

Muslims

Profile

India's Muslim population of some 120 million is the third largest in the world - after those of Indonesia and Pakistan - and forms the largest religious minority in India. They are not a homogeneous group, divided as they are by language, ethnicity, culture and economic position. The great majority are Sunni Muslims, and the remainder are Shi'a and various other sects such as Bohras, Isma'ilis and Ahmadiyas. Muslims form a majority in the state of Kashmir, while elsewhere they are concentrated in particular areas. The largest numbers are to be found in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Kerala.

In the north of India most Muslim communities speak Urdu, which is not a recognized official language of India-largely because of the lack of a distinct majority population in a specific area. Apart from Kashmir, Muslims are everywhere in a minority in India.

Historical context

Islam was first introduced in India through the Arab invasion of Sind in CE 712 and through subsequent invasions of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The religion firmly established itself as a force through the Mughal emperors in the sixteenth century. The Mughals generally refrained from forcible conversions to Islam, and the great Mughal Emperor Akbar granted a remarkable measure of tolerance and autonomy to non-Muslims. Although a considerable number of soldiers and officials came with the Mughals, the bulk of the Muslim population is descended from peoples of India, mainly from members of lower castes who converted to Islam as a means of escape from persecution and repression at the hands of the caste Hindus. While the concentration of Muslims was in the north-west of India (present-day Pakistan) and the east (present-day Bangladesh), there were also substantial numbers throughout the north and east. The decline of Muslim domination of India and the ultimate dispossession of the Mughal empire had a number of consequences. While bitterly resenting the loss of the empire, Muslims had to bear the brunt of the retaliatory policies at the hands of the new colonial masters after the failed uprising of 1857. Muslims had refrained from adopting the culture and language of the British both because of their religious beliefs and out of the conviction of a lack of necessity. Consequently they made themselves ineligible for positions of influence and importance. Fearing complete and permanent submersion at the hands of the majority Hindus, at the end of the nineteenth century some more articulate Muslims began a social and cultural movement intended to inculcate a sense of consciousness and create a Muslim renaissance. Features of this movement included the educational initiatives of Syed Ahmad Khan, and Agha Khan's Simla deputation, which demanded separate Muslim political representation; it culminated in the establishment of the All India Muslim League. The Muslim League came in time to represent the aspirations of the Muslim masses in India, and ultimately spearheaded the Pakistan movement led by Mohammed Ali Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan. Conflict between the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress, at the helm of the movement for independence from Britain, eventually resulted in the decision to partition India and to create Pakistan.

The division of India along communal lines could not completely eradicate the religious minorities;

instead it contributed to exacerbating the already existing tensions and division. The tragedy which ensued at the time of partition with Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus all victims of brutal and widespread conflict, remains one of the great catastrophes of human history. In so far as India's Muslims were concerned, the creation of Pakistan as homeland for Muslims resulted in a new minority problem for the now independent state of India. Muslim-majority regions (with the exception of Kashmir) separated to form the state of Pakistan. Muslim inhabitants of India now felt more insecure. The numerical strength of Muslims in India also decreased, from over 25 per cent of the population to about 10 per cent.

The manner of partition and the form that it took left a bitter legacy, and the perception of Muslims in India as anti-India or anti-national has done much to damage Hindu-Muslim relationships. The rise of Hindu fundamentalism as a political force, overtaking the liberal attitudes and policies that were evident in the first decades of independence, have also become an issue for Muslims to contend with. In the 1970s Indian Muslims began to reassess their own position. The Emergency of 1975-77 proved a watershed, with Muslims in northern India particularly becoming victims of a forced sterilization campaign. The movement to demand rights for Muslims began to grow in the period following the Emergency and has gathered fresh momentum in recent times. Among the most significant of the challenges for India's Muslims have been: the Shah Bano case (1985), where the demand for a uniform civil code was met with outright resistance from Muslim fundamentalist groups, polarizing views between the Hindu and Muslim communities; the destruction of the Babri Masjid (mosque) in Ayodhya in 1992, which dealt a grave blow to the secular aspirations of the Indian state; and the movement since the late 1980s for independence in Kashmir, which has had an impact for non-Kashmiri Muslims living throughout India.

Indian Muslims are not granted the same constitutional safeguards as the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and they are not entitled to reservations in employment and education. Although Hinduism is the majority religion, it is not an official or state-sponsored one; India is a secular state, and complete freedom of religion is guaranteed. The Minorities Commission, set up after the election of the Janata government in 1977, monitors the position of the non-scheduled caste and non-scheduled tribe minorities such as Muslims, although it has no powers to implement changes. Nor are Muslims entitled to reserved constituencies in central or state government assemblies, although all have Muslim parliamentary representatives. There have been several Muslim chief ministers and two Presidents have been Muslim, although the latter position has little real power despite high visibility.

Notwithstanding the large Muslim population of India, Muslims are strikingly under-represented in the civil service, military and institutions of higher education. At the beginning of the new millennium Muslims comprised only 2 per cent of the officers and 1.5 per cent of the clerks in the central civil service, and 3 per cent of the elite Indian administrative service. Less than 2 per cent of the army officer corps is Muslim, and Muslim representation in the higher echelons of the military is also poor. Beneath this pattern lies the issue of access to education and the general problem of large numbers of Muslims not being adequately trained or equipped to compete on equal terms at the market-place.

Another problem is language. In the north of India most Muslim communities speak Urdu, which is not a recognized official language of India—largely because of the lack of a distinct majority population in a specific area. Apart from Kashmir, Muslims are everywhere in a minority in India. Uttar Pradesh, the state with the largest population in India, where approximately 15 per cent of the 110 million people are Muslims, did not recognize Urdu as an official language before 1989. Muslims campaigned for Urdu to receive the status of an official language alongside Hindi. When this was granted in Uttar Pradesh in September 1989 there were clashes between Hindu and Muslim students in which at least twenty-three people died. Urdu has also received official language status in Bihar.

While major differences exist between Hindus and Muslims in their religious, cultural and social

outlook, in many cases the religious divide may be only a contributing factor to intercommunal discord. The main causes of dissension and divisiveness are equally likely to be poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and so on. Hindu extremist groups such as the Shiv Sena and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh consider Muslims to be disloyal to the Indian state. On the other hand, Muslim extremist groups preach a militant Islam that argues for a separate way of life for Muslims. The Shah Bano case provides a notable example of this, where an elderly Muslim woman sued her divorced husband for maintenance. Muslim traditionalists, apparently backed by the majority of Muslims, saw the court ruling in her favour as interference in the Islamic personal laws which govern the community. Less traditionalist Muslims, however, saw this ruling as an important breakthrough for the rights of women under Islam.

Muslim material expectations rose during the late 1970s and 1980s. With hundreds of thousands of Muslims working in Gulf countries, the new wealth they acquired created a sense of competition between Muslims and Hindus. The small business sector in the north has also helped bring about a slow improvement in the Muslim economic position. However, the repercussions of regional and internal conflicts have produced major setbacks for Muslims. The job market in the Gulf was seriously affected in the aftermath of the Gulf War and thousands of Muslims returned home with little prospect of regaining the same level of employment that they had enjoyed in the Middle East. In many ways Muslims have been increasingly conscious of their inferior socioeconomic position, and this has given them new determination to change it. However, there is no all-Indian Muslim party, and attempts to have a common front with the scheduled castes have yet to come to fruition. There has been a lack of overall direction and of any appropriate forum through which Muslims of India can articulate their demands.

Current issues

Notwithstanding a change in the Federal government in 2004, Indian security forces continued to pursue policies *inter alia* of extra-judicial killings, detentions and torture. The implication of such policies was particularly tragic for India's many segments of Muslim minorities-in particular Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir. Arbitrary practices of arrests, detentions and torture was deployed against the Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir; Courts in Jammu and Kashmir were reluctant to hear cases involving militant crimes and failed to act expeditiously on *habeas corpus* cases. The conflict between Muslim Kashmiris and the Indian armed forces has been brutal resulting in more 40,000 deaths within the past 15 years. Since April 2005 (with the visit of Pakistan's Military leader Pervaiz Musharraf to India) some albeit slow progress has been made in developing a peace-dialogue. In April 2005 a bus-service opened between the two parts of the divided Kashmir. In June 2005, a number of Kashmiri leaders held talks with the Pakistani leader, General Musharraf with a view to advancing the peace initiative. This was followed by the decision at the end of August by the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to hold talks with the Kashmiri separatists. The talks which were conducted with the moderate wing of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference in Delhi on 5 September 2005 provide cause for optimism: the leader of the Hurriyat-an umbrella group of parties opposed to Indian rule in Kashmir-agreed in principle to denounce all forms of violence within Kashmir. However, in the light of the intransigent stance of all the parties involved in the conflict and in the light of the continuing violations of India security forces a resolution to the dispute appears distant. The role and status of Kashmiri politicians in the present dialogue process also needs to be amplified as part of a broader political process. The divisions between the Hurriyat and the hardliners in the negotiating process has been a critical issue. This is manifest by a various killings of and attacks on moderate Hurriyat leaders by Pakistan-based hardline militant groups in Kashmir over the last few years.

In addition to the grievances emerging from Kashmir, Muslims of India claim to have suffered persecution and genocide in the state of Gujarat. Muslim leaders condemn the failure of the Gujarat government and the Indian Courts to prosecute those involved in the killing of over two thousand

Muslims at the hand of Hindu extremists. In many cases attempts to hold perpetrators of Gujarat riots accountable were hampered by the allegedly defective manner in which police recorded complaints. There were allegations made by the victims that the police failed to register their complaints or recorded the details in such a way as to lead to lesser charges. Victims complained that the police and governmental authorities deliberately failed to bring charges against prominent people involved in attacks. No appropriate action has been undertaken against those involved in the Gujarat - the Best Bakery case exemplifies the situation. This case had to be moved out of Gujrat High Court to neighbouring Maharashtra by the order of the Supreme Court. A retrial was ordered in relation to the most serious instance of rioting in Godhra and arrest warrants were issued for 10 of the 21 accused. Many other riot cases are awaiting hearing from the Supreme Court as regards Gujarat. There was also the continuation of another related sectarian Hindu-Muslim dispute over the sacred site of Ayodha. On 5 July 2005, six men pretending to be tourists, used explosives to blast through the wall of the Ayodha site. Although all the assailants were killed, Hindu nationalist parties such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) called for retaliatory action to be taken against Muslim organizations and blamed Pakistan for orchestrating the attack.

Further tensions emerged after the terrorist bomb blasts on 11 July 2006 in Mumbai (formerly Bombay). These bombs blast which killed 209 people and seriously injured nearly 1000, were blamed on Islamic extremists aggrieved at the treatment of Muslim in Kashmir and Gujarat. Indian security services blamed Al-Qeeda and their Indian agents for the terrorist atrocity, and on 18 July three members of the Students Islamic Movement of India were arrested on suspicion of masterminding the terrorist plot. This atrocity has led to further increasing the nervousness and tensions for Indian Muslims and at the same time threatening to stall the peace talk with neighbouring, Muslim majority Pakistan.

In July 2008, 21 bombs went off simultaneously in Ahmedabad, killing 53 and wounding around 200. Police and paramilitary forces poured into the area in the wake of the blasts. In August 2008, local human rights activists claimed that about 400 Muslim youths had been rounded up in response to the bombings, but the government had not identified any perpetrators.

A recent report commissioned by the Congress government, the Justice (Retd) Rajinder Sachar Committee Report, brings out the issues of income, education and employment related to Indian Muslims. The Committee was set up by the Prime Minister as a High Level Committee under the Chairmanship of Justice (retd) Rajinder Sachar to examine in comprehensive detail the social, economic and education status of the Indian Muslim community as standing in 2006. The findings of the Sachar Committee in 2006 have clearly indicated certain levels and forms of systemic discrimination and official prejudice operating in Indian society at almost all levels against Muslims and some of the results have shocked the whole country. The Committee used data tabulated indices for levels of education (matriculation, graduates and above), employment (workers and formal sector), economic (poverty and land holdings) between Hindu and Muslim Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Muslims in general and compared them with the standard all-India average. Some of the key findings of the Report as regards Muslims in general and Muslim OBCs are as below:

1. OBCs are generally below the all-India average when it comes to matriculation, graduation and industry employment;
2. Surprisingly, Hindu OBCs averaged better than the national mean when it came to non-formal employment, poverty levels and ownership in landholdings;
3. Muslim OBCs are placed poorer than Hindu OBCs in all major categories;
4. Muslims in general are the poorest and come behind Hindu and Muslim OBCs.

Economist Abusaleh Sharif, a Member Secretary of the Sachar Committee, has observed in an Indian newspaper, The Indian Express, that, '(These) NSSO statistics demonstrate general Muslims are well

below the status of Hindu OBCs.' (See The Indian Express, 31st October, 2006).

The statistical figures for Muslims in rural areas are also deeply disturbing:

1. A whopping 94.9 per cent of Muslims in Below Poverty Line (BPL) families in rural areas do not receive their entitlement of free foodgrains. Only 1.9 per cent of the Muslim community benefit from the Antyodaya Anna Yojana Scheme (a government programme meant to prevent starvation deaths by providing food grains at a subsidised rate);
2. A large percentage of rural Muslims-60.2 per cent-do not have any ownership of land;
3. Only 3.2 per cent of rural Muslims receive subsidised loans. The committee also found shocking instances of discrimination against the community. These include cases of Muslims not getting loans from even nationalised banks. 'There is an implicit diktat that loans should not be given in specific areas dominated by Muslims because of the high probability of default', the Committee observed after a visit to Rajasthan;
4. Only 2.1 per cent of Muslim farmers owning tractors (this is abysmal when seen in the context of India having about 15,25,000 tractors in the country and having the 4th largest tractor-owning population in the world after the US, Japan and Italy).

On the education front, only about 3.6 per cent of Muslims above the age of twenty are college graduates according to recent data as collected in 2006 from the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO). 54.6 per cent Muslims in villages and 60 per cent in urban areas have never attended schools. There are 3.1 per cent of the Muslim community in urban areas who are graduates and 1.2 per cent who are post-graduates. Only 0.8 per cent of Muslims in rural areas are graduates. The Committee also found inadequate number of government schools in the Muslim-dominated areas contributing to the low number of Muslim boys and girls attending the schools. One of the most shocking revelations was that the share of Muslims in all state government jobs - across all grades - in a dozen high-Muslim population states is just over 6 per cent. The Report findings show that there is no state where the representation of Muslims matches with their population share. The percentage of Muslims across all Public Sector Units (PSUs) in India illustrate the point that Muslims are severely under-represented even in government employment, including PSUs, compared to the percentage of their population in a state. What makes this statistic even more shocking is when this figure of Muslim employment in PSUs is seen in the context of some of the states like West Bengal and Bihar where the political establishment has made Muslim welfare a key political and electoral rhetoric. West Bengal provides a good example of duplicity and concealed systemic discrimination. While the Left Front government there has professed secular policies as its key electoral rhetoric and has enjoyed a three-decade reign of uninterrupted power, it has one of the lowest shares of Muslims in government employment: just 4.2 per cent. This is where almost a quarter of the state's population is Muslim. In fact, West Bengal reported zero percent of Muslims in higher positions in state PSUs. The other states where the story is similar are Bihar, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh where the ratio of Muslims employed in government jobs are extremely low - less than a third of their share of population. The percentage of Muslims in higher positions in PSUs in Maharashtra is only 1.9 percent.

It is quite apparent that while the Left Front government in West Bengal and the Laloo Prasad government in Bihar has successfully provided physical safety and security to Muslims through the effective containment and prevention of communal riots, they have systematically failed to politically empower Muslims by giving them jobs and education. This becomes quite shocking when it is seen that that both the Left Front government and the Laloo Prasad government have been in continuous power in office for long periods of time and have consistently used Muslim upliftment as part of their electoral rhetoric.

Data received by the Sachar Committee show that representation of Muslims in jobs is less than half of

their population share in all states across the country. The state with the highest percentage of Muslims employed in the government is Assam: 11.2 per cent Muslim population percentage share is 30.9 per cent. The highest percentage of Muslims in higher positions in state PSUs is in Kerala - 9.5 percent. Some of the states that have a relatively higher proportion of Muslim representation in state government jobs are: a) Karnataka (Muslim population share: 12.2 per cent, share in jobs: 8.5); b) ironically Gujarat (Muslim population share 9.1 per cent, share in jobs: 5.4 per cent); and c) Tamil Nadu (Muslim population share: 5.6 per cent, share in jobs: 3.2 per cent). In Kerala, where literacy levels are highest in the country, it is shown that only 10.4 per cent of state government employees are Muslim (less than half of the share of Muslims in the population of the state). The percentage of Muslims in higher positions in state government owned PSUs in Bihar and Karnataka is 8.6 per cent. Ironically, it is 8.5 per cent in Gujarat, higher than most states, though not even fifty percent of the population share of Muslims.

The 2006 Sachar Committee Report also found clear evidence that Muslims severely lacked representation in the central elite civil services. Muslims in India constitute just over 3 per cent of the Indian Police Service and 1.6 per cent of the Indian Foreign Service. There are only 10 of a total of 619 Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officers according to the Expenditure Reforms Committee 1999-2000 documents. The senior-most Muslim IFS officer is Talmiz Ahmed, who is presently Director General of Indian Council of World Affairs. The percentage of Muslims in the Indian Police Service (IPS) is about 3.39 per cent. According to the IPS Civil List 2006 (as on January 1), there are 109 Muslims out of a sum total of 3209 names. There is only one Muslim who holds a sensitive intelligence post in the country-Asif Ibrahim-who heads the Delhi desk of the Intelligence Bureau (IB). The percentage of Muslim intake in the Indian Administrative Service is 2.2 per cent according to the Civil Services List of 2006 (as on January 1, 2006). Again, there are about 108 Muslim IAS officers out of a sum-total of 4790 such officers in the country. This figure also includes 1248 State Services Officers who have been promoted to the IAS. Mohammed Riazuddin of the Kerala cadre is the senior most Muslim IAS officer in India.

The Committee also found an alarming low level of state-wise Muslim representation in all levels of the judiciary as compared to the share of Muslim population. The overall figure of Muslims in the judiciary in the 12 high-Muslim population states stands at only 7.8 per cent as an average percentage. Again, Left Front-ruled West Bengal features as the lowest performer with only 5 per cent of Muslims in the higher positions of the state judiciary (percentage of Muslims in the state is 25.2 per cent). The position in neighbouring Assam is also quite similar. While the state has a Muslim population percentage of 30.9 per cent, the percentage of Muslims in the judiciary is only 9.4 per cent. The percentage of Muslims in the judiciary in Jammu and Kashmir, the state with the highest Muslim population (66.97 per cent), is only 48.3 per cent. Andhra Pradesh is the only state that has more Muslims in the judiciary in terms of proportional representation - Muslims constitute 12.4 per cent of the judiciary (their population share is 9.2 per cent in the state).