

Socio-Economy and Educational Status of Muslims in India

: An Overview

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Abstract : The topic describes the development among the Muslim community in their socio and economic status in India in prior time of country's freedom and after. Education is the only mechanism that enhances the process of social, economic, and cultural development of communities. Among all the religious communities, Muslims are in the least educated section of Indian Society. The backwardness among Muslims in comparison with non- Muslims in India have become a matter of concern at present. There are several reasons for backwardness of Muslims in India such as large family size, lack of link between madarsa education and modern education, economic poverty, negative attitude towards girl's education etc. The objective of this paper is to analyze the educational vision of Muslims in India. Education is the top most priority in Islam and hence to the Muslims.

Key Words : NSSO (National Sample Survey Office), Madrasa (Arabic term for Institute or school), KVS (Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan), NVS (Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti), NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training).

Introduction : The Indian Constitution is committed to the equality of citizens and the responsibility of the State to preserve, protect and assure the rights of minorities in matters of language, religion and culture. That is why our national leaders while framing the Constitution, emphasized the doctrine of unity in diversity. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National, Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities says that the promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to such minorities contribute to the political and social stability of the countries in which they live. Meeting their aspirations and ensuring their rights acknowledges the dignity and equality of all individuals and furthers participatory development. This in turn contributes to the lessening of tensions among groups and individuals. These factors are major determinants for stability and peace. All developed countries and most developing ones give appropriate emphasis to looking after the interests of minorities. Thus, in any country, the faith and confidence of the minorities in the functioning of the State in an impartial manner is an acid test of its being a just State. As the processes of economic development unfold, pressures are likely to build up and intensify when there is unequal development and some groups or minorities lag behind in the development process. Ideally, development processes should remove or reduce economic and social obstacles to cooperation and mutual respect among all groups in the country. If development processes are misdirected, they may have the opposite effect. It is this aspect which is important and needs to be addressed so as to give confidence to minorities. Since

Independence, India has achieved significant growth and development. It has also been successful in reducing poverty and improving crucial human development indicators such as levels of literacy, education and health. There are indications, however, that not all religious communities and social groups (henceforth socio-religious communities SRCs) have shared equally the benefits of the growth process. Among these, the Muslims, the largest minority community in the country, constituting 13.4 per cent of the population, are seriously lagging behind in terms of most of the human development indicators. While the perception of deprivation is widespread among Muslims, there has been no systematic effort since Independence to analyze the condition of religious minorities in the country. Despite the need to analyze the socio-economic and educational conditions of different SRCs, until recently appropriate data for such an analysis was not generated by Government agencies. There have been welcome change in the scope of data collection with respect to SRCs in the 1990s, which, in turn, has made this report possible. The current effort is the first of its kind to undertake a data-based research on the Muslims in India.

To understand the situation of the Muslim community in the country the Government of India constituted a committee under the chairmanship of Justice Rajinder Sachar a retired Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India. The Sachar Committee Report is based on an extensive study of factual data from different sources and it contains several well-thought recommendations to safeguard the interest of the community and to enhance its socio-economic conditions.

Educational Status of Muslim Community :

According NSSO labor force survey the education and economic condition of Muslims does not show any signs of improvement in India.

- The NSSO's 68th round (2011-12) provides estimates of education levels and job market indicators across major religious communities in India.
- The educational attainment of Muslims is the least among all these communities.
- In urban areas, the number of male Muslim postgraduates is as low as 15 per 1,000.
- This number is about four times lower than that of other communities, including Hindus, Christians and Sikhs.
- The number of male graduates among Muslims is 71 per 1,000, less than even half the number of graduates (per 1,000) in other communities.
- Similarly, the number of Muslims educated up to the secondary and higher secondary levels is 162 and 90 per 1,000 persons, respectively, again the least among all the communities.
- The average per capita consumption expenditure (used as an indicator of income) among Muslims is just Rs. 32.66 per day, which is the least among all religious groups.

According NSSO report –

- An analysis of the data on economic and educational indicators for various religious groups reveals that Muslims are facing a vicious circle of poverty.

- Poor achievement at higher levels of education is partly a reflection of similarly low levels of school education or of illiteracy.
- Around half the Muslim population over 15 years is either illiterate or has only primary or middle school education.
- Muslims have the lowest attendance rates and educational attainment especially in higher education, this can be explained by their income level and higher costs for post-secondary education.
- The signs of Indian Muslims being caught in a vicious circle of poverty are visible in terms of their low consumption expenditure and poor job market indicators, including LFPR, employment status, and worker population ratio.
- The sex-ratio for Muslims in both rural and urban areas showed a decline between 2004-05 and 2009-10.
- The average household size, in both rural and urban areas, for Muslims was higher than those of other religious groups, and the average household size was the lowest among Christians. The household size in rural areas was higher than that of urban areas for each of the religious groups.
- In rural areas, self-employment was the mainstay for all the religious groups. The proportion of households with major income from self-employed in agriculture was highest for Muslims (46 per cent).
- Among all the land possessed classes, in rural areas, proportion of households belonging to the land possessed class '0.005-0.40' hectare was the highest for all the major religious groups, which was more than 40 per cent.
- About 38 per cent of Muslim households cultivated more than or equal to 0.001 hectare of land but less than 1.00 hectare of land.
- For both rural and urban India, average Monthly per Capita Expenditure (MPCE) for Muslim household was Rs. 980.

The literacy rate among persons of age 15 years and above was the lowest for Muslim, for both the sexes in rural and urban areas. The proportion of persons of age 15 years and above with educational level secondary and above was the lowest for Muslims.

The current attendance rates in educational institutions were higher among males than females and also lower in urban areas than in rural areas. The current attendance rates in educational institutions among persons of age 0-29 years were the lowest among Muslims for rural males, rural females, urban males and urban females.

The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for male was much higher than female for all religious groups – the differential being greater in urban areas. The male-female differential in LFPR was the highest among Muslims. The LFPR for rural male, rural female and urban female was the highest for Muslims while that for urban male was the highest for Sikhs.

Work Participation Rate (WPR) for male was much higher than female for Muslim religious groups – the differential being greater in the urban areas.

Educational status of Muslim Women in India: Educationally Muslims comprise one of the most backward communities in the country. Muslim girls and women (female) lag behind their male counterparts and female of all other communities. According to census 2011, the literacy rate among Muslims (57.28%) was far below the national average (63.07%). The Muslim female literacy rate was (51.89%) below the Muslim male literacy rate (62.40%), census 2011. Apart from it, male-female literacy gap is also highest among the Hindu and Muslims.

Without empirical evidence, educational planning will depend on subjective and impressionistic views. This was highlighted by the 2006 Sachar Committee Report on Muslims, which observed that it was often believed, without data, that most Muslim children studied in *madrasas*, thus encouraging religious fundamentalism. The evidence indicated that far fewer Muslim children attended madrasas than believed — around 4% of those aged 7-19 and that most Muslim students attended government and government-aided schools.

A major contribution of the report was to highlight the paucity of data on Indian Muslims in general and their education in particular. Consequently, more official educational data was released, but glaring omissions and deficiencies persist in many government sources of information.

This includes the most recent compilation of the department of education, *Educational Statistics at a Glance, 2018*, which has continued with the post-Independence tradition of providing data for the general population, and separately for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), but excluding Muslims as a separate category. Muslims have also been excluded, and SCs and STs included, in the student enrolment data furnished by special government school networks run by the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS) and the Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS).

Muslims are also conspicuous by their absence in the National Achievement Surveys (NAS) of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). The most recent 2017 NAS evaluated the learning outcomes of about 2.2 million students in language, mathematics and environmental studies in classes 3 and 5, and tested social studies, science and environmental studies in Class 7. Like the previous publications, learning data was provided separately for SC and ST students. While now including Other Backward Classes (OBCs) too, the NAS Report excluded Muslims from its purview.

The importance of this type of learning data, enrolment and other statistics is highlighted by comparing the post-Independence educational trajectories of Muslims, SCs and STs. Educational statistics in colonial India indicated that Muslims were far ahead of SCs and STs in educational enrolment at all levels of school and higher education.

However, unlike Muslims, SCs and STs made educational progress in post-Independence India. The availability of data on SCs and STs allowed for special educational schemes to be launched for them. National and state planners and government agencies used a variety of educational indicators to track their quantitative and qualitative progress, thus enabling corrective action.

On the other hand, monitoring the educational progress of Muslims was hamstrung by the near-total absence of official data, and consequently, their inexorable downward spiral went

publicly unnoticed for decades. When official education statistics and the 2001 Census data on Muslims was finally made publicly available, the true extent of their “invisible” comparative decline was revealed.

Muslims have been the most educationally backward group in India. In comparison to their population, they have the lowest enrolment rates at elementary, high school and higher secondary school education, as well as higher education.

Since the official educational statistics have revealed for almost a decade that Muslims are the most educationally backward, it is unreasonable for the department of education’s *Educational Statistics at a Glance*, KVS, NVS and NCERT to continue to exclude Muslims from their purview. Though recent school and higher education reports — District Information System for Education and All India Survey on Higher Education — do provide data on Muslims, it is not comprehensive.

Socio-Economy :

There is sufficient data on how Muslims in India have experienced discrimination in terms of ‘access’ to equal opportunities and social amenities. From healthcare to employment, education and housing, studies have shown how the community faces barriers across the country, with limited state intervention offered to improve their living conditions. Even in areas of procedural justice and in terms of access to legal recourse, Muslims find it hard to get their voices heard.

A 2021 study by the Centre for New Economics Studies (CNES), while creating an ‘Access (In)Equality Index’, analysed the high degree of variance in restrictive access to basic social, economic and legal services amongst marginalised groups. Here, the indicators for Indian Muslims were found to be far worse than some of the other most discriminated groups (Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Castes). A 2019 report by Common Cause found that half of the police surveyed showed anti-Muslim bias, making them less likely to intervene to stop crimes against Muslims.

Now more than ever, there is widespread impunity for those who attack Muslims. Government-sponsored bulldozers are wrecking the homes of dissenting Muslim activists without any proper ‘due process’. Courts and government bodies are overturning convictions and withdrawing cases that accuse Hindus of involvement in violence against Muslims.

Previously, the Congress-led government commissioned in 2006 what was then termed a ‘landmark study’, [the Sachar Committee Report](#). It focused on India’s Muslim population. The report identified many inequities that affect the socioeconomic upward mobility of the minority community across India. However, the government failed to implement most of the Sachar committee recommendations during its tenure.

The literature on the economics of discrimination has developed along two main lines. I will mention only one aspect, which is more critical to our story’s focus here. A greater part of the academic literature explores the effects of discrimination by different economic agents on the workings of a competitive economy. Products may not usually bear the ethnic label of their producer. Similarly, a Muslim tailor’s work may not be clearly reflected in the ‘labelling’ or ‘branding’ of the finished apparel product (say, a stitched shirt or a trouser).

However, this is not the case in ‘factor’ markets, ie, access to land, labour, capital, entrepreneurship and technology.

In the context of India, too, academic studies documenting the explicit costs of political, social and economic discrimination against Muslims are well-documented in terms of how such acts of discrimination have directly affected their own livelihoods, from a labour or factor market perspective.

Most of India’s Muslims work in the ‘informal’ economy. It is worth emphasising how any economic discrimination against them will affect not only the 80% of the Indian Muslims working in the informal economy but also the entire Indian labour market as a whole, 85% to 90% of which is broadly based in the informal, vulnerable employment-economic landscape. The informal economy is deeply entwined and feeds into the overall functioning of the formal, organised economic structure.

Nearly 85% of wage workers among Muslims are still employed precariously without any ‘written contract’, according to the 2019 Periodic Labour Survey Data. More than half of the workers in the Muslim community are engaged in self-employment, and another 25% of their workers are engaged in casual work.

Recent attacks on Muslim street vendors are markers of a deepening political polarisation and attempts at further economic marginalisation of informal workers of the minority community. Poor institutional networks to enable unionisation amongst minority populations have further made it difficult for Muslims to voice their concerns.

While conducting fieldwork in the aftermath of the riots in Northeast Delhi in 2020, our Centre’s research team analysed how the targeted Muslim community, even after the riots, was facing systemic discrimination in getting access to rehabilitation funds, seeking rental accommodation.

In a recent set of academic studies, articulated in an article by *Article 14*, evidence from both quantitative analysis and qualitative fieldwork in the National Capital Region of Delhi shows that Muslims and Dalits face the worst residential segregation in Indian cities, relegating them to spaces with poor public services like piped water and sewage.

These latest findings are in line with other studies that find Indian cities to be defined by segregation based on ‘caste’ and ‘religious’ identity.

Conclusion :

Muslims are the largest religious minority community in the country. Half of the Indian Muslims live in India's 'Hindi heartland'. The community has long history and a rich heritage. It has immensely contributed in the development of Indian society, economy and civilization. But still they are the most backward community in the country. Though in recent past India has achieved success in all fronts but Muslims are unaffected by the process of economic development. We have analysed some of the indicators of their recession in to backwardness and had a comprehension of the fact that the socioeconomic weakness of their vast bulk prevents them from catching up with the rest of their countrymen. In other words, we can say that this backwardness narrows down their world view, sets limits to their aspirations, subjects them to exploitations and external manipulations, pushes them towards social,

economic marginality, puts serious impediments in their constructive endeavour and leads a sizable number of their members towards poverty and disorganization. The country does not have enough empirical data about the socio-economic and educational problems of the Muslims. But there are few studies are available on Muslim done by government organisation, individual researcher and non government organisation.

What should the government do to remedy this? First, review all official publications including the Census, and publish data on Muslims that is made available for SCs and STs. This includes statistics on enrolment, learning, examination results, provision of facilities/scholarships in all central and state reports, which would assist in tracking the educational progress of Muslim students, at all stages and networks of school and higher education. Institutions such as Unicef, Unesco and the World Bank should also be urged to follow suit in the reporting of data.

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