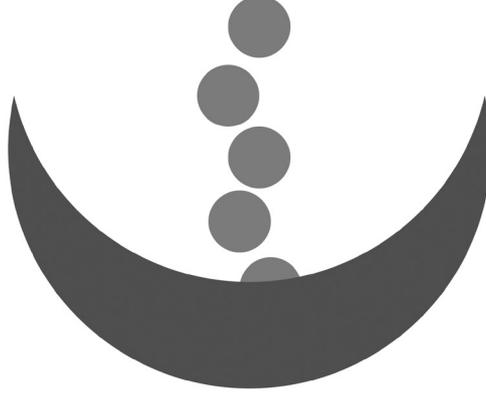


# IISS INTERNATIONAL ILEM SUMMER SCHOOL 3



## SOCIAL JUSTICE AND POVERTY IN MUSLIM WORLD PROCEEDINGS

ORGANIZERS



SUPPORTERS



# Muslims in the Twenty-first Century: An Analytical Study of the Socio-Economic and Educational Status of Indian Muslims

Muhammad Yaseen Gada\*

**Abstract:** India's Muslims, over 177 million, represent the world's third-largest population next only to Indonesia and Pakistan. In India, they constitute about 14.2% of total population and are the second-largest religious community in the country. Nevertheless, Indian Muslims are backward socially, economically, educationally, and in power politically. The present paper attempts to analyse, from the available data, the Muslim backwardness especially in education and employment. Various socio-economic indicators reveal a dismal picture: show Muslims are systematically deprived of their rights and are stuck at the lowest socio-economic stratum in relation to other minority religious communities in India. The paper, hence, suggests various community initiatives through economic betterment and educational advancement—religious and modern—critical thinking, proper awareness and positive engagement and management as the key remedial measures to alleviate their backwardness'. It concludes that owing to their significant numbers, the well-being of Indian Muslims place great implications for the overall well-being of Indian society in particular and for the Muslim world in general.

**Keywords:** Backwardness, Discrimination, Muslim, Socio-Economic, Education, Employment.

## Introduction

Today the (minority) Muslim societies all over the world are in a deep crisis; with all their institutions social, economic, political, educational regarded as the important indicators to measure the well-being and development level of any society, or, rather, a civilization show a dismal picture. Data of the various human development indicators—health, literacy, poverty, employment, infrastructure, access to technology to name a few clearly portray Muslim backwardness or their lagging far behind compared to other religious communities of the world.

In the past, Islamic Civilization was considered to be the most advanced, tolerant, prosperous, progressive, or rather, a commonwealth Civilization in the world. This was mainly because of their accomplishments and commitments practically in all the disciplines of knowledge. Islam is the first religion that democratized knowledge and inde-

\* PhD Student, Aligarh Muslim University, Islamic Studies.  
Correspondence: myaseenm2@gmail.com

pendent inquiry. However, after 16th century AD, the situation changed drastically. For, "learning and inquiry was no more the motto of the Muslims with the result that today they occupy the lowest position in the ladder of the world. They are educationally backward, scientifically marginal, politically insignificant and economically poor", and, "this is the present status of the entire *Ummah* amongst the comity of nations" (Farooqi). Furthermore, it has been observed that there is not a single Muslim minority which is richer than the majority among whom it lives (Siddiqi 1997). On the other hand, it has been claimed that "in most of the countries where Muslims live in substantial numbers [like in India] they are generally poorer than the non-Muslims", and that "the African, South Asian, and East Asian countries with large Muslim minorities tend to be poorer than the mostly Middle Eastern countries with Muslim majorities" (Siddiqi 1997; Kuran 2004, p. 123). Why Muslims are so backward? Would it continue to prevail? If not! Then what are the remedial measures to improve the Muslim backwardness especially the India Muslims. These are some of the important issues often raised by the Muslim intellectuals and scholars particularly.

### **Muslims in India**

India is the second-most populous and the seventh-largest country with over 1.2 billion people (GOI 2011). It is a multicultural and multi religious country. Muslims, presently accounting 14.2%, have been living in India since the dawn of Islam (Avari 2013, pp. 17-20). History bears testimony to the fact that despite being a minority community, Indian Muslims have played a crucial role, "in nurturing and upbringing this country, its beautification, construction and development". Moreover, "Muslims gave this country arts and sciences, culture and civilization and nurtured it with their blood and toil. They have been equal partners along with other nations in introducing this country on the world map" (Siddiqi). However, when the process of colonialisation of India by the British colonial powers started in the eighteenth century (Berglee 2012), Muslims bore the brunt first from the colonial cruelty, oppression and discrimination, and now, indeed since independence, the fanatical Hindus, inimical to the Muslims', continuously suppressed and discriminated against the Muslims (Siddiqi). Thereby, the Indian Muslim community got a sense of insecurity, frustration and uncertainty since independence and partition (Najiullah p. 21). Broadly speaking, Muslims of India are struggling with a two-pronged challenge: state's antipathy and Muslim weakness.

### **Issues and Problems**

Indian Muslims, like other Muslim minorities over the world, face three main issues, views Mohammad Nejatullah Siddiqi (b. 1931), a renowned Islamic scholar and an expert on Islamic banking and finance. The issues are "poverty, threat from major-

ity chauvinism and their role amongst their people, the larger society to which they belong" (Siddiqi 1997). For Nejatullah, poverty is the basic and main cause of Muslim backwardness and, he adds, "approximately one-fifth of Indians are extremely poor, and about half of them are Muslims". Despite India's extraordinary economic growth for the last two-decade or so, it is leaving behind its largest minority (accounting 14.2%) which, according to Muqtedar Khan (the Indian-American political scientist at the University of Delaware, USA), not only enjoy a lesser share of these gains but their relative economic conditions compared to other religious minorities has suffered significantly in spite of spectacular national growth (Khan, 2015). Thus, many concern that poverty amidst increasing prosperity is the most visible problem for India in the early twenty-first century (Siddiqi 1997); and furthermore "no country can boast of development if its sizeable [like Indian Muslim] minority lags behind" (Engineer). Obviously, the socioeconomic marginalization and discrimination of such a large section of Indian society should be a matter of concern for all (Sikand 2006).

### **Employment and Education: Twin Pillars of Socio-Economic Well-Being**

Employment and education are considered the two key sectors on which economic well-being of a community can be judged. Given that, after an increasing realization from the Muslim community about the growing need to focus on the economic and educational concerns of the Muslim community of India, the Prime Minister of India, in March 2005, appointed a High Level Committee under the chairmanship of Retired Justice Rajinder Sachar to inquire into and to prepare a detailed report on the social, economic and educational status of the Muslims of India. The Sachar Committee's report (Sachar 2006) is particularly interesting in that it was probably the first comprehensive analysis of the conditions of Muslim Community by using large scale empirical data, and that it compares the Muslim status with that of SC/STs and OBCs and provides conclusive evidence on the precariousness and vulnerability of Indian Muslims in various dimensions including education and employment. Its conclusions are as valid today as they were a decade ago (Avari 2015, p. 13; Basant 2012, p.3). The data suggests that the correlates of Muslim participation in education and employment are complex and multidimensional. Therefore, an analysis of these two indicators would reveal the Muslim deprivation in India more clearly than other indicators.

### **Employment Patterns and Working Conditions of Indian Muslims**

Employment provides an individual means to sustain and to satisfy the basic needs, comfort and leisure of day-to-day life. According to the estimates provided in the Sachar Committee report, which show that, except in urban areas, there is generally lower aggregate worker participation by Muslims, particularly by Muslim women. It reported that the worker population ratio/rate for Muslim women in the 15 to 64

years age range was a mere 25%, while for women belonging to SC/ST groups in the same age range it was 44% (Sachar, p. 90). Muslims, overall, experience low mean per capita consumption expenditure and higher incidence of poverty than all SRCs (socio-religious communities) except SCs/STs (Basant 2012, p. 19). As compared to other SRCs, a majority of Muslims are self-employed rather than holding salaried or waged employment. For example, in 2004-5, in urban areas, 57% of Muslims as opposed to 43% of Hindus were self-employed; in the case of women, while 60% of Hindu women were self-employed, the figure for Muslim women was 73% (Sachar, p. 91; Basant, 2012, p. 20; Avari, 2015, p. 14). Moreover, several studies have shown that the working conditions are more precarious for Muslim workers than for all other SRCs.

In addition, Muslims' shares in the category of salaried/waged employment in various departments are abysmally low at all levels. In 2001,<sup>1</sup> Although, Muslims constitute 13% of India's population, Muslim employment, however, was just 3% in the higher administrative service (with 3% IAS, 1.8% in the IFS and 4% in the IPS), 2.2% in banks, 4.5% in railways (Indian Railways employs about 14 lakh people), 5% in postal department and 3.7% in university teaching faculty (Sachar, pp. 165-168; Balakrishnan, 2008, p. 238). Muslims' participation in police and security related activities is considered to be quite important with respect to the security concerns of the Community. In the police service, Muslims constitute just 6% while as 42% of the employees were drawn from the Hindu upper castes and 23% from other castes. These higher figures of other SRCs certainly led Muslim perceptions and complaints of the discriminatory attitudes of Hindu security forces. Similarly, in the defence sector, only 4% were Muslims as opposed to 52% for upper caste Hindus and 35% for other castes (Sachar, pp. 101-102; Avari, 2015, p. 15).

Overall, whether employed in public or private jobs, a disproportionate number of Muslims seem to hold down jobs with lower salaries or wages. Their participation was/is relatively lower in professional, technical, clerical and managerial skills (Sachar, p. 103). The gruesome picture of the Muslim deprivation is primarily because of poor educational standard within the Muslim community (Avari 2015, *ibid*).

### ***Patterns and Relative Levels of Education***

Levels of literacy and percentage of younger population continuing in educational institutions play a significant role in facilitating socio-economic development. Despite the tall claims about the importance of education and numerous constitutional judgments joining state's duty to provide adequate levels of education to all citizens, the

1 Muslim population in India has grown by 24% between 2001 and 2011 against the national average of 18% with the community's representation rising to 14.2% from 13.4% of total population. However, as of now, an official analysis of data by religion, except population, from the census 2011 is not yet out. The last census of India i.e., 2001, for the first time in post-independent India, has come out with religion-wise data on few socio-economic indicators like, sex-ratio, literacy level and workers.

best of India's educational system remains confined to the private or voluntary sector. While schools and colleges in these sectors attempt to provide good levels of education, the educational condition of the vast majority of India's children remains 'precarious' because, in the words of the Sachar Committee's report, the central governments have 'abdicated their responsibility' (Sachar, p. 50; Avari 2015, p. 15).

The Sachar Committee report sharply brought out the relative deprivation of Muslims in education; it shows that Muslims are at a double disadvantage. Muslim children attend mostly sub-standard schools; their literacy rate is far below that of the lower caste children; their non-attendance rate is high, and so is their drop-out rate after middle school. Their deprivation increases manifold as the level of education rises.

Literacy rates among Muslims are lower than most other SRCs (except for SCs and STs) and have not increased fast to meet with literacy rates of high caste groups (Basant 2012, p. 11). The Sachar committee report says that, in 2001, the Muslim literacy rate was 59.1 % (with 67.6% for males and 50.1% for females) as opposed to the national average of 65.1 %. Except SCs/STs, with an even lower literacy level of 52.2%, the remaining category of 'All Others' show a high literacy level of 70.8 % (Sachar, p. 52). The report shows that as many as 25 % of Muslim children in the 6-14 year age group either never attended school or have dropped out (Sachar, p. 58). This directly contributes to larger deficits in higher education; Graduation Attaining Rates (GAR) are the lowest for Muslims and not meeting with the average. The report estimates that the proportion of Muslim students in undergraduate courses was about 9% lower than their share in population; in postgraduate courses the status is equally disappointing, only 1 out of 20 students was a Muslim (Sachar, p. 71). In the 20-30 years age range 18.6% of upper caste Hindus were graduates as opposed to 4.5% Muslim graduates (Sachar, p. 67). Muslim enrolment in the premier colleges (such as IITs, IIMs, medical colleges etc.) of India is still worse, the report says, 1 out of the 25 Undergraduate student and 1 out of the 50 post-Graduate student is a Muslim in premier colleges (Sachar, p. 69).

The Sachar committee report has vividly clarified the position of Muslims. Its remark that "[Muslim] Community exhibits deficits and deprivation in practically all dimensions of development" (Sachar, p. 237) is adequately sufficient to envision the current status. While the committee envisioned an inclusive development for all deprived SRCs through its exhaustive recommendations (Sachar, pp. 237-254) though not conclusive for the economic empowerment of Muslims of India (Rahmatullah 2010, p. 6). The government, however, took little or no heed to these suggestions, using the commissions simply as vote-grabbing gimmicks in order to give the impression of being serious about Muslim "backwardness" and "marginalisation". Nevertheless, it is hoped that the report being prepared by the High Level Committee will, if nothing else, sensitise some policymakers to the urgent need to address Muslim deprivation (Sikand 2006; Shahabuddin 2007).

## **Remedial Measures**

What is therefore necessary, asserts Rahmatullah (2010, p. 1) is to “visualize a dream ensuring power, prosperity and happiness and identify ways and means to make it upper rather than lower hand”. The community of Islam is self-conscious and has a commitment to lead rather all the humankind. Nevertheless, one should not oversimplify the present globalised world where only those survive that is competent enough to stand the challenges. Therefore, they should not wait and see their problems to be redressed by the government, rather Muslims have to introspect themselves for they also contributed to their grim situation; they have to take community initiatives for the empowerment of the Muslims, for “*God does not change the condition of the people unless they change themselves*” (Al-Qur’an, 13:11).

### **Educational and Economic Empowerment**

Education and employment are key sectors the Muslims have to pay special attention; for, economic betterment and educational levels (beginning with a literacy drive), asserts Najahtulaah Siddiqi (1997), seems to be a necessary condition for any role to be played by a Muslim minority vis-a-vis its countrymen. Muslim intellectuals, its leaders, organizations—social and religious—have an important role play to helping people especially poorer to put their foot on the road to self respect and hope. Eradication of poverty, removal of illiteracy and inculcation of entrepreneurial qualities are necessary to ameliorate the socio-economic conditions of Indian Muslims. To achieve these objectives, Najahtullah Siddiqi points two facts to recognize before taking any initiative, he illustrates:

Firstly, the overwhelming majority of Muslim in India are illiterate and very poor. Secondly, in future most jobs will be in the private sector where skill and potential productivity will decide who gets which job. Our educational priorities must reflect these realities. Most of our efforts and resources should be directed towards educating the poorest of the poor and the illiterate. Next comes skill generating programmes which can enable people to get a job or launch their own small business. The primary school and the vocational and technical institutes must come before universities, colleges and other costly affairs. People should be made to pay for higher education and social subsidies should be reserved for the institutions serving people without means (Siddiqi 1997).

However, Muslims will have to mobilize all their strength to create resources for themselves for that the Muslim community needs individuals, NGOs, welfare groups with money to spare so that the community can do all that is needed to preserve its identity, promote its culture and safeguard its interests (Siddiqi 1997).

### **Utilization of Zakat and Waqf (endowments)**

Zakat a socio-religious institution has tremendous potentials of ameliorating economic sickness of the community. It has been observed that a majority of the liable Muslims is indifferent to pay the Zakat. Yet, according to an estimate, in India, the annual disbursement of Zakat amounts to approximately Rs. 10,000 crores (Rahmatullah 2010, p. 8). Therefore, if those liable pay Zakāt, there would be enough resources to eradicate the poverty. This is the right time that community think and act for the productive use of Zakat Fund.

Similarly, there is a large number of waqf property scattered throughout India that can economically empower the community provided they are commercially exploited for the general Muslim cause (Rahmatullah 2010). Unfortunately, the state does not ensure community participation in their functioning and use of the resources that they generate. Even, a large portion of these properties is misused by the members and officials of the boards (Fazlie 1995; Siddiqi; Engineer 2010).

Again, Muslim women are being deprived of their property share of the inheritance as prescribed by the *Shari'ah*. This also contributed to an economic disparity between men and women; place direct implication for women folk's advancement. These are remain issues that can be rectified, at least, by the Muslim community itself without asking for an eternal aid.

Therefore, among other issues crucial to be addressed for the future prospect of the Muslim community, scholars generally stress on the following:

- Stress on quality education (including infrastructure) and training.
- More participation in the competitive examinations for Jobs.
- Formation of a think tank and advocacy group.
- Centre for studies on Indian Muslims.
- Improving self-employment opportunities and conditions.
- Building a strong political leadership.
- Making efforts to dialogue with other communities.
- Mobilizing ulama to the existing social, economic and educational problems of the Muslim community.
- Balanced approach to Life.
- Upholding patience, perseverance and open-mindedness.
- Providing an atmosphere of free-thinking and independent inquiry.

Besides, Muslim intellectuals, leaders, social activists should continue to demand, not as a favor but as an equal right, "through effective equality of opportunity, due rep-

resentation in the organs of power, the legislature, the judiciary, the government, the administration, the armed forces and the political parties. Not only the Muslims but all other Backward Communities need effective measures of positive affirmation which would make an impact within a reasonably short term" (Shahabuddin 2007).

## Conclusions

Thus far we have analysed that in terms of all the socio-economic parameters discussed above the Muslims are relatively worse-off than the majority Hindus which includes the SCs and STs and other SRCs in both rural and urban areas in India. Muslims are backward most educationally and economically. For Muslims were/are marginalized and discriminated by the respective governments of India since her independence. Muslims' ignorance and weakness also led to their poverty, low literacy rate and poor working conditions. Therefore, to alleviate and improve the socio-economic conditions, the paper suggests initiatives for the Muslim empowerment through education and employment; it advocates quality education from primary level, through to the technical training and skill development for self-employment. It aspires Muslim intellectuals, leaders, social activists and religious scholars to play a significant role vis-à-vis making enough sources available for educational and economic sector. For, excelling in 3 E's—Education, Employment and Economy, underlines the all-round development of any community guaranteed and envisioned vis-à-vis Knowledge, Power and Wealth.

## References

- Avari, B. (2013). *Islamic Civilization in South Asia: Muslim Power and Presence in the Indian Subcontinent*. London: Routledge.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2015). Muslims of India and their Well-being (unpublished paper). UK: Manchester Metropolitan University.
- Balakrishnan, R. and M. D. (2008). *Social Development in Independent India: Paths Tread and the Road Ahead*. New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley.
- Basant, R. (2012). Education and Employment among Muslims in India: An Analysis of Patterns and Trends. W.P. No. 2012-09-03 September.
- Berglee, R. (2012). World Regional Geography: People, Places and Globalization. Retrieved from [https://saylordotorg.github.io/text\\_world-regional-geography-people-places-and-globalization/s12-01-introducing-the-realm.html](https://saylordotorg.github.io/text_world-regional-geography-people-places-and-globalization/s12-01-introducing-the-realm.html) (accessed on 25 May 2015).
- Engineer, A. A. (n.d.). Indian Muslims and Education. *Secular Perspective*, July 1-15. Retrieved from <http://ecumene.org/IIS/csss15.htm>.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2010). Zakat Board and Muslim Economic and Educational Problems. *Secular Perspective*, May 1-15. Retrieved from <http://www.csss-islam.com/arch%201.htm>
- Farooqi, Dr. M. I. H. (n.d.). Status of Muslim Societies around the World. Retrieved from [http://www.irfi.org/articles/articles\\_251\\_300/status\\_of\\_muslim\\_societies\\_around.htm](http://www.irfi.org/articles/articles_251_300/status_of_muslim_societies_around.htm)

- Fazlie, M. B. J. (1995). *Hindu Chauvinism and Muslims in India*. Jeddah: Abul-Qasim Pub.
- GOI.(2011). Census of India,. Retrieved from <http://censusindia.gov.in/>
- Khan, Dr. M. (2015 May 12). Indian Muslim in the Age of Muslim Uprisings.*The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/muqtedar-khan/indian-muslims-in-the-age-of-muslim-uprisings\\_b\\_7213744.html?ir=India&adsSiteOverride=in](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/muqtedar-khan/indian-muslims-in-the-age-of-muslim-uprisings_b_7213744.html?ir=India&adsSiteOverride=in)
- Kuran, T. (2004).*Islam and Mammon: The Economic Predicaments of Islamism*. Princeton: Princeton university press.
- Najiullah, S. (2011).*Muslim Minorities and the National Commission for Minorities in India*.UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Rahmatullah, Dr. (2010). Vision on Economic Empowerment of Indian Muslims. Paper presented in Muslim Think Tank meeting,Banglore, 1-8.
- Sachar Report. (2006). *Social, economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community in India: A Report*. New Delhi: Cabinet Secretariat.
- Shahabuddin, S. (2007).Social Justice for the Muslim Community—Panacea for Upliftment.*Mainstream*. Vol xlv(30).
- Siddiqi, A. A. (n.d.). Indian Muslims: Problems and prospects. *The Milli Gazette*.Retrieved from <http://www.milligazette.com/Archives/15022002/15022200249.htm>.
- Siddiqi, M. N. (1997). Muslim Minorities in the Twenty first Century: A Case Study of the Indian Muslims. *Encounters*, 3(2), 11937.
- Sikand, Y. and I. A. (2006). Survey of SocioEconomic Conditions of Muslims In India. Retrieved from <http://www.countercurrents.org/comm-sikand090206.n>.
- Thompson, M. (2003).*Islam and the West: Critical Perspectives on Modernity*. Rowman& Littlefield Publishers.