



EXPLORING THE EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF INDIAN MUSLIMS



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Abstract

The Census of 2011 enumerated India's Muslim population at over 17.18 crore (approx.14.2%). Muslims constitute the second largest religious group in India and thus the largest minority. In India, contrary to common belief, Muslims do not constitute a socially homogenous community. Indian Muslims are characterized by regional and linguistic variations and highly unequal systems of social stratification with caste like formations (Ahmad, 1981). This significant minority community has been reduced to the lowest socio economic stratum in post independent India. They have lagged behind the schedule castes in many walks of life and are continuously lagging behind day by day. They are educationally most backward, economically poor and politically a powerless community of the country (Waheed, 2007). The deprivation at different levels of education is at the root of every problem, which Indian Muslims are facing. The higher dropout rates as

compared to rates of enrolment are an important reason for declining trends in education affecting their employment opportunities, a chance to earn salaried income and decent standard of living. In addition to rampant unemployment and underemployment, income inequalities are also a problem among Muslims. The deplorable condition of Muslims is traceable to the vicious circle of poverty. The low earnings or income of Muslims is reflected in less savings, low access to quality education, high dropout rate, unskilled or semi-skilled employment or self-employment, low consumption expenditure and ghettoized existence. The paper is an attempt to demystify the condition of Muslims by highlighting the pitiable conditions of Muslims in terms of employment, poverty and consumption vis-à-vis other socio-religious groups in the country.

Key Words: Muslims, Poverty, Unemployment, Education, Minorities

RESEARCH PAPER

Introduction:

The Census of 2011 enumerated India's Muslim population at over 17.18 crores (approx.14.2%). Muslims constitute the second largest religious group in India and thus the largest minority. India's Muslim population is amongst the largest in the world, exceeded only by Indonesia's and close to the Muslim populations of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Moreover, it is larger than the total populations of most countries of the world (GOI 2006-07). There is a paradox about the condition of Muslims in India. This paradox has been created as a result of political process India. The vote-bank politics and the ascendancy of political hinduvta since 1990s have been responsible for marginalization of Muslims. On one hand, the deprivation among Muslims is manifold and on the other hand the steps undertaken for benefit of Muslim community are portrayed as appeasement of Muslims. This anti-muslim politics of right wing parties has further accentuated the deplorable conditions of Muslims in country. Though no steps are taken for upliftment of Muslim community but care is taken that whatever steps are been taken is either non-starter or implemented in lackadaisical attitude. This has affected the entire community across country. The Muslim population lives predominantly in rural areas like the ST/SC and the total population. The level of urbanization among the Muslims, however, is higher than the ST/SC or the general population. Analysis of the recent trends in the distribution of population across socio-religious categories in rural areas, metro cities and other urban towns from NSS data indicate that a higher percentage of Muslim population reside in metro cities or other urban areas compared to other religious groups (except upper caste Hindus (OCH)) (NSS Report 2011-12).It must be noted here that, residing of large percent of Muslim in urban areas in no way reflects progress in education and opportunities for employment. However, it can be seen as poverty and deprivation led existence. However, the recent trend in urbanization has exclusionary tinge benefitting the well-off sections across the major caste-religion spectrum and have become less welcoming for weaker and more vulnerable social groups. The share of Muslims in metro cities has gone up by a slightly higher margin (although by a lesser margin than for UCH), compared to that in smaller cities and towns, as the social discrimination may be

less there due to anonymity in larger urban settlements (Kundu, 2013). This reflects the prejudices and discrimination Muslims face on daily basis which invariably hampers their occupational mobility and opportunities for employment.

The progress of Muslims in terms of development in education is an important reason for their present deplorable condition. There has been a steady and continuous process of degeneration of Indian Muslims vis-à-vis other deprived sections of society like SCs/STs. Though there is evidence of large scale deprivation and poverty among Muslims, the Muslims themselves are been blamed for their deplorable conditions by certain sections of society. The failure of the state to provide security and essential freedoms to develop capabilities among Muslims is an important reason for the community's present condition. The Muslims in India have been caught in vicious poverty trap. Poverty creates a situation which leads to frustration and inability to complete education; leading to low employability or unemployment furthering more frustration and eventual isolation from society.

Methodology:

The present research article is based on secondary sources such as books, research journals, reports of government committees, newspapers, internet and other sources.

Indian Muslims: An overview

Muslims have a glorious history and rich legacy in Indian sub-continent. Muslims in India have immensely contributed to country's rich cultural heritage. However, there has been a steady deterioration in overall condition of Indian Muslims and today they are lagging in every societal aspect viz, education, employment, political representation, means of ownership etc. Widespread illiteracy, low income, irregular employment implying thereby a high incidence of poverty is all pervasive among Muslims. (Makki, 2008). Various committees of government have highlighted about deplorable socio-economic and educational conditions of Muslims. It is important to understand that numerous socio-political factors are at play that are responsible for conditions of Muslims. A survey conducted by TISS among Muslim households in districts of Maharashtra found that a large proportion of Muslim students from both genders do not show

any aspirations in terms of education and employment, this does not augur well for the future of community, which is already marginalized (Shaban, 2016). The Muslim community is confronted with high level of illiteracy along with higher dropout rate at the elementary stage which is reflected in their low quality of economic opportunities and consequently low standard of living. High incidence of poverty is all pervasive among Muslims due to illiteracy, low income and irregular employment thereby reflecting a poor human development status (Pervez 2011). The TISS survey found only 2.2 per cent to be graduates and above. Among the graduates, 1.9 per cent belonged to humanities, Arts and Commerce; only 0.5 per cent belonged to science, engineering and technology. Only 1 per cent of the total sample had post graduation degree. (Shaban 2011)

The low priority given to educational development and career making of children pulls back Muslim students from achieving academic success. The indifferent attitude of Muslim parents and guardians towards education play an important part in low success rate among Muslim students (Zaidi, 2004). This is reflected in pathetic economic conditions of the Muslims in India, which is a cause of concern. The over-representation of Muslims in informal/unorganized sector or self employment activities can be attributed to their low educational attainment owing to financial constraints and non-motivating atmosphere at home and surroundings. Employment in informal sector is associated with job insecurity, low income and very few opportunities for growth. Majority of them have hand to mouth existence. In rural areas, they consist working class and landless agricultural labourers, while in cities they are daily wage earners or self employed, thereby reflecting their low economic status and little or no opportunities for growth.

Employment status among Muslims:

The job market in India is segmented. The opening of the economy has created a new set of jobs which are available for the upper classes as they possess suitable technical knowledge, skills and educational levels. But, the majority of weaker sections of society are deprived of this opportunity and eke out subsistence living. One of the major inequities observed among the Muslim community, highlighted by various researchers as also the JSCR is in the field of

education. A direct result of any disparity in educational standards, especially of educational attainments at higher levels, would be reflected in the employment situation, especially in the quality of employment (Kundu, 2014). Though, the representation of Muslims in primary education is more as compared to other communities but with each increasing stage of education the percent of Muslim enrolment declines. The representation of Muslims in higher education is merely 2 percent. This is directly reflected in their avenues of employment. The level of self employment is high among Muslims. During 2011-12, the percentage of rural households living on self-employment among Muslims was 49 per cent close to the national average of 50 per cent. However, about 25 per cent of rural Muslim households lived from earnings from self-employment in non-agriculture as against 14 per cent for Hindu households (Rakesh Basant, 2012). This is a reflection of low land ownership among rural Muslim families and their consequent detachment from agriculture and allied activities. The ownership of land in rural areas is not only a source of regular income but a motivating factor for educational progress and safeguard against any socio-economic eventuality. In urban areas, 50 per cent of the Muslim households are self-employed against only 33 per cent among the Hindus. The livelihood of Muslims is mostly dependent on self-employment in informal sector which is also evident from their lower share of households living on earnings from regular wage employment (28 per cent households for Muslims versus 43 per cent households for Hindus and 42 per cent for the overall urban households). Over the recent years, it appears that more of urban Muslim household have shifted to self -employment as a major source of household income. Though, importance of higher education in getting quality employment cannot be neglected, there are however several socio-cultural factors including non-economic factors leading to observed patterns of employment and significant disparity in earnings for the Muslim community vis-a-vis other social groups (*ibid*). The urban nature of Muslim living can be attributed to presence of more opportunities of employment in unskilled activities or semi-skilled activities and also opportunities for self-employment in bigger cities and metropolitan areas. However, meager income is just sufficient to take care of food, clothing, and shelter while educational needs are neglected or takes backstage.

The over-representation of Muslims in informal sector and their engagement in self-employment activities is a fact which has been underlined by government committees and reports. With respect to Labour Force Participation Rate for urban males among the different socio-religious committees, the data from NSSO 68th round (2011-12) shows that Muslim OBC have the highest labour force participation rate followed by Muslim Others. An important point to note here is that the labour participation is highest in the 15-20 age-groups, implying that Muslims youths in large number are discontinuing their education at an early age. There is high casualisation of labour both in rural and urban areas. The casual worker is the most vulnerable category of worker having manifold deprivation and consequent marginalization. Casual workers engaged in agriculture constitute the most vulnerable group in rural areas. ST, Muslim OBC and Muslim others, too have high percentage of casual workers. In lower educational categories, the unemployment rate is highest among Muslims, followed by scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribes (STs) (Kundu 2011).

There is considerable similarity in terms of occupation of Muslims in rural and urban areas. These occupations are mostly characterized by low income, insecurity, informal and little or no avenue for growth and development. In rural areas, Muslims are more into crafts and trade and work as plant and machine operators. Their share in other than “elementary occupation” is higher than all other groups which confirm their somewhat better. The percentages of Muslims working as professionals, clerks, in service, shop and market sale persons are less than those of SC/ST population and way below that of general population occupational status. (Mansoor, 2021). The occupational pattern in smaller urban centre works out to the similar. Muslims are engaged in semi skilled and skilled informal sectors like carpentry, plumber, petty trade, butchery, hawking, drivers, weaving etc. The status of the Muslims in metro cities can then be considered to be relatively worse than that in rural areas in terms of their occupational hierarchy (Patel, 2011). Significantly, the percentage of Muslims in elementary low paying occupations is higher than the general population, although less than that of SC and ST. Unfortunately, however, the share of urban Muslim workers in public administration, services, education and health sectors are much lower than other SRCs. Furthermore, the percentage of regular salaried workers is the lowest for Muslim OBC (26 %) and Muslim others (31%) among the urban males. The

Muslims have literally very less or no representation in occupations that provides regular salary, job security and an opportunity for future growth and development.

Conclusion:

The higher percent of labour participation among Muslims points to their low economic condition and lack of attributes, essential for securing regular employment. The predominance of youth from 15-20 year age group in labour force points to grim reality of Muslims leaving education at an early age as compared to other communities. Muslims occupy the lower rungs of occupations such as hawker, driver, plumber, carpenter, transport labourer etc. The continued deprivation has marginalized the community on majority of parameters of human development. The choices of occupation among Muslims may be due to discrimination in labour market, lack of occupational mobility, ghettoization of community or following of traditional occupational practices. It is necessary to support the Muslims engaged in self employment with financial incentives and technical knowledge. A policy framework is needed to provide quality education with financial incentives for Muslims which will reduce the dropouts and increase educational attainment among the community.

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