MUSLIMS AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS IN INDIA

65 years ago India has made a pledge to build an inclusive, plural and secular society which would equitably integrate its religious minorities while respecting their distinct identities and honoring difference. Even after 65 years of independence very little attention paid in this regard. Minorities are the most vulnerable, in particular, the largest minority community, Muslims, who constitute 13.4 per cent of the total population of India. They are excluded and discriminated in all the way possible. Until 2001 census the details related to Muslims were not included in the census, therefore the information related to Muslims didn’t exist in the official records too. At present here is an almost universal sentiment of fear and growing despair among minorities of the country especially Muslims. There is mounting disillusionment with all institutions of governance. The constant dread of being profiled as a terrorist, with the additional fears of illegal and prolonged detention, denial of bail, torture, unfair and biased investigation and trial, and extra-judicial killings. There is on the other hand, the lived experience of day to day discrimination, in education, employment, housing and public services, which entrap the community in hopeless conditions of poverty and want.

The comprehensive report on the socio-economic, educational and political representation status of Muslim communities by Justice Rajindar Sachar and his team constituted by United Progressive Alliance in 2005 (UPA – Government headed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh) drew the nation’s attention with astonishment. It is overwhelming to know that the overall status of Muslim OBCs are worst than the condition of Hindu OBCs.- (Findings of Justice Sachar committee report)

THE FINDINGS OF SACHAR COMMITTEE

- In the field of literacy the committee has found that the rate among Muslims is very much below than the national average. The gap between Muslims and the general average is greater in urban areas and women. 25 per cent of children of Muslim parents in the 6-14 year age group have either never attended school or have dropped out.
- Muslim parents are not averse to mainstream education or to send their children to affordable Government schools. The access to government schools for children of Muslim parents is limited
- Bidi workers, tailors and mechanics need to be provided with social safety nets and social security. The participation of Muslims in the professional and managerial cadre is low.
- The average amount of bank loan disbursed to the Muslims is 2/3 of the amount disbursed to other minorities. In some cases it is half. The Reserve Bank of India’s efforts to extend banking and credit facilities under the Prime Minister’s 15-point programme of 1983 has mainly benefited other minorities marginalizing Muslims.
There is a clear and significant inverse association between the proportion of the Muslim population and the availability of educational infrastructure in small villages. Muslim concentration villages are not well served with pucca approach roads and local bus stops.

Substantially larger proportion of the Muslim households in urban areas are in the less than Rs.500 expenditure bracket.

The presence of Muslims has been found to be only 3% in the IAS, 1.8% in the IFS and 4% in the IPS.

Muslim community has a representation of only 4.5% in Indian Railways while 98.7% of them are positioned at lower levels. Representation of Muslims is very low in the Universities and in Banks. Their share in police constables is only 6%, in health 4.4%, in transport 6.5%.

The information regarding the Scheme has not adequately percolated down. Even if the share of Muslims in elected bodies is low they and other under represented segments can be involved in the decision making process through innovative mechanisms.

Most of the variables indicate that Muslim-OBCs are significantly deprived in comparison to Hindu-OBCs. The work participation rate (WPR) shows the presence of a sharp difference between Hindu-OBCs (67%) and the Muslims. The share of Muslim-OBCs in government/PSU jobs is much lower than Hindu-OBCs.

Only four per cent of Muslims students actually go to madrasas primarily because primary state schools do not exist for miles. Therefore, the idea that Muslims prefer madrasa education was found to be not true.

That there is “substantial demand from the community for fertility regulation and for modern contraceptives” and over 20 million couples are already use contraceptives. “Muslim population growth has slowed down as fertility has declined substantially”. This clarified and puts an end to any propaganda that there has been a Muslim conspiracy afoot since 1947 to reproduce mightily, and that a danger that the Indian Hindus will be reduced to a minority due to high birth rate of Muslims.

That Muslims wherever spoken to complained of suffering the twin calumnies of being dubbed “anti-national” and of being “appeased”. However, the Indian Muslim community as a whole had never indulged in anti-national activities and the conditions borne out by the committee's findings clearly explained that no "appeasement" had taken place.

There is a critical need to address the gap between government schemes and programs and access by the community. The recent report form the Ministry of the Minority affairs reveals that the financial allocations for development minorities have been underutilized. In the 11th National 5 Year Plan the outlay for religious minorities was Rs.1400 crore, but only 35% of the total amount allocated was used.
The Reasons for ineffectiveness of the development programs concerning to Muslim Minorities

- No specific policy focus on development of Muslim community
- Narrow policy approach in terms of coverage of programme and schemes
- Proportional share of minorities in total population not kept into consideration
- No Special Central Assistance (SCA) to states
- No provision for creating awareness about interventions
- Panchayats not given adequate role in planning and implementation
- Follows existing guidelines of CSSs rather than formulating new norms and guidelines
- Follows area development approach rather than beneficiary approach
- No proper implementation/institutional mechanism in many states and districts
- More focus on infrastructural development
- Low unit costs and cumbersome application procedures

The way forward: As change agents, individuals and organizations need to come out with programs new initiatives that will cater to the development of Muslim community, Mobilize and build awareness on their rights, welfare programs and schemes – PMs 15 point program, develop community leadership build linkages and network, create secular and democratic space for dialogue. There is an urgent need to urge government to have policy for the development of the Muslims, to allocate development fund in proportion to minority population, to create awareness, to involve panchayats in implementing welfare programs to, formulate new guidelines and norms, to setup proper implementing mechanisms and institutions, to monitor the programs, to have Separate minor head and budget statement to be introduce on welfare of minorities in budget, to make the application process simple and setup entitlements centers in all the panchayats to facilitate access to entitlements through entitlement centers.