

Muslim Identity in India: Narratives of Social Exclusion and Inclusion

Dr.Zainab Farhat

Assistant Professor

Department of Government and Public Administration

School of Humanities

Lovely Professional University

E-mail: zainfarhat27@gmail.com

Prof. Nagendra Ambedkar Sole

Professor

Department of Public Policy, Law & Governance

Central University of Rajasthan

E-mail: snambedkar@curaj.ac.in

Abstract

The major characteristic of Indian society is its Pluralism. With the change in the patterns of economic development, the diversity of Indian culture is at complexity. While maintaining the ideas of secularism and limiting the caste politics, the society is moving towards polarization and fragmentation. Moreover, the issue of Social exclusion has taken over the recent discourse from central policy making to political debates and academic discourse firstly in Western Europe, and later in other parts of the world. While the issue of minority right has become an important topic, there can be numerous reasons quoted- unquoted for the existing discrimination among Muslims. The findings of the study help to demonstrate the effects of social exclusion on the lives of Muslim population in India.

Keywords: pluralism; Indian culture; social exclusion; discrimination; Muslims

Introduction

Many nations struggle with problems of social exclusion within the ethnoreligious lines. Additionally, there have been efforts to hold the unique characteristics of each group through establishing positive factors to reduce such exclusion. The chapter aims to highlight the discourse leading towards different elements of social exclusion and its multi-dimensional approach and policies designed for Muslims in India. In India, the history of positive

discrimination started with the development of organized movements designed to reduce the power of Brahmins.

As India is the most authentic plural society, it encompasses a diverse set of religious and ethnic groups. The Indian government has not engaged in an overt manner towards indirect discrimination or oppression of its religious minorities. In contrast to these, Minorities in India face challenges due to their identity. The partition in 1947 had a significant effect on Muslim education. It is said that the educated Indian Muslims shifted to Pakistan and economically and educationally deprived were left in India. The question arises that why the social structure of India is unequal - the answer may be the hierarchical system by which the rights of each are predetermined. Through the constitution, primacy was given to the ideas of equality and social justice for the national development.

Since the constituent assembly debates (1946–49), the rights of India's minorities have been taken on a wide contestation. The constitution stating the cultural, linguistic and educational rights through article 14, 15(1), 25 to 28, 29 guarantees equality to the minorities. Further, articles 30(1) and 30(2), has created an exclusive and separate domain of rights for minorities. Hasan (2016) pointed out that the effort to bring equality was made at two levels; first through the constitutional effort and second through economic equality.

In the 1980's, the increase in religiosity started issues relating to Muslims. The increased polarisation was visible for the course of identity formation, and the political parties presided over it to take advantage. The right-wing widely known for its negative approach towards Muslims and the Congress party's pro-Muslim attitude made Muslims go in a shell, making them vulnerable and dependent on the thought that their binary in numbers is more important than their lives. The political parties treated them as a vote-bank making them realize that they are most marginalized and sufferers. Even the Muslim leaders despite taking up the economic and educational concerns, chose the controversial ones. As exclusion in India revolves around the inter-relations of the society, which discriminate, exclude and deprive specific groups, ghettos are being formed in relatively older parts of the city which lacks planned development and are not upgraded with common facilities making the area left out.

Under-representation of minorities has been discussed in the political debates. Moreover, minority as a term for many has been a demographic group. For Muslim being the religious minority in India at 14.4% of the country's population, the constitution has enlisted right to freedom of religion, conservation of their language and to manage educational institutions as their exclusive rights. These exclusive rights have offered them an alternative identity along with the public policies which apply to all. The Gopal Singh Committee Report (1983), The Sachar Committee's Report (2006), Justice Ranganath Mishra Commission (2007), The India Human Development Report (2011) and the Post- Sachar Evaluation committee report (2014) has revealed that Muslims are in a state of being social, economically and educationally backward community trapped in a deplorable condition.

When groups are restricted from accessing the government facilities, it is the constitutional duty of the state to intervene. Béteille (2008) and Velaskar (1990) point out that inequality in access to education leads to further disparities which create backwardness for the individual and they cannot access other facilities. Inequality further raises questions on social exclusion which is linked with the ideas of social solidarity.

The concept of Minority

Minority existed all along, but the kind of political investment made towards them is fairly recent. They are not always related to the disadvantaged sections, but in a larger view, there are demands for greater equality among these groups. This can be in the form of government interventions through developmental programmes. "In a constitutional democracy, minorities are expected to be the articulators of their problems, makers of their identity, and the protectors of their interests" (Mohapatra, 2014). The identity-making process of the minorities is controlled by many actors involving the state and the majority where weak numerical figures and low socio economic status become a central idea in making of a minority. In many countries, governments have responded either out of a concern for social justice or to mitigate political conflict for the ethnic groups such as Minority in the form of preferential policies or affirmative action programs, reservations, or compensatory discrimination, as these policies are variously called- are one such government response (Weiner, 1983). The approach of the government has

changed in the due course of time through a number of Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) and plans for the welfare of Minorities but the implementation part is unsatisfactory.

In the BJP led government since 2014, the status of the minority community is being questioned on their nationalist and fundamentalist attitude. The image is being sabotaged and they are witnessing a deep identity crisis. To highlight this, the three types of inter-related issues among Minorities are-

- Issues relating to Identity: The differences in socio-cultural practices makes minority different from others.
- Issues relating to Security: A group, small in number, may feel insecure in the society.
- Issues relating to Equity: The minorities remain deprived of the available opportunity.

Multi-Dimensional Approach of Social Exclusion

The affluence of any society is based on the involvement of its members towards the societal cause. The phenomena that lead to social exclusion has two major factors, i.e. denial to participate (external) and inability to participate (internal) (Barnes, 2006). The problem of exclusion is very severe, particularly when it comes to children. Those who grow up in an excluded condition face conditions of not doing well in schools, have lower access to better health facilities and are at a larger risk. The improper functioning of the societal institutions verily pushes the vulnerable and the deprived section to poor living conditions. The solution to the problem which may be very direct and simple can be an increase in the resource based system of rights and facilities that cater to the masses. The productive involvement of members in a societal cause is based on the societal prosperity. The alienation of groups or individual from the collective cause is not only indicative of the dysfunctional institutions but the risks of social disruption (SEU, 1997).

The wider concept of poverty is taken in the term of Social Exclusion. As defined by Katherine Duffy, “Social exclusion is a broader concept than poverty, encompassing not only low material means but the inability to participate effectively in economic, social, political and cultural life and in some characterisations alienation and distance from mainstream society” (Duffy, 2005). By keeping the view of the following, social exclusion can be understood by Ruth Levitas as-“A complex and multi-dimensional process involving the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available

to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas affecting both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole” (Levitas, 2007).

Social Exclusion in deeper sense is identified as “deep exclusion” where they are exposed to the multi-dimensional disadvantage. Ruth Levitas in 2007 has come out with the concept of deep exclusion while presenting a model named as the Bristol Social Exclusion Matrix (B-SEM) which present a link between multiple disadvantage and social exclusion. The study of social exclusion among children is of utmost importance as children belong to those groups which are commonly ignored in most of the studies. The low socio-economic conditions of the third world countries are more prone to deprivations of the society. The Australian government report on social exclusion outlined that there are four domains of social exclusion, i.e. ensuring employment and access to services to youth, ensured interactional connectivity of youth with family, friends and community, health security and right to be heard. The dimensions of Social Exclusion are-

1. **Educational dimension:** The stratification in the Indian society is reflected in the educational attainment and it deserves attention because traditional social disparities that governed caste relations are rapidly being transformed into class inequalities through differential educational attainments (Dreze, 1995; Desai, 2013). The literature lays emphasis on education being the precursor for the human development. The Muslim community overall generates a low figure in education and already at a disadvantaged stage, they are prone to vulnerabilities where denial of educational and lack of employment opportunities are two greatest disabilities. The differences in educational attainment across various segments of society occur due to differing levels of socio-economic status, which in turn impacts the (social) demand for education across social classes. The studies have shown that if the proportion of population with formal schooling is high, the greater is the quality of human capital and their ability to achieve upward socio-economic mobility (Alam, 2007, 2010; Shariff, 2012).

The U-DISE (Unified District Information System for Education) 2015–16 statistics presents that Muslim children accounted for about 14.43 per cent of all the children enrolled at primary stage and 12.60 percent in upper primary stage and 13.80 percent at the elementary level (U-

DISE, 2017). The school system in India is diverse and there are a variety of schools offering different learning opportunities and educational outcomes. The students of the lower strata go to government schools and the proportion of school-going children attending private schools has increased considerably in recent years. This is due to failure of the public education system to meet the demand for quality schooling and has deteriorated the standard of teaching in the existing government schools (De, 2000).

The popular perceptions follows that Muslim children largely attend Madrasas to acquire religious education rather than schools of modern education, where the empirical evidence justifies that 30 and 66 per cent of all enrolled Muslim children aged between 7–16 years attend private and government schools, respectively, as against 29 and 71 per cent, respectively, for others. Thus, only 4 percent of Muslim children enrolled in the relevant age group attend Madrasas. The Muslim community stands economically disadvantaged relative to other communities- predominantly Hindus. Thus, a strong backing in terms of meeting the educational needs of the community is the need of the hour.

2. Economic dimension: Sen (1975) has defined the employment concept in three aspects: income, production, and recognition. It was assumed that employment is a means to alleviate poverty. The economic approach to exclusion seems to cover mainly the first two aspects. The third refers to the idea that ‘employment gives a person the recognition of being engaged in something worth his while’. As Reddy (2002) highlights the status of Muslims, pointing out that any indicator or the comparison outlines, the situation of Muslims are the same where they suffer from greater economic deprivation than Hindu and the disparity is high in the rural areas. The overall impression of the Muslim disadvantage crosscut social, economic and political dimension is resulting from lack of substantial progress.

3. Political dimension: The pattern of political representation has gained wide interest in the recent years. The change in the political system has demanded inclusion of those excluded through policies to address the imbalances. The under-representation of certain community demands inclusion in the policy making and their representation in the mainstream political process. A democracy will become breakable when its minorities are systematically denied political representation. Indeed no democracy can last long when its oppressed castes are scarred

against each other on a religious basis. The report of Indian express highlights that in 2018, out of 1386 MLA's there are only four Muslims (Mannathukkaren, 2018). The exclusion is staggering as the representation is 0.28% of the population when the Muslim population is 14.2%. The one trend that is gaining strength since 2014 is the political invisibility of the Muslims by denying them the needed political space and othering them in the social space. This is rightly being expressed by Alexis de Tocqueville calling the system as the "tyranny of the majority". A classic example of under-representation of Muslims is the assembly elections in the state of Uttar Pradesh in the year 2016 where Muslim constitutes 19.2% of the population and the BJP government (which is currently in power) has not fielded a single candidate from the Muslim community where it swiped 312 out of 403 seats and the Muslim representation in UP fell from 17.1% to 5.9%.

As Hasan (2009) points that "political parties generally tend to under nominate minorities and lack the will to counter unsubstantiated assumptions with regard to political opposition of voters to minority candidates, who presumably cannot win election owing to this opposition." She further argues that parties often tend to look at elections through party angles and are unwilling to give tickets to minorities for fear of giving an advantage to their rivals. In case of Indian Muslim, political party like the INC took over the agenda of Minority appeasement and ethnic politics, where other parties like the right wing followed with the Hindutva identity, inconsistently different from the Muslim Identity.

Another point to note is that the Muslim community is itself deeply divided by caste and class. The Ashrafs (the forward castes) are the overpowering beneficiary of communal politics and the Pasmandas (backward castes) are in small gains. The community is not united to fight the socio-economic turmoil in which they strongly going forth. Though the caste system among Muslims is nowhere to be found in the Holy book of Quran, it is the differential attitude of the Muslim clerics which has taken the caste divide instead of focusing on the issues of Muslim development.

Social Exclusion of Muslims: A Review

Millions of people all over the world are born with scars of social blemish reducing their capacity as an individual. These scars last for years and generations. The study of social science

has contributed to the dynamics of social life. The concept of ‘social exclusion and inclusion can be traced back to the French and American revolution where the ideas of Freedom, justice, equality and fraternity became the dominant ideology. The term was coined by Rene Lenior in the 70s in the book “Les Exclus” which means ‘excluded” to identify the marginalized. In India the concept of social exclusion faces three major challenges, firstly it relates to the historical discrimination; secondly, the political economy of the excluded; thirdly, it questions the way in which responses are controlled in the framework of social exclusion.

Social exclusion and inclusion are two terms that are making roads in policy discourse, especially in developing nations like India. How well the concept of social exclusion is dealt is dependent on how well it is defined. In the course of social exclusion, certain groups are sidelined as they go through social negotiation and economic engagement. Muslims faces difficulties with the social and political marginalization. It is said that history being a mirror-process puts narratives in the picture of exclusion and inequality. A major tool of social exclusion is the discriminatory process where people are sidelined due to their belongingness to a particular group.

A phenomenon “stereotype threat” has been consistently into the discourse. It means that the constant discrimination reduces the self-confidence of the victim, undermining their self – admiration as they tend to believe themselves to be of low worth (Boorah, 2015). It was in this context that Mydral (1944) defines that the “vicious circles of cumulative causation”: the breakdown of discriminated groups to make progress is based on the attitude of the dominant class. At the outset, it has been noted that identity and religion have been into debates for long. Such an identity affects the discriminatory process which affects the minorities at large. As religious identity is divisive and cannot be ignored. Through the lens of this identity, speculation and stereotyping persists.

The issue of Social Exclusion, though a western concept, but it is much relevant in India today as the issue of group inequality persists evidently. This has further led to the discussions on policies and programmes to overcome these inequalities. To overcome, such issues of social exclusion, the general pro-poor policies are necessary at the initial level but there is a greater need for supplementing group specific policies as the governance of today’s time is influenced by the

merits and efficiency. In simple sense, exclusion is the incapability to participate in the community life. Certainly, if inclusion occurs, it is on the unequal terms which affect the person's ability to interact and productively take part in the course of life. The question arises that why exclusion persists? The answer to this is complicated to define, yet it lies in the theoretical studies. In the mid of 1950's Becker (1993) argues that discrimination happens because of the prejudice that one group hold towards the other. In his case, it was against the women and blacks.

Similarly, Arrow (1973) has taken the approach of the belief-based theory identifies that people discriminate on the low assumption and skills of others. It is defined by the belief of others. The identity theory of Akerlof and Kranton (2010) argues that identity plays a crucial role in the economic setup. The behavior of a group is determined by the distinction between "us" and "them". It is seen as the coming of the social context in the economic setup. Blumer (1958) observed that the prejudice against race exist in the group position and not in a feeling. According to him, there are four types of feeling present in the dominant group- first is the sense of superiority, second, the feeling that subordinates race is diverse, third a feeling of claim towards certain areas and fourth is the fear that the subordinate race foster on the entitlements of the dominant group. Ambedkar (1989), graded inequality works on the system of hierarchy, where those who are at the bottom suffer the most and the dominant caste enjoys unlimited power and freedom. In the work of Blumer, Ambedkar added that discrimination is further shaped by social and religious beliefs. To critically examine Blumer's and Ambedkar's interpretation, the dominant groups never comprehend the subordinate groups.

Sen (2000) argues that "being excluded can sometimes be in itself a deprivation and this can be of intrinsic importance on its own. For example, not being able to relate to others and to take part in the life of the community can directly impoverish a person's life. It is a loss of its own self in addition to whatever further deprivation it may indirectly generate" (Sen, 2000). Thus, social exclusion is about the group interactions and about one's own identity making. "Individuals are most vulnerable when they have fewest personal capacities and material resources....but none of these threatens their survival so long as they enjoy the protections afforded by membership of an inclusive group that co-operates productively and redistributes its product" (Jordan, 1996).

The educational attainment varies between groups. Exclusion in education can be curtailed if inclusive governance and implementation of policy become effective. The fact that discrimination persists is thoughtful of the fact that ideas of equality have been embedded in the social, economic and political spheres. The civic learning and the enhancement of education can instill the principles of non-discrimination, equality and democracy in the actions and thinking of individuals making them improved citizens of the country.

Policies for Muslims in India: Multiculturalism and Exclusion in the Democratic structure

Multiculturalism in political discourse is responding to the challenges associated with religious and cultural diversity. The term “multicultural” is used to describe the diversity in a society, encompassing a variety of regulatory claims where people of minority groups are likely to absorb in the dominant culture where they can maintain their distinct collective identities and practices. The idea of Pluralism comes from the act of the modernization process, which has enhanced multiculturalism. The ideals of Multiculturalism reveal variant realities. The categories of McLaren conservative, liberal and critical multiculturalism indicate some of the significant usage in capturing a shift from the integrationist approach (conservative) to celebration of socio-cultural differences in the framework of liberalism (liberal) to a philosophical ideology challenging the hegemonic framework of liberal democracy in pursuit of equality for the socio-culturally different (critical) (McLaren, 1994).

As Jain (2012) points out that, “addressing the values of social justice, multiculturalism advocates ‘equal’ space to the ‘socio-culturally different’ with ‘equal’ referring to equality of opportunities as well as result”. The Political philosophy of Multiculturalism highlights the importance of resource distribution where the political recognition may be extended to caste inequalities overlooking the religious inequality. The critical Multiculturalism sees democracy as the main tool for cultural groups to stand up for resources, status, power and identity. The effective implementation of critical multiculturalism requires a change in the attitude of the people in a more inclusive manner. As Mill (1869) rightly defines that the communities are on the ‘tyranny of the majority’ that have been the victims of social discrimination and are unable to be at par with the society.

Parekh's (2000) multicultural perspective highlights that human beings are intensely shaped by culture but not determined through it, and they carry a middle course between naturalism and culturalism. He states that different cultures represent varied systems of vision of the good life. Therefore, no culture is worthless and no culture can be perfect and all cultures are plural on the inside but not disjointed, which signifies that a culture cannot appreciate the significance of others if it does not appreciate the plurality within itself.

Kymlicka (2007) highlights that the “Liberal Multiculturalism has no right definition but it is the view that the states should not only uphold the familiar set of common civil, political and social rights of citizenship that are protected in all constitutional liberal democracies but adopt various group-specific rights or policies that are intended to recognize and accommodate the distinctive identities and aspirations of ethno-cultural groups” (Kymlicka, 2007). Individuals should be in a position to participate in all public platforms or access all state institutions without having to deny or hide ethno cultural identity. c) Accord obligation to recognize and accommodate history, language and culture of non-dominant groups. It must acknowledge the historic injustice done to minority/non-dominant groups and should manifest a willingness to offer rectification for them. d) Not focus on symbolic recognition of identities only but to take into account politics of interests and redistribution of resources and, e) not prescribe generic rights for all members of minority groups. Different policies are required for different disadvantaged sections.

Being a multicultural country India has been known for framing policies for accommodating its diverse section of individuals. After the Sachar Committee report (2006), the Ministry of Minority Affairs has been set up to solve issues relating to the minorities. Although, the pace of the schemes and policies is not progressive and due to the limitations of the liberal framework the pressing issues relating to Muslims are yet to be addressed. The Maulana Azad Education Foundation (MAEF) is a brainchild of the MOMA (Ministry of Minority Affairs). It has been providing various schemes for the development of minority students; those are Pre-matric scholarship, post matric scholarship, Begum Hazrat Mahal national scholarship and Gharib Nawaz skill development scheme which has been discussed in the next chapter. The existence of these schemes is not widely known to many. In the preceding chapters, it is highlighted that the availing of scholarship has become a tedious process for schools.

The policies of the Indian government reveal an unclear approach towards the minorities where the differences are documented and are implemented for the development of the community but the results remain unclear. There are models made for the development of the minority and the approachable model is the development deficit model which promotes affirmative action providing opportunities for the development through scholarships and other skill development programmes. The Indian politics keep on rupturing with the politicians who advertise the pro-minority policies which are conservative in orientation. They are presented as vote banks for the leaders, and the needs are rarely addressed.

Maintenance of the stereotypical identity and the so-called pro-minority appeasement policy remains stagnant. The Sachar Committee report point towards the social gaps existing among the communities with the issues of security, identity and equity. To counter such issues, government has proposed the setting up of Equal opportunity commission (EOC).

Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC)

There is a debate that whether public programs can be targeted based on their religion. This has been 'unconstitutional' for many as they highlight that it leads to discrimination on the basis of religion. It is vital to identify the mechanism that highlights the importance of diversity in the public discourse at different levels. These mechanisms need to be institutionalised. As the Sachar Committee report points out that the Muslims are affected by the discriminatory perception, the report ensured equality of opportunity and recommended the formation of a legal stand to look into the grievances through the EOC.

The EOC formed as legal and autonomous body aims to collect and document the intergroup inequalities and mandated to make sure that no minority community is being discriminated on any grounds. It is for the adequate representation in the educational and employment institutions. Jain (2012) quotes that the primary problem is located in the generic approach that EOC has adopted in identifying disadvantaged groups as no universal policy can effectively help different needs of diverse groups like a minority.

Similarly, Ogbu (1982) has discussed the group and class-based mobility systems in which he defines that stereotypes and discrimination are the major hindrances which do not allow the

minorities to take advantage of the general policies as they neither address any of these and the historical roots of discrimination and voluntary exclusion. While the affirmative action is not rightly possible to capture the socio-economic differentiation among Muslims, Hasan (2009) points out that this issue is complicated for two reasons, firstly that the Sachar Committee report demonstrates the huge institutional deficit with regard to representation as well as socio-economic backwardness of Muslims as a whole, and secondly it shows that the community is differentiated and divided into sub-groups and caste groupings which have different capacities to access opportunities.

Likewise, there has been a wide contestation for pro-affirmative plans for the Minorities. The need to safeguard national interest through the formation of new structures can lead to positive changes for the minorities. Though there has been a wide gap between the Sachar committee recommendations and their implementation, the capacity to bring liberal democracy can be transformed in reality through grass root democracy.

The EOC intends to support the performance of governments through analysis and policy-making on public system and civil society. In recent times, there is a need to develop and promote a culture of 'display analyses'. Further, it should be accessible to individuals and groups of people to seek relief on the situation of discrimination and exclusion.

Conclusions

To conclude, the paper assessed how Social exclusion reflects the multiple and overlapping nature of the disadvantages experienced by certain groups and how Muslims are socially and educationally marginalized. An analysis has been made on the policies of the Muslims, the coming up of the Equal opportunity commission (EOC) and the rights of the Muslim Women. As the academic work reflects a radical shift demanding equal space for minorities in the cultural, subjective and material sphere, the establishment of EOC is an indication of structural changes that would leave a lasting impact on the democracy of India. A decisive question that is eminent in the discourse among Muslims in India is that it lacked genuine leaders. When security has become the prime motto instead of development, the party whom the Muslims are voting takes them as underrepresented and taking their vote for granted. The leadership among Muslims is missing. The under-representation was seen as a result of the historical nature of partition or due

to the indifference of educational and job preference. If we look onto the key cause of under-representation among Muslims it may be due to the discrimination and biases and through the educational backwardness. The setting up of EOC may foster developmental changes.

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