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BACKWARDNESS OF INDIAN MUSLIMS: PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

This article discuss the debates and discussions on the issue of backwardness of Muslims in India. All these debates and discussions are mainly centered on the question of regional and intra group differentiation among and within the Muslims. Paper also analyze the various reasons for the educational and economic backward ness of Muslims and to look into their problems through empirical realities, rather than conventional understanding.

KEYWORDS: Muslims, backwardness, minority

INTRODUCTION :

The review of literature intends to summarize the debates and discussions on the issue of backwardness of Muslims in India. All these debates and discussions are mainly centered on the question of regional and intra group differentiation among and within the Muslims. They largely sought to revisit the erstwhile arguments advanced by some scholars and colonial administrators. Paper also tries to analyze the degree of modernization and its various obstacles proportionately related to educational achievements and economic role of Muslims. After the independence, the studies on Indian Muslims received great attention and became one of the most important concerns for Academicians and research scholars, considering the relative socio-economic position of Muslims.

These studies have absorbed and relied greatly on the earlier views and ideas that could not capture the ground level realities of the Muslim communities. New approaches have grown out of these filed studies entitled to address on the question of under representation of Muslims in various spheres. These approaches have given more thrust on empirical realities, rather than conventional understanding. Given to this context, here makes a more realistic attempt to summarize the debates and discussion that have evolved out from field experiences of various studies.

India is the second largest Muslim populated country in the world only next to Indonesia and Muslim community is the largest minority group in the country (13.4% as per the 2001 census). When compared to other communities in India, Muslim communities are one of the most deprived sections lagging very much behind in terms of various human development indicators. Indian governments had appointed few commissions and committees to look into the socio-economic conditions of the minorities in India such as Gopal Singh committee (1980), Sachar committee (2006) and Ranganath Mishra Commission Report (2007). And all these committees have summarized that the condition of Muslims in India is pathetic and requires immediate attention. These studies and reports have affirmed that Muslims in India is a minority not only in numerical sense but also in terms of their socio-economic status and educational and

employment positions. Indian Muslims are deprived of social opportunity, because of lack of access to education, healthcare, employment and other public services.

The recent and much discussed Sachar committee Report (2006) shows the present pathetic condition of Indian minorities in general and Muslims in particular across the areas of education, economy and standard of living, health care etc. The literacy rate of Muslims in India is 59.1 percentages (Male 68, female 50.1), which is below the national average of 64.8 per cent[2] . The Muslims are the only religious group with low literacy rate in India. The NSSO report says that, 25 percent of the Muslim children in the 6-14 age groups have either never attended schools or are dropped out (Sachar Report 2006: 58). While the enrolment rate of SCs and STs in the educational institutions are relatively very high (95 percent), the Muslim representation is only restricted to 65 percent, which is lower than the average. Hasan and Menon (2005:26) in their study have found out that, in the year of 2000 there are 48 percent of the Muslims in rural areas and 30 percent in urban areas who could not read or write among the age group of seven and above, while it is 44 percent and 10 percent respectively among Hindus. This poor performance continues in middle schools, secondary schools and followed by higher secondary institutions[3] . In most of the areas the Muslim representation is deprived than the SC/ST students and particularly in the premier higher educational institutions such as IIMs and IITs.

Educational attainment and economic conditions are closely related. The economic backwardness of the Muslims is clearly reflected in their employment pattern in central and state government jobs as well as in private and public sectors. The majority of Muslim population in India earns their daily wages through self-employment (61 percent compared to 55 percent of Hindus) rather than via regular or salaried jobs (Sachar Report 2006: 91). In the field of employment their representation is only 4.9 percentage in state level and 3.2 in national services. Among these, 98 percent of the people are working in lower positions and grades in the departments like railway, bank, postal services etc. According to the Sachar committee report as against the population of 13.4% the share of Muslims in state employment is 6.3%. Their overall presence in public sector under group 'A' posts is 7.2% and in group 'D' post is 10.9% (SS. Gill 2008:115).

The standards of living for Muslims are generally poor and pathetic when compared to other communities (Sachar Report 2006: 39). Nutrition condition is worse among Muslims especially children of below 5 (Sachar Report 2006: 178). Because of the low age at marriage and the low use of preventive methods the fertility rate is high among Muslims. A survey by the National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) said that three out of every 10 Muslims were below poverty line and lived on less than rupees 550 a month in the year 2004-05.

Muslims in India are one of the largest socially and economically backward minorities, and the problem get further complicated when it is realized that the Muslims, as popularly believed, are not a homogeneous community but are horizontally and vertically divided into various regional and cultural group on one hand, and into castes and classes on the other (Engineer 1985:1). One of the reasons cited in earlier studies for the backwardness of Indian Muslims was that they are homogeneous and monolithic communities. This crude way of understanding could not be able to explain the actual status of Muslims. These arguments were put forwarded by many academicians in their understanding of Muslims like Ernest Gellner(2000). However, later it was understood from the empirical studies that Muslims are not homogeneous communities, rather heterogeneous communities[4] . They are horizontally and vertically divided into various regional and cultural groups. Despite of its religious egalitarianism, heterogeneity and inequality are the striking features of the Muslims in the present society.

Francis Robinson well explained in his book *'separatism among Indian Muslims'*, the divisions among the Indian Muslims. He started with the basic difference between the two major groups of Muslims called *Sunnis* and *Shias*. The Sunnis are theocrats, who believed that church and state should be one, and *Shias* wanted both to be separated. The Sunnis are again divided into groups based on their various schools of thoughts followed by their ulemas[5] . He further argues that Muslims are treated as a monolithic bloc but they are mainly divided into two major ethnic groups such as *Ashrafs* and *Ajlafs*[6] . The Ashrafs are again divided into Syeds, *Sheikhs, Mughals* and *Pathans* (2008: 24-5). Thus, it is clearly palpable that caste hierarchy system is prevalent among Muslims.

There is an interesting point suggested by Hasan and Menon (2004) that the heterogeneity of Muslim

communities is invisible in the society and noted that neither Hindus nor Muslims are seen as a collective entity and confirmed M. N. Srinivas'point that Caste system is prevalent among all religious communities in a distinct form. But there is no official recognition and practice of caste among Muslims as among Hindus. For more, Francis explained in his book that inter-caste marriages are common among Muslims between the four groups of the Aahrafs and even happened with the groups outside of the Ashrafs category (2008:24).

Muslims are sociologically most significant minority and rather than their numbers many other socio-political factors are also turned those as significant because once the Muslims were the rulers of the land, centre of the partition of the country, victims or elements in major riots. Jayaram (2012) raises an important point that the Muslims are different from other minority groups in the sense that they may be minority by will or force. Due to their minority status and growing insecurity feelings, they do not want to be assimilated into the mainstream society. The Indian Muslims, as argued by Jayaram, seek to secure their cultural and religious identity (Jayaram 2012 and Nita Kirmani 2013).

The Muslims response to socio-economic and political problems varies according to their group such as religious, regional and cultural, so the interest has to be carefully studied in this light in order to confirm to empirical approach and to avoid a prior assumption (Engineer 1985:1 and Hasan and Menon 2005). Engineer argues that the problem of Muslims in India has its own history, in order to understand this one has to begin from the post mutiny period, when the development began to take place with the consolidation of British rule and it's unleashing of new forces which brought about sharp conflict between two major communities-Hindus and Muslims. Indian Muslims suffer from a sense of insecurity and they are obsessed with the feeling of threat to their identity and consequently and some consequential issues as we shall see centre of their emotional upsurge (1985:2 and 269). Because of the spatial or historical situations in which it is located, Indian Muslim groups have a different set of problems and prospects to deal with.

Jayaram (2012) and Ausaf Ahmad (1993) further argues that very small sections of the Muslims are engaged or look forward for government jobs and came through higher education. The projection of the problems of this small section of the community as the problems of the entire community is therefore held to be unjustified. Some scholars have mentioned certain reasons for the backwardness of the Muslims- religious traditionality and backwardness and psychological crisis of their identity mainly after partition and other reason are the deliberate neglect and discrimination against Muslims by the larger society. It spreads some lights on reality and none of them have focused on the core reasons of the problem. Jayaram emphasize that the root of the problem lies in the shaping of Muslims as a minority and the socio-economic structure of the Muslim community.

The Muslim minorities always face the feeling of marginalization, alienation and insecurity and there is a common mislead notion that Muslims are more prone to violence than Hindus and less educated. The construction of Muslim identity can be seen as a defensive response to these marginalization and insecurities. Construction of neighborhood and relationship is based on the production of identity; in this basis they always like to be in an exclusive Muslim neighborhood area which will be mainly away from the mainstream area and it affects their opportunities from modern education and employment opportunities etc. They always try to keep a Muslim outlook with traditions and culture and unified Muslim identity around the symbols of Islam (NidaKirmani: 2013).

Engineer pointed out two main factors which prevent the Indian Muslims from the process of social change or modernization, are the backwardness and the minority status of the Muslim community. They are minority not only in numerical sense but also in their socio-economic condition, and which makes them minority with in minority in India. Engineer argued that there are other reasons too like lack of security, being subject to partition, oppression and exploitation etc keeps them away from the main stream modernization process and moreover make more backward and more minority feelings (1985:261). The impact of British rule and subsequent partition has further enhanced their religious awareness (Lehri 1997:21). After the partition of India a mass scale number of Muslims migrated to the newly formed state called Pakistan. They were mainly the educated middle class, upper class Muslims, Muslim professionals, engineers, doctors, lawyers, technicians, bureaucrats, university and bank professors etc (Ausaf Ahmad 1993: 37 & 87). In this case the lack of leadership

and guidance is also became one reason for their backwardness.

The state of backwardness among Muslims during the past many years has developed a rigid social attitude and as a very self conscious community. It prohibits them from moving with the changing times and thereby significantly affecting their economic prosperity (Halan 2007:166). The partition and followed by the centuries of insecurities turned them back the Indian Muslims away from the very forces of English and western education, science and modernity, modern science and technology etc that would have helped them to cope up with the changing world (JS Bandukwala: 2006, Ausaf Ahmad: 1993 and YC Halan 2007).

Jayaram points out that the hostile attitude towards modernization, western education, Muslims' personal laws, religious orthodoxy, etc act as barriers to development of Muslim community as a whole. As was explained earlier, the forced minority status increases the insecurity feelings among the Muslims. In turn, this insecurity feeling does not allow them to be assimilated into the dominant society. This is the reason as to why the members of Muslim community could not able to improve their position and catch up the opportunities provided by the changing economy.

The lack of own community educational institutions is also turned as a main cause to stop them from embracing the modern education. Other communities could develop their own educational institution meant to acquire advanced education and knowledge. They are spending comparatively good amount of income for education than any other sector. Some of the Arab countries are donating money to various institutions of Muslims. Unfortunately again major share of these donations are utilized only for building mosques or establishing religious educational institutions. It can be utilized to run modern educational institutions for Muslims (Lehri 1997:321). Lack of proper leadership and organization are the main reasons for this 'development' without desirable results.

The discussion has brought out the major factors for the backwardness of Indian Muslim Community with a more meaningful and realistic view. For further understanding and ascertainment, one should look at the historical contexts, regional aspects, socio- economic conditions, differences in ideologies and theories and other social and cultural factors of Muslim community, rather than simply focusing more on religious constraints alone. Muslim community should be located based on their specific social, historical geographical and economic location.

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1.For more details see Sachar committee report (2006).
2.ibid 60-68
3.Jayaram: 2012, Jairath: 2011, Hasan and Menon: 2004, Sushila Jain: 1986 and Ausaf Ahmad: 1993.
4.Francis Robinson: 2008
5.ibid

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