

A Resurgent Muslim Community Asserts Itself: Sachar Committee provides the Forum

[A Review Essay on *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India, Report of Prime Minister's High Level Committee*, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India, November, 2006]

The Committee set up to enquire into the social, economic and educational status of Muslims in India, commonly known as the Sachar Committee, was a High Level Committee of the Government of India constituted under the Cabinet Secretariat through a notification issued by the Prime Minister's Office. It was a highly empowered Committee; it had the power to seek and obtain all possible assistance and information from all Ministries/ Departments and other bodies under the Government. The Committee thus was, for all practical purposes, an organ of the Indian State.

The Report on the Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslims of India that the Committee has submitted, however, hardly reads like an objective document expected of such a high body, in fact from any body of the State, high or low. The Committee seems to have modelled itself on the lines of a non-governmental sectional advocacy group. Like most such NGOs, the Committee has selectively used and interpreted the enormous data it commanded to present the worst possible picture of the supposed disadvantage suffered by the object of its advocacy, in this case the Muslims of India.

Where the data proves inflexible to such manipulation, and obviously shows an advantage in favour of the Muslims rather than disadvantage against them, the Committee offers peculiar interpretations or begins casting doubts on the data and suggests further study. Like the sectional advocacy NGOs, the Committee is so committed to the interests of its own object group that it sees all other groups in the society as competitors. Throughout the Report, the Committee seems to be minutely searching for instances where some other groups may have done somewhat better than the Muslims. Even in instances where the data indicates Muslims doing very well, the Report records a grouse that some other group – sometimes the Scheduled Castes, sometimes the Other Minorities, and almost always the Upper Caste Hindus – has done better. The Committee does not even care to refrain from making snide remarks about the ways of other social and religious groups; the Report is littered with such uncharitable, and mostly irrelevant, remarks about Hindus.

Below, we describe the more important aspects of the condition of Muslims that the Committee has looked at, and the way it has handled the data in these cases.

POPULATION OF MUSLIMS

The Committee begins by studying the population size, distribution and health conditions of Muslims in India. Significant aspects of this analysis are the following.

Rising Share of Muslims in the Population

One of the most important facts about Muslims in India is that their population has been growing much faster than other communities. According to the census data compiled by the Committee, in the 40 years between 1961 and 2001, the population of Muslims has grown by 194 percent, while the total population of India has grown by only 134 percent. Consequently, the share of Muslims in the population has risen from 10.7 percent in 1961 to 13.4 percent in 2001.

While presenting this data, the Committee emphasises the fact that during the last decade absolute decline in the decadal growth of Muslims has been more than that of the total population; Muslim growth has come down from 32.9 percent in the previous decade to 29.5 percent during the last decade, while the growth of the total population has declined from 23.9 to 21.6 percent. But, the Committee fails to point out that this data implies that the growth rate for the Muslims and the total population has declined by almost exactly the same 10 percent. The Committee is also aware that Muslim growth during 1981-1991 was extraordinarily high. It could partly be because census could not be conducted in Assam in 1981 and in J&K in 1991, and therefore the 1981-1991 rate of growth for Muslims was merely an estimate. In case the growth rate of 1981-1991 was over-estimated than the decline seen during 1991-2001 also gets overestimated. One shall have to wait for at least another decade to seriously accept the position that the growth rate of Muslims has begun to decline significantly.

The more important fact that emerges from the census data is the growing gap in the growth rate of Muslims and of the total population. This gap was of the order of about 15 percent in 1951-1961, it widened to about 25 percent during 1961-71 and 1971-1981, and during the last two decades of 1981-1991 and 1991-2001, it has widened further to nearly 50 percent. The yawning gap in the growth of Muslims and others is very clearly visible in Figure 3.1 of the Report; yet the Committee makes the patently wrong statement that the growth differential between Muslims and others has narrowed.

Since this high growth is such a fundamental aspect of the status of Muslims in India, the Committee goes into great details of the phenomenon, and compiles data on the fertility and mortality rates of Muslims and other socio-religious groups. The data on both these aspects of Muslim demography is highly revealing.

Higher Muslim Fertility

The Committee, of course, finds that Muslims have the highest fertility amongst all major religious groups. One of the common measures of fertility is Total Fertility Rate (TFR), which measures the average number of live births by a woman over her lifetime. The TFR for Muslims is higher than the Indian average by 0.7 to 1 points according to different data sources. The second National Family Health Survey, NHFS-2, estimates the TFR for Muslims at 3.6, while it is 2.9 for the total population of India, 2.8 for Hindus, 2.4 for Christians and 2.3 for Sikhs. The gap for Muslims and others is even higher according to the estimates of Census 2001.

The Committee observes that this differential fertility is no matter of concern. It opines that the fertility of all groups in India is declining; along with others, fertility of Muslims is also declining, though it remains, in the elegant phrase used by the Committee, “a notch higher than overall fertility in some states”. This according to the Committee is only because the decline in Muslim fertility is lagging behind others by 10-15 years; Muslim shall in 10-15 years achieve the TFR that others have reached today.

The Committee further tells us that within the next few decades, most communities in India shall reach what is called the replacement TFR level, the level at which the number of children born is roughly equal to the number of persons dying, and the population begins to stabilise. TFR of 2.1 is normally considered the replacement level for reasonably healthy populations; in populations with relatively higher morbidity and mortality, replacement TFR is somewhat higher. Muslims according to the Committee shall reach this level 10-20 years later than other communities. Once that happens, the problem of differential growth between Muslims and others shall disappear.

There are two problems with this argument. First, according to the calculations relied upon by the Committee, the differential growth of Muslims shall continue long enough for the Muslim share in the population of India to rise to 20 percent. Thus even according to the best case scenario sketched by the Committee, Muslim share in the Indian population is going to be twice what it was in 1951 following Partition. The Committee, of course, does not find it to be a matter of any concern. It refers to the often asked question about the time when the Muslim population will become the largest group, given the differential in the growth of Muslims and others. And the Committee offers the counter proposition: “How does it matter which population is the largest?” So, we have this Committee, with the self-image of a Muslim advocacy group and carrying the authority of the Indian State, telling the nation that it does not matter whether the mainstream of Indian civilisation survives or is extinguished as the mainstream.

In this context, the Committee also refers to an estimate by the present author and others that before the end of the 21st century, Muslims and Christians together shall form more than half of the population of undivided India.¹ The Committee finds this estimate problematic; but one can be absolutely sure that if the Muslims indeed reach the level of 20 percent of Indian population as estimated by the Committee and the population of Pakistan continues to grow as per the established trends, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains together shall be reduced to a minority in the undivided pre-Partition India within the next few decades.

But even the estimate that the share of Muslims shall stabilise at 20 percent of the population of divided India is problematic. It is based on the assumption that once all groups reach the level of replacement TFR, shares of all groups would stabilise. But who can guarantee that the fertility of some groups would not continue to decline below the replacement level, and their populations would not contract? It seems to

¹ See, A. P. Joshi, M. D. Srinivas and J. K. Bajaj (2003), *Religious Demography of India*, Centre for Policy Studies, Chennai and A. P. Joshi, M. D. Srinivas and J. K. Bajaj (2005), *Religious Demography of India, 2001 Revision*, Centre for Policy Studies, Chennai.

have already happened in several states of India; interestingly some of these are the ones that the Committee has quoted as exemplars of low Muslim fertility.

Take the example of Kerala. Muslim TFR in that state is rather low at 2.5; this is what gets quoted so often. However, what fails to get quoted is the fact that the Hindu TFR in that state is 1.6, which is much below the replacement TFR, and also below the Christian TFR of 1.9. Muslims in Kerala are not growing too rapidly, but the Hindu population there has reached the phase of decline. So even when fertility levels are low for all communities, the differential of growth between different communities need not disappear. During the last decade of 1991-2001, Hindus in Kerala have grown by less than 7.5 percent, while Muslims have grown by nearly 16 percent. Though fertility in the state is relatively low for all communities, the differential remains greatly significant.

For another example, let us take Assam. In this state also, Hindu fertility has reached below the replacement level; TFR for Hindus in Assam is 2.0, for Muslims it is 3.1. During the last decade, Muslims in the state have grown by nearly 30 percent, Hindus by less than 14 percent. Similar situation prevails in many other states, where Hindu fertility has reached near or below replacement level. Of the 16 major states for which the Committee has compiled TFR data, Hindu TFR is 2.2 or below for six, and it is between 2.3 and 2.5 in another three. The gap in the growth of Muslims and Hindus in most of these states remains fairly wide.

In the states where Hindu fertility is much above the replacement level, Muslim fertility is generally much higher. The extreme example is Haryana, where TFR for Hindus is 2.8 and that for Muslims is 6.0. During the last decade, Muslims in Haryana have grown by 60 percent, while Hindus have grown by less than 27 percent.

Thus, the assertion of the Committee that differential in growth of Muslims and others shall decline is not borne out by the data; the assertion is based only in unfounded assumptions.

Lower Muslim Mortality

The fact that Muslims have relatively high fertility is fairly well-known. It is not nearly as well-known that they also have relatively lower mortality. According to the data of the second National Family Health Survey (NFHS), Infant Mortality (IMR) amongst Muslims is 77 compared to 90 per thousand for the Hindus. This differential exists both in urban and rural areas; in fact the differential is considerably higher in urban areas. Urban IMR for Muslims is 51 compared to 64 for the Hindus; the corresponding numbers for rural areas are 90 and 97. Muslims show even more marked advantage in mortality amongst children below 5 years of age (U5MR). These lower mortality rates for Muslims are seen in all regions of India except the northeast.

Comparing the results of the first and second round of NFHS, the Committee further finds that both the infant mortality and under 5 child mortality rates for Muslims have declined more rapidly amongst the Muslim than Hindus. Thus, Muslims not only have lower infant and under-five mortality rates compared to other communities but they have experienced the largest declines in these rates during the 1990s.

The Committee also finds that the advantage that Muslims have over others in infant and child mortality rates persists through adult ages, and their life-expectancy is higher than the average by about one year. Maternal mortality data also shows similar advantage in favour of Muslims.

Thus on all measures of survival, Muslims seem to be doing better than others in India. They have higher fertility, lower infant mortality, lower child mortality, lower maternal mortality and better life-expectancy. And, their advantage on these measures of survival seems to have distinctly improved during the 1990s.

The Committee is surprised at this distinct advantage that Muslims have in terms of survival, in spite of their economically and otherwise disadvantaged position, which the Committee holds to be “given”. The Committee suggests that it might be because of better infant feeding and child care practices among Muslims. But, it is also possible that the traditional values of family and community, which the Muslims are known to have maintained better than most other groups, do offer an advantage in the care of infant, child and the mother, and perhaps also the sick. An extensive study to document child, mother and sick care practices amongst Muslims and the role of the family and community in these matters would be of great sociological significance.

International Migration

Another factor which influences relative growth of a community is international migration. The Committee studies this factor and comes to the conclusion that the higher growth of Muslims in recent decades is largely explained by their higher fertility and lower mortality. The contribution of international migration to the growth differential between Muslims and others is small, amounting to about one sixth of the total differential between Hindus and Muslims. The Committee, therefore, concludes that the feeling that there is considerable international migration of Muslims into India is not valid and that such migration plays only a minor role in the growth of Muslim population in India.

International migration, almost entirely illegal, contributing one-sixth to the growth of a community is not a small matter. If the Committee had further analysed the data for different regions, instead of restricting itself to the national level data alone, it would have certainly found that the contribution of international illegal migration to Muslim growth in certain areas is much larger than this. On most other issues, the Committee insists on the data being disaggregated much below the national level, and in many cases the Committee is dissatisfied that it is unable to get data at micro levels. But on the issue of international illegal migration of Muslims, which is obviously much higher in certain border areas and pocket of the country, the Committee does not feel the need for carrying its analysis below the national level.

EDUCATIONAL CONDITIONS OF MUSLIMS

The next aspect of the condition of Muslims that the Committee takes up for detailed study is their educational status. The Committee looks at a large number of indicators of the status of education. Below, we look at some of its findings.

Literacy Rates

According to the data of the 2001 census, Muslims are indeed somewhat behind the national average in terms of literacy. They have a literacy rate of 59.1 percent as against the national average of 65.1 percent. Surprisingly, as the Committee notices, the gap is higher in urban areas than in rural areas; even more surprisingly, and this seems to have escaped the attention of the Committee, the literacy gap is far less for Muslim females than males. Female literacy rate among Muslims is 50.09 percent as against the national average of 53.55 percent; the corresponding figures for male literacy rates are 67.56 and 75.26 percent, respectively.

Since different states of India differ widely in their literacy levels, it is important to look at the disaggregated literacy data for individual states. At this level the picture becomes more complex. In 10 out of the 21 major states for which the Committee has compiled data, literacy levels of Muslims are *higher* than the state average. These include Jharkhand, Orissa, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu. Notice that the list encompasses all states south of and including Madhya Pradesh. In all these states, except, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Karnataka, the literacy advantage in favour of Muslims is as high as 7-9 percentage points.

This information should have been a matter of celebration for the Committee; it should have been happy that in as many as 10 states of India, Muslims have not only overcome their supposed literacy disadvantage, but have even surpassed others. The Committee, however, sounds disturbed. It suggests that the state-level data should be disaggregated further, because it may lead to the discovery of some sub-group of Muslims within the state that is not fairing as well as the average Muslim of the state and for whose betterment fresh policy interventions may be devised.

The Committee does discover some sub-groups that have some disadvantage with respect to others; but the Committee fails to notice the most important sub-group, that of Muslim females, who seem to be doing much better than others. In all of the 10 states in the list above, Muslim females have a much higher advantage in literacy over the average than that enjoyed by Muslim males. In Chhattisgarh, female literacy amongst Muslims is 74 percent as against the state average of 52 percent; in Tamil Nadu, the corresponding numbers are 76 and 64 percent respectively; and in Orissa, 62 and 50 percent. It is indeed strange that the Committee does not find it worthwhile to mention and highlight this information, which clearly has a great deal to say about the social and educational status of Muslim in India and which so strongly contradicts several stereotype images about their attitude towards both women and education.

Rise in Literacy Levels

The Committee next looks at the rate of rise in literacy amongst Muslims over the last few decades. The data compiled by the Committee clearly shows that literacy rates amongst all groups, including Muslims, have improved rapidly in recent decades. According to the data on age-specific literacy rates computed from the NSS 61st Round (2004-2005), only 46.1 percent of Muslims of age 23 years and above are

literate, while more than 75 percent of Muslims below that age are literate today. This indeed is greatly laudable performance both by the community and the state. But, the Committee once again, instead of lauding the phenomenon, discovers a grouse. The grouse here is that though Muslims have indeed done very well in improving their literacy levels, yet the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes have done even better! SCs/STs in the older age groups had lower literacy than Muslims, but SCs/STs in the younger age groups seem to be doing almost as well, or slightly better. And this the Committee finds to be a matter of concern!

Enrolment Rates and Mean Years of Schooling

The Committee finds, on the basis of the data of Census 2001, that on the average a child in India goes to school for less than 4 years. This obviously should be a matter of national concern. But the Committee is concerned solely with Muslims; mean years of schooling (MYS) may be low for all Indian children, but the Committee frets that MYS for Muslim children is only 83% of the MSY for all children. India urgently needs to ensure that MYS for all children goes up, but the Committee seems to be concerned with only equalising the MYS of Muslims and others.

Incidentally, in the states where Muslim literacy is high, Muslim MYS is fairly near the average or is higher. In Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Orissa, Muslim MYS is above the state average; and, in Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, Muslim MYS is about the same as the state average.

Regarding enrolment rates, the Committee notices that according to the NSSO data there has been a substantial increase of 65 percent in the enrolment rates for Muslims between 1999-2000 and 2004-05 and that this has raised their enrolment rate above that of OBCs. The Committee once again seems to regret that the increase in the enrolment rate of SCs/STs has been even higher at 95 percent.

Higher Levels Educational Attainment

The differences in the educational attainment at middle school and higher levels amongst Muslims are perhaps more significant than the differences in levels of literacy, mean years of schooling and enrolment. It seems that significantly lower percentage of Muslims in the relevant age groups have passed middle, matriculation or higher levels of education. The Committee, however, has deliberately tried to overstate the difference by comparing Muslim attainment with not the average of India or of individual states, but with the attainment levels of a new category of "All Others" formed by subtracting the population of Muslims, SCs and STs from the total.

The more significant aspect of the data is the rapid increase in the levels of educational attainment achieved by Muslims. Within the last decade of 1991-2001, percentage of Muslims who have completed primary education has gone up from 47 to 61 percent, those who have completed middle school from 31 to 41 percent, and those who have completed Matriculation from 16 to 24 percent. Compared to the Muslim attainment at these levels of education at the time of Independence, the improvement is indeed spectacular. It is true that the levels of education have been

improving for others also, including the SCs and STs. But Muslims clearly have been significant participants in this process.

In short, the data on literacy and education that the Committee has compiled seems to indicate that while Muslims were indeed backwards in terms of literacy and education at the time of Independence and for two or three of the following decades, their participation in education has improved rapidly since then. In matters of literacy and enrolment, they have more or less bridged the gap; in half of the major states of India, Muslims, especially Muslim females, have surpassed the average literacy rates of the state. The gaps at the level of higher levels of attainment are still significant, but these are likely to begin narrowing when the higher literacy and enrolment achieved recently begin to reflect in the Muslim attainments at the Primary, Middle and Matriculation levels. Notwithstanding the still persisting gap between Muslims and others at these levels, Muslim attainment at every level has improved significantly.

Overall levels of schooling in India still remain fairly low. We need to ensure that much larger percentage of children completes primary education, and a much larger percentage of them moves to higher levels of schooling. But this is a national, not a Muslim, problem. And, as the data compiled by the Committee indicates, in matters where the nation has begun to move ahead, improvement in the attainment of Muslims has also been equally rapid.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF MUSLIMS

After studying the population dynamics and literacy status of Muslims in India, the Committee turns its attention to their employment status. Below, we summarise some of the major parameters that the Committee studies in this context and its observations on the subject.

Work Participation Rate

One of the simplest measures of the participation of a community or group in economic activity is the worker population ratio or work participation rate, which measures the ratio of workers in the total population. According to the 2001 census, worker population ratio of Muslims is indeed considerably lower than other communities. For India as a whole, work participation rate for Muslims is around 31 percent as against the ratio of 39 percent for the total population. But, as the Committee notes, this lower ratio for Muslims is almost entirely because of extremely low participation of Muslim women in economic activity. For Muslim males the work participation rate is only slightly lower than the average; in fact, this rate is fairly similar for males of all communities. Work participation rate for Muslim women is, however, about half that of Hindus and Christians; the figure is 14 percent for Muslims, about 28 percent for Hindus and 29 percent for Christians. The Committee's estimates based on the 61st round of NSS (2004-05) show that about 44 percent of women in the prime age group of 15-64 years in India participate in work while the rate for Muslim women is only about 25 percent. Further the Committee notes that in

rural areas about 70 percent of the Hindu women participate in work while only 29 percent of the Muslim women are similarly engaged.

The Committee seems to be in a hurry to wish away this information. At this stage, it makes one of its worst snide remarks against the Hindus, saying that the “work participation rate of Muslim women is lower even that for women belonging to upper-caste Hindu households where they may be socio-cultural constraints to women’s work”. The data shows severe socio-cultural constraints to Muslim women’s participation in work, and the Committee talks about possible constraints faced by an unrelated group, whose work participation rate is in fact considerably higher!

But whatever the prejudices that this Committee seems to hold in favour of the Muslims, and against others, especially the upper caste Hindus, the data is abundantly clear that if the work participation rate of Muslims remains low, it is almost entirely because the community does not encourage its women to engage in work. Even acquisition of literacy does not seem to improve the work participation rate of Muslim women. In states like Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, where female literacy among Muslim women is considerably higher than others, their participation in work is even farther below the average of the state. Even in Kerala, where literacy is almost universal, only 6 percent of Muslim women participate in work, compared to 19 percent of Hindu women.

Activity Status

The Committee is on surer ground when it begins to look at the activity status of Muslim and other workers. The Committee finds that participation of Muslims in self-employment related activities is higher than others; about 61 percent of the total Muslim workforce is engaged in such activities as against 55 percent of the Hindu workers. The difference is sharper in urban areas where 57 percent of Muslims and only 43 percent of Hindus fall in this category. In rural areas, the percentage of self-employed Muslims is in fact lower than both the upper caste and OBC Hindus, because of relatively lower participation of Muslims in agriculture.

This somewhat higher level of self-employment amongst Muslims in urban areas is the main finding of the Committee in the context of employment status of Muslims. Correspondingly, Muslims have somewhat lower participation in regular salaried jobs; though, as the Committee notes, the condition of Muslim with respect to such jobs at the aggregate level does not seem very different from that of OBCs and SC/ST Hindus. It is only in urban areas, and especially in public sector employment, that the difference becomes significant. In such urban employment, Muslims seem to be clearly under-represented.

Conversely much larger proportion of Muslims work in self-owned proprietary enterprises, and this is particularly so in urban areas. The Committee further finds that Muslim enterprise and work participation is concentrated in wearing apparel, auto repair and maintenance, electrical machinery, textiles and tobacco products in the manufacturing industries and land transport and retail in the non-manufacturing industries. The Committee analyses the status of the manufacturing industries in this list and finds that during the 1990s there has been significant growth in value added in

all these sectors; and in most of them productivity and employment also have grown considerably. Muslims workers thus seem to be concentrated in growth sectors of economy. The Committee has recommended that efforts should be made to identify more precisely the sectors of economy that have relatively larger presence of Muslims and focus policy interventions in these sectors.

The Committee posits the higher presence of Muslims in self-employment sectors of economy, and corresponding lower presence in regular jobs in the public and private sector, as a matter of concern. But, since Muslim population is known to have a large proportion of artisans, higher level of self-employment amongst them is understandable. In the present context, when the economy and polity are moving towards a much greater emphasis on self-employment and enterprise, the higher presence of Muslims in self-employment sectors should probably be seen more as an advantage than a disadvantage. This is especially so when the sectors of economy of special concern to Muslims also happen to be the growth-sectors of Indian economy.

The Committee goes into much finer details about the employment and occupational status of Muslims. But the thrust of all this is that Muslims are somewhat under-represented in formal and government sectors of the economy, while they have a somewhat better presence in the self-employment and entrepreneurial sectors. And among the latter, the sectors with higher Muslim presence are doing rather well. This is hardly a picture of a community in economic distress.

ACCESS TO BANK CREDIT

If the presence of Muslims is relatively higher in economic activities based in self-employment and individual enterprise than it is important that they should have reasonable access to bank credit. The Committee compiles great amount of detailed data on the relative access of Muslims to credit in different sectors of banking. Broadly the data indicates that Muslims have a fair share of credit accounts; thus Muslims constitute about 12 percent of all credit account holders in the Scheduled Banks, which is close to their share in the population. But, amount per account for Muslims is lower than the average. As the Committee puts it, Muslims are able to get loans sanctioned, but the amounts obtained on average are small in comparison to other groups.

This can hardly be a matter of serious concern. The State and the Society can only ensure that those who need loans have equitable access to banks; the amounts disbursed have to necessarily depend upon the judgement of the banker. The Committee of course recommends several measures to make the banks “specifically direct credit to Muslims”. It is strange that having found that the share of Muslims in credit accounts is satisfactory across various sectors, the Committee does not hesitate in making the sweeping statement that “the financial exclusion of Muslims has far reaching implications...” How and where did the Committee discover financial exclusion in the data compiled? This kind of hyperbole is typical of the sectional advocacy groups on which this high governmental Committee seems to have modelled itself.

The worst that the data compiled by the Committee shows is that the average size of Muslim enterprise is smaller than the overall average. This should not have been surprising, since a larger percentage of Muslims is engaged in self-employment related activities. What is more, the average amount advanced to Muslims is rapidly rising. As the Committee notices, the amount advanced per account for Muslims has been steadily going up; it has nearly doubled in four years, from Rs.15,463 in March 2001 to Rs.29,671 in March 2005. Here also the Committee finds reason for complaint, because the average amount advanced to other minorities has also been rising!

Muslims also have a share of 7.6% in individual deposit accounts; deposit per account for Muslims is almost the same as the average. Average individual deposit per account for Muslims is depressed because of their deposits being very low in some of the states, mainly West Bengal. Elsewhere, Muslims are doing very well in terms of the average deposit held by them. In 12 of the 21 states for which the Committee has compiled data, the average size of deposit per account by Muslims is higher than the average of the state. These 12 states include, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Uttaranchal, Delhi, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Orissa and Chhattisgarh. In some of these 12 states, the average size of deposit in accounts held by Muslims is considerably higher than the average of the state. And, in most of the remaining 9 states, except West Bengal, and to a lesser extent Punjab, the average size of Muslim deposits is fairly near the average of the state.

To sum up, notwithstanding, the various complaints that the Committee makes on the behalf of Muslims, they do not seem to be doing badly in terms of access to credit. The number of Muslims enjoying credit is almost equal to their share in the population; there are several states where the number of loan account for Muslims is even larger than their population. Average amount advanced per loan account for Muslims is lower than the average, but it is fast rising. And, the average amount of deposits in accounts held by Muslims in most states is in fact considerably larger than the average of the state. It is difficult to discern any kind of bias or economic distress in this data.

ACCESS TO SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Under this title, the Committee wants to look at the relative access of Muslims to social and physical infrastructural facilities like roads, schools, hospitals, bank, electricity and potable water etc. The Committee compiles much data to show that availability of such facilities is poorer in localities of relatively higher Muslim concentration.

Of all the data compiled by the Committee, this perhaps stands on the weakest methodological foundation. As the Committee is aware, Muslims in India are strongly concentrated in certain geographical regions of the country. Of 138 million Muslims in India, according to the 2001 Census, almost exactly half, 68.4 million to be exact, live in the four states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. Another 8 million are in Assam. Within these states, Muslims are concentrated much more in the

districts and taluks nearer the border with Nepal and Bangladesh. The localities with relatively higher proportion of Muslims are thus located in these five states, and especially in the border regions of these.

It is well known that these five states, and particularly the border regions amongst them, have relatively poor social and physical infrastructure. It so happens that a relatively larger number of localities of Muslim concentration fall in these areas. The Committee uses this to infer that the localities of Muslim concentration have poorer facilities. This is certainly an invalid inference. The phenomenon the Committee is observing is geographical, not communal. Other communities living in these areas are also equally poorly provided.

The Committee had as its members and had access to a number of competent social scientists. It is therefore fair to assume that this effort to turn a geographical phenomenon into a communal one is not a mere methodological lapse; it has been done intentionally. Such intentional and blatant misrepresentation of data and information is often indulged in by sectional advocacy groups; but this high governmental committee also seems unable to resist the temptation.

However, if as a result of the Committee's exertions, social and physical infrastructure is improved in these states and especially in their border areas, it would be a blessing in disguise. Even if the new facilities get specifically directed towards localities with higher Muslim concentration, as the Committee desires, everyone in the area shall benefit. It would also probably make the border areas of India in the eastern region, which are known to be notoriously porous, more safe and secure.

POVERTY AMONG MUSLIMS

India today is a poor country. Some 320 million of Indians are poor; the number comes down to 251 million if somewhat different methodology is used. Even by this lower estimate, 22.7 percent of Indians live below the poverty line.

The Committee looks at poverty statistics in great detail and it finds that Muslims are over-represented in this unfortunate group of Indians. While 22.7 percent of all Indians are poor, for Muslims the figure is 31 percent. The gap between Muslims and others is high in urban areas; average incidence of poverty in urban areas is 29 percent, but 44 percent of urban Muslims are poor. In rural areas, the gap is much less; the incidence of poverty amongst Muslims in rural areas is 33 percent compared to the average incidence of 28 percent.

There are similar differences in the mean per capita expenditure (MPCE) of Muslims and others; MPCE for Muslims in 2004-05 is Rs.635 against the all India average of Rs.712. The gap is higher in urban areas; MPCE for urban Muslims is Rs.804 against the average of Rs.1105. In rural areas, the difference is marginal; average MPCE in rural India is Rs.579, for rural Muslims it is Rs.553.

The data compiled by the Committee, however, indicates that the incidence of poverty amongst Muslims is declining. It is declining rapidly for Muslims in rural areas.

Between 1993-94 and 2004-05, incidence of poverty amongst rural Muslims has come down from 45 to 33 percent. In 10 of the 21 states for which the Committee has compiled data, incidence of rural poverty amongst Muslims is now lower than the average. These include Delhi, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab. In most of these states, the difference between the incidence of poverty in rural areas amongst Muslims is considerably lower than the state average; thus in Gujarat, 20% of the rural people are poor, the incidence amongst Muslim is 13%; in Tamil Nadu, the corresponding figures are 24% and 10%; in Orissa, 47% and 26%; in Himachal Pradesh, 8% and 4%, in Punjab, 9% and 4%; and in Delhi, 7% and 0%.

In urban areas, the situation for Muslims does not seem as good. But the decline in the incidence of poverty amongst them since 1987-88 has been almost spectacular in several states including Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Orissa and Punjab, and the gap between urban poverty amongst Muslims and the average has been substantially bridged.

Thus the data does indicate high level of poverty amongst Muslims, but the picture is not as uniformly grim as the Committee makes out. In rural areas, the difference between Muslims and others are now hardly substantial; and, in several states rural poverty amongst Muslims is now much lower than the average. In urban areas, the gap between Muslims and others is still large at the all-India level, but it has been substantially bridged in several states.

MUSLIM EMPLOYMENT IN GOVERNMENT SECTOR

Having earlier looked at the employment status of Muslim workers in general, the Committee turns its attention to employment of Muslims in government sector in particular. As the Committee notes, there were 387 million working persons in India in 2004-05. Of these, about 27 million, or only about 7 percent of the total workforce, were employed in the organised sector. And of these, about 18.6 million forming less than 5 percent of the workforces were employed in government departments and public sector undertakings. So in this part of its analysis, the Committee is concerned with the share of Muslims within a fairly small sector of employment.

For this purpose, the Committee asked for and obtained detailed data on community-wise employment from all departments of the government, all universities, all state and central PSUs and from various defence and security agencies. Such collection of community-wise data from even some of the extremely sensitive sectors had raised much controversy.

On the basis of the data that the Committee finally collected, it comes to the conclusion that Muslims have a fairly reasonable share of employment in state level departments and PSUs. They constitute 6.3 percent of the employees in the state level government departments, and 10.8 percent of the employees in state PSUs. Their share of the employment in central government departments, central PSUs and central security agencies, however, is low. The Committee also finds that in these departments and agencies, the share of Muslim is generally higher at lower level

positions, and they are relatively poorly represented at the high managerial, technical and administrative levels.

All this could have probably been concluded from the data on education. All positions in government departments and agencies are filled on the basis of educational attainments. And since the Committee has noticed that the Muslims so far have been less represented in education, especially at the higher levels, their relatively lesser representation in government departments and agencies is a natural consequence of that condition. The Committee has also noticed that levels of literacy and higher attainments in education among Muslims have been rising rapidly during the last couple of decades. This should begin reflecting in their placement in government departments and agencies soon enough. In fact, the data on recent recruitments at the state level compiled by the Committee indicates that the share of Muslims in Group A positions has considerably improved.

Where properly educated and equipped Muslim candidates are available, the Committee has not been able to find any bias against them. Thus the Committee finds that the success rates of Muslim candidates in the written examination and interviews for the civil services conducted by the UPSC are exactly the same as those of other candidates. According to the data collected by the Committee, during 2003 and 2004, Muslims formed 4.9 percent of all candidates that appeared for the mains written civil services examination; Muslims also formed 4.8 percent of the candidates selected for interview, and they formed 4.8 percent of those finally recommended for appointment.

Incidentally, the Committee, in its report, seems to have erred in either calculating the percentages of Muslim candidates etc., or has given their number wrongly. It is difficult to check the data, because UPSC normally does not maintain data on religious identities, and the data for Muslims was specially tabulated by the UPSC for the Committee. But the conclusion of the Committee that the success rates of Muslim candidates both at the level of written examination and the interview are exactly equal to the average success rates is not affected by this error.

Thus once a Muslim candidate presents himself for appointment to the civil services, chances of his selection are exactly the same as that of other candidates. This seems to be true for all services, though the Committee does not seem to be entirely satisfied with the fairness of selection procedures, even in the judiciary. In this context, it comments, "In Judiciary, the recruitment procedures are considered quite fair. Yet the presence and participation of Muslims in the Judiciary has been a major point of concern." Like any sectional advocacy group, this Committee does not seem to hesitate in casting doubt on the fairness of recruitment procedures in general, even in the absence of any evidence of bias against Muslims.

The Committee has been very concerned about the poor presence of Muslims in the security agencies, especially of the central agencies. But surprisingly, the Committee finds that in the states, the Home Department has the highest presence of Muslims compared to any other Departments of the state government. In the Home Departments of Andhra Pradesh, Assam and Kerala, Muslims have a share 14.6%, 11.3% and 10.7%, respectively. In West Bengal, 14.1% of the higher positions in the Home department are manned by Muslims.

We are highlighting these figures from the data compiled by the Committee to show that there is hardly any evidence of a systematic bias against Muslims in any sector of government employment. Therefore, there is no reason to doubt that the share of Muslims in the government departments and PSUs shall improve as the new focus of Muslim community on education that the Committee has documented begins to reflect at the higher levels of education. It seems to be happening already, if the data on recent recruitments compiled by the Committee is any guide.

OBCS AMONG MUSLIMS

The Committee begins with the observation that according to the 61st round of NSSO data, 40.7% of the Muslims and 43% of the Hindus belong to the category of Other Backward Castes (OBCs). In the 55th round of NSSO survey, held in 1999-2000, only 31.7% percent of Muslims and 38.3% of Hindus were reported as OBCs. In the last few years, there has been a considerable premium in Indian public life on the OBC status. Larger and larger numbers of people are aspiring to belong to this category. In five years, the number of Hindus reporting to be OBCs has gone up by 5 percentage points, and the Muslims reporting thus by 9 percentage points.

As the Committee notes, in several states almost the entire population of Muslims has been classified as OBCs. More than 99 percent of the Muslims in Kerala, and almost 90 percent of them in Haryana and Tamil Nadu now have the OBC privilege. In Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand, almost two-thirds of the Muslims have been accorded the OBC status. In Rajasthan, percentage of OBCs amongst Muslims has gone up to 56% from 24% in 1999-2000. Of the states that have a large presence of Muslims, only West Bengal and Assam do not accord OBC status to a majority of them. In West Bengal, only 2.4% of the Muslims are classified as OBCs; in Assam, the figure is 17.1%.

Given that such a large majority of Muslims are OBCs in most of the important states, it is odd that the Committee goes into great detail to find differences in the status of Muslim OBCs and other Muslims in matters of literacy, etc. The differences that the Committee finds are essentially geographical differences between the states where most of Muslims are OBCs and the states where they are not. And mostly these differences are not significant. In fact, the data does not show anything significantly different than what the Committee has already observed for Muslims in general.

Interestingly, the Committee finds that in terms of primary level education, Muslim OBCs as well as other Muslims are doing better than Hindu OBCs; they start falling behind the Hindu OBCs at higher levels. This is a phenomenon that we have remarked upon earlier. If the Muslim community has in the recent past begun to seriously focus on education, as the data indicates, then the present differences between the Muslims and Hindus at higher levels of education should begin to disappear in the near future. Another interesting piece of information that the Committee reports is that the Muslim OBCs are better represented in central security agencies than the general Muslims, and conversely general Muslims are better represented in University jobs than the Muslim OBCs. Another noteworthy bit of information that the Committee collects is that the average monthly per capita

expenditure of Muslim OBCs in rural areas is higher than both the general Muslims and the Hindu OBCs. All these are interesting pieces of information, but they do not tell us much more new about the status of Muslims.

The Committee goes into all this data only to make a case for affirmative action in favour of Muslim OBCs. But this seems to have been already done in the states with relatively high Muslim presence. Like a true advocacy groups, the Committee takes great pains to discover whether some caste that deserves to be classified as OBC has been excluded from some list or the other. However, from the way the Muslim OBC lists have expanded in several states during the last five years, it seems that the Muslims really do not need the advocacy of the Committee in this matter. They already have the political clout and numbers to claim and obtain the privileges of OBC status.

RECLAIMING WAKF PROPERTIES

The Committee has compiled a great deal of useful information on the extent and value of Wakf properties. According to the Committee, about 6 lakh acres of land in the country is occupied by Wakf properties and their book value is estimated at about Rs.6,000 crores. Kerala, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu have the most valuable Wakf properties; book value of such properties in these three states alone is 5,000 crore rupees. West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh have the largest number of Wakf properties; of the total about 4.9 lakh Wakf properties, 2.7 lakhs are in these two states alone.

Some of the Wakf properties are situated in prime locations across the country. The Committee estimates the current market value of these properties in the country to be around 1.2 lakh crores. The Committee believes that if put to efficient and marketable use the Wakf properties can easily generate an income of about 12,000 crores per annum. This is almost two-thirds of the total annual plan outlay of the centre, states and union territories combined on education for 2004-05.

The availability of such valuable properties makes the Muslim communities amongst the most richly endowed communities of India. Unfortunately, unlike on other aspects of the status of Muslims, the Committee has not compiled comparable data on the communally owned properties of other groups. Such compilation would have given some idea of how the Muslim community is fairing relative to others in the matter of public endowments.

The Committee has gone into some detail to suggest legal, administrative and structural measures to ensure that the Wakf properties are cleared of all encroachment and adverse possession by tenants or others, and that these properties are put to the most efficient economic use. The Committee has also suggested that the Government of India should create a National Wakf Corporation with a revolving corpus fund of Rs.500 crores to provide financial and technical help for further development of Wakf properties to enhance Wakf resources.

All these are welcome measures; all communities in India should be helped to properly maintain and run their communal properties and resources. We only hope

that while planning to empower the Muslim community financially, legally and administratively to properly manage its Wakf properties, the Government of India would also extend similar courtesies and privileges to other communities and their communal institutions, including the Hindus and their temples.

PERCEPTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

The Committee begins its Report with a listing of the negative perceptions that the Muslim community has about their status in the mainstream of India. The Committee arrives at this listing through a process of consultation with various invited people and by seeking representations from the public through newspaper advertisements. And, in the first substantive chapter of its Report the Committee presents this list of supposedly felt perceptions and grievances of the community, which reads like a compilation of the well-known stereotypes harboured by Muslims about others.

The Committee thus tells us parenthetically that the Muslims carry a double burden of being labelled as “anti national” and being “appeased” at the same time; that for a large number of Muslim women in India today, the ‘safe’ space is within the boundaries of the home and community; that whenever any incident occurs Muslim boys are picked up by the police; that Muslims live with an inferiority complex as “every bearded man is considered an ISI agent”; that social boycott of Muslims in certain parts of the country has forced them to migrate from places where they lived for centuries; that the perception of being discriminated against is overpowering amongst a wide cross-section of Muslims resulting in collective alienation; that the education system appears to have given up on Muslim girls; that the “communal” content of school textbooks as well as the school ethos has been a major concern for the Muslims; and so on and so on.

That a high level government committee should indulge in such an elaborate listing of mere hearsay and rumours is indeed strange. As we have seen above, the data compiled by the Committee hardly supports any of these prejudices and grievances. In its wide-ranging collection of data from all possible sources, the Committee has been able to find no evidence of a systematic bias against Muslims as Muslims. Wherever it has found the Muslims to be at some disadvantage, it is either because of a certain lag in their taking to modern education, or because of their geographical concentration in some of the least developed border areas of the country, or other similar non-communal causes.

And in spite of all the supposed disadvantages so minutely catalogued by the Committee, the picture that emerges from the data compiled by it is hardly of a community in distress or under seize. On the other hand, an objective look at the data only reveals a resurgent community. Its share in the population is rising everywhere in the country; the community has high fertility combined with considerably lower infant, child and maternal mortality, and higher longevity, compared to others. The proportion of literates in the community is rising; and already total and female literacy amongst Muslims is higher than others in almost half of the major states of the country. And, the community is fast making up the lag it had compared to others in attainments at middle, matriculation and higher levels of education. Self-employment

and entrepreneurial activities, where a large proportion of Muslim workers are engaged, have become the preferred mode of economic activity in the country today. Even more importantly, the sectors of economy that are of particular importance to the Muslims, like textiles, apparels, auto-maintenance, electrical machinery, retail trade, have become the growth sectors of Indian economy. It is therefore not surprising that the size of individual bank deposits in Muslim accounts is considerably higher than the average in most states of India.

Some sixty years ago, the Muslim majority areas of India had seceded from the country. At that stage, a large proportion of the elite and relatively better off Muslims had left the country to seek greater opportunities in the newly created Muslim state. The Muslim community that was left behind was therefore deprived in several ways; on the average it was less educated and economically less endowed. The data compiled by the Committee indicates that the community has largely come out of that phase. It seems to be in the process of building up an educated and economically ascendant middle class.

The setting up of this Committee in fact seems to be a consequence of this resurgence of the Muslim community. The objective of the Committee seems to be to highlight the felt grievances of the resurgent middle class among Muslims and make recommendations for their redressal, irrespective of the validity or otherwise of the grievances. The Committee, in its last chapter, makes a number of such recommendations, some of which seem preposterous. But in the India of today, resurgent middle classes of communities who claim to be outside the mainstream of India are often able to get away with preposterous claims and demands.

It is of course a matter of celebration that the truncated Muslim community that was left behind in India has begun to catch up with others. It is a measure of the egalitarian policies that Independent India has followed that within a few decades the community has been able to make up for the disadvantages of being left with severely depleted middle and upper classes. Many other groups and communities of India have similarly overcome their disadvantage to become significant partners in the society, economy and polity of India. It is however sad that those who have thus benefited from the way the Independent Indian polity has functioned have often ended up articulating greater grievances against the society and the polity. It is the sad fate of India that its mainstream society and polity fail to get recognition or gratitude for helping the various groups and communities grow so rapidly to levels of equality. Ultimately, what is being demanded of the mainstream society and polity is to extinguish itself. The labours and recommendations of the Sachar Committee form a few more steps in that direction.

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