out turn of Rs 850 crore and was exporting locks worth Rs 450 crore, is now losing its space in both foreign and Indian markets. From previously capturing 90% of the Indian markets, Aligarh now owns less than 50%. The exports, too, have been reduced to Rs 250 crore.

Vijay Bajaj, President of All India Lock Manufacturers Association and owner of Bajaj Locks, said: "The lock industry in Aligarh has suffered a setback owing to the liberalization policy of the government and the entry of multinational companies. Moreover, in Aligarh, the lock industry is still lacking in modernization and automation and it is still a labour-oriented industry."

It has been observed that some of the lock factories have been converted into hardware factories. According to the industry department of the Aligarh Muslim University, there are 5,000 lock factories in Aligarh. In these factories, locks are manufactured based on lever technology while in China and Taiwan, locks are manufactured using pin cylinder technology, which is cheaper and stronger.

According to Pramod Agarwal, industrialist and owner of Indian Die-casting, another factor for the setback of the lock industry was that they were running on self-finance basis. Owing to paucity of funds, Aligarh lock units cannot adopt modern methods of production (HT Correspondent, 2010: 2).

As a result, its exports are almost nil. The small industrialists associated with the lock industry in Aligarh are finding it hard to make a living. The industry, which has always provided secure guarantee, now finds itself on the edifice of insecurity (Jain, 2003).

India's Global Integration is devastating this Artisan Class

Outside Bangalore, Ramanagram an erstwhile center for silk processing—is a study in contrast to Bangalore's booming IT sector. When India lifted tariff restrictions under WTO obligations in 2000, cheaper Chinese silk flooded India, reducing the Muslim majority city to a ghost town as the silk processing units shut down. In Varanasi long synonymous for Indian women with beautiful silk saris 100,000 mostly Muslim Indian weavers have lost jobs in face of Chinese silk imports. Some of them have committed suicide while others have resorted to selling their blood for survival. In Aligarh, 100,000 Muslim locksmiths have lost jobs in the past few years in face of cheaper Chinese locks (Sandhu, 2006).

This is a well-known fact that wherever and whenever Muslim artisans, traders and entrepreneurs have achieved success in consolidating their economic base and started competing with non-Muslim communities, their economic base is deliberately demolished in frequently occurring violence. Some of the incidences of violence are so severe that they may appropriately be referred as pogroms against Muslims. During 1960s, 1970s and 1980s this violence did frequently take place in cities like Jamshedpur, Meerut, Aligarh, Bhagalpur, Moradabad, Bhiwandi, Saharanpur etc., which are known centers of Muslim concentration in handloom industries. "A Parsi Police Commissioner is credited by the Organizer, the newspaper of the RSS, with the following conclusion. A riot does not occur in a sleepy little village of UP, where all suffer equally, or in a tribal village of Madhya Pradesh where all live safely in their poverty. It occurs in Moradabad, where the metal workers have built a good industry or Aligarh where lock makers have made good or in Bhiwandi where power loom rivalries are poisonous. It occurs in Ahmedabad and Hyderabad and Jamshedpur where there are jobs to get, contract to secure, houses and shops to capture, and it occurs in Agra and Firozabad and in all other towns where economic rivalries are serious and have to be covered up with the cloak of communalism." To demolish the economic base of emerging Muslim traders and entrepreneurs appears to be the cause of many organized violences against Muslims. The case of Gujarat pogrom is the best example. Gujarat pogrom was not organized only for looting property of Muslims, raping their women and killing them in mass but also for their systematic economic boycott. Chelias and ghanchis, which have emerged recently as enterprising Muslim communities, were target of large scale violence. All dhabas of Chelias on National Highway No.8 and their hotels in Ahmedabad were razed to the ground. This was also the case with the lives and property of other enterprising Muslims.

Globalization is damaging the economic base of Indian Muslims. It is a process of making the poor, poorer and the rich richer. It increases the socio-economic gap between poor and rich communities.Therefore, as we have seen earlier, Muslims are becoming poorer and backward compared to Hindus. Many weavers of Banaras and eastern Uttar Pradesh have been forced to leave their occupations and migrate to different parts of the country in search of employment. This has happened because of the declining weaving industry due to globalization. Gautam has recorded the same phenomenon in the lock industry of Aligarh, which is under severe threat from Chinese locks. No artisan and small scale entrepreneur including Muslims are in a position to compete with products of other countries in the market. Therefore, the future of artisans and the small scale industry appear to be bleak. If adequate measures are not taken by the government to protect the interest of artisans and handicrafts, the rich heritage of Indian crafts would not merely be lost but also millions of skilled workers and small entrepreneurs will be reduced to the level of casual workers (Waheed, 2006:27–29).

Sociologists have shown that the potential for conflict peaks in a society when rapidly rising expectations are not met. It is quite possible that India, with its lethargic job creation in manufacturing and increasing conflicts along urban–rural and Hindu–Muslims axes will not be able to sustain a focus on reforms (Sandhu, 2006).

Two interrelated processes are taking place among the marginalized communities. On one hand, they are continuously being subjected to exclusion, deprivation and discrimination. On the other hand, they have been protesting against the oppression and exploitation they are subjected to and are asserting their rights to be citizens of the nation and members of the society like anyone else. It is these interrelated processes, which have led to identity formation and assertion among them. Various stakeholders need to realize this fact and align with the excluded in their struggle for inclusion and equity (Louis, 2008:12).

Child Labour as Manifestation of Social Exclusion among Muslims in Aligarh

Social exclusion manifests itself in diverse ways. All those who are poor are necessarily part of the socially excluded in a fundamental sense. Child labour connotes a major form of exclusion because it obstructs opportunities for self development, especially through education, but it also embodies other forms of deprivation as well (Nayak, 1994).

In Aligarh Lock Industry majority of child labourers come from the poorer sections of society especially Muslim community. Higher levels of poverty among socially excluded groups translate, as might be expected, into poorer levels of human development in terms of both health and education. Social exclusion and discrimination, a result of poverty, unemployment and ethnic and gender biases, are important factors that keep children out of school and force them to work. Among the pull factors, that combine with the prevalence of poverty in society, employers prefer children to adults not only because child labour is cheaper to buy, but also because the children are amenable to control, making them vulnerable to exploitation by profit-motivated employers. While the market forces are for greater labour flexibility and deregulation in the organized sector, the informal economy, largely unregulated by the labour laws, provides an ideal breeding ground for child labour. Such a market-based development strategy that promotes liberalization and globalization encourages cheap labour. In the Indian context, however, poverty alone must be the most significant determinant of social exclusion. Ending poverty and increasing excess to education are therefore crucial tools in the fight against ending child labour.

On the whole Muslims seem to be characteristically obscure due to social and physical distancing from the social, economic and political nucleus. They also have low personal esteem. The process and mechanisms of exclusion take mundane and subtle routes that often go unnoticed. Most of the Muslims are illiterate, they are mostly endogamous, wage labour and artisanship are the main source of income. Apparently, low dependency ratios because almost everyone has to work including children, relatively more nuclear and fractured families, high fertility and low health care utilization, low employment and wage stability are observed among Muslims. Their participation in public programs and utilization of publicly provided goods and services are substantially lower than the population as a whole. Muslims have been unable to find an adequate proportion of positions in Government machinery and public and political policy making (Mistry, 2005:413).

CASE STUDIES

Case 1: Zakir Ali, a 51-year-old man belongs to Alvi Bradari. He lives in Shahjamal along with his wife and four children. Earlier he used to pull a rickshaw but now he works in a lock's karkhana. He is suffering from tuberculosis. His monthly income is Rs. 1200 with an expenditure ranging between Rs. 50 to 60 a day for his treatment alone. Therefore, his income is not sufficient to support the family. That's why his wife also works in the same karkhana to supplement her family by the small amount of Rs. 700. Owing to financial constraints, she cannot send her children to school. The family lives in a single room, which is neither properly ventilated nor hygienic. They live below poverty line and the future of all the children is in the dark. The family is victim to high price rise.

Case 2: Afsana Begum, a 45-year-old widow, lives in Shahjamal one of the slum areas of Aligarh. She belongs to the Bhatiara community. Nowadays, this community claims the status of Sheikh. She is an illiterate and has four children. In order to supplement her family she started working in a karkhana after her husband's death. She involves in the work of pressmaini and earns Rs.800–900/- per month. Her eldest daughter who is just 13 years old also works in the same karkhana and earns Rs.400–500/- per month. The remaining other three children are not engaged in any work. She wants to send them to school, but her present economic condition does not permit it. Mostly she is unable to arrange for two square meals a day. As she is illiterate she is excluded from many governmental schemes for widows and she is unaware of bank loans, etc. She admits that economic reason is the only reason for her to push her daughter to work at such an early age.

Case 3: Naseema, a 35-year-old lady is involved in the lock making process. She is living in the ADA colony of Shahjamal with her mother-in-law, husband and two male children. Naseema's elder son Ghufran is 7 years and her younger one Imran is over 4 years. Both the children are malnourished and do not go to school. She hails from the Ansari caste.

She has been engaged in the work of the power machine for 15 years and earns only Rs.600/- monthly. Being a kidney patient she works on the power machine, which is very cumbersome and it adversely affects her health. Owing to lack of money she cannot get proper treatment.

Her husband Sulaiman is a 40-year-old rickshaw puller, and he owns a rickshaw. He earns around Rs.50 to 60 per day. However, being an alcoholic he does not go to work regularly. He spends all his earnings on his own addiction. They live in a single rented room, which is neither ventilated nor hygienic.

Case 4: Sattar Malik lives in gali (street) no. 4 of Shahjamal. He is 35 years old, and he belongs to the Teli community. His wife's name is Sameena, the couple is having six children, that is, five daughters and only one son. Among them two daughters Shabnam 10 years and Shahnaz 8 years are studying in a Madarsa because he believed that instead of modern English education, only religious education is the best for girls. He is involved in the work of talajadai (lock setting). His work depends on the Thekedar under whom he works. He earns maximum Rs.2000/- in a month only when all his family help him. The family lives in their own single room, which is kuchha. Owing to poor sanitation their room is filled with dirty water most of the time and he admits that his financial condition is the most important reason for his present state of affairs. Owing to lack of awareness and illiteracy, they couldn't adapt to the policy of family planning because they believed that more children means more income and less children means less income.

CONCLUSION

Tentatively, it may be concluded that in Aligarh lock industry majority of the workers are Muslim. They produce goods for others and are vulnerable to various forms of exploitation. The lock industry of Aligarh is under severe threat from the Chinese locks. Artisans and small-scale entrepreneurs especially Muslims are not in a position to compete in the competitive market. Among the Muslim workers of lock industry, poverty is so acute that these trained artisans did not have funds to manufacture their own products. Presently, the Muslim artisans and small-scale industry appear to be miserable and their future is uncertain. Instead of sending their children to schools many Muslims artisans prefer to send their children to work in the lock industry due to impoverishment and poverty.

Ongoing trends of globalization and liberalization, the economic conditions of Muslims workers of Aligarh are expected to worsen since only highly competitive and skilled individuals and industries are expected to survive in such an economy.

Although the government has devised and implemented various policies and programmes for improving the socio-economic conditions of poor artisans. So far they have not achieved desirable results. Economic and educational deprivation reduced the community's ability to seek relief from government development schemes. Meanwhile, the younger generation of Muslim lock workers of Aligarh is facing more economic hardship than their counterparts in any other community. Indeed, they become the poorest of the poor, unsure of their future. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the socio-economic upliftment of Muslim lock workers.

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