

State of Indian Secularism

Shah Abdul Halim

I am a Muslim, I cannot help my tears;
I have gone through fifty nine long years,
Suffering pangs of hunger, day after day
And unbearable humiliation all the way.
I faced riots, bullets, sword and dagger
They brunt my home, mother and sister;
When I complained, they put me in a cell.
There are no jobs, life is one big hell.
Under the benign sky of my beloved land,
I am reduced to starve with outstretched hand.
Weary and worn out, I search for solace,
I wander crestfallen from palace to palace,
I have no home, so no ration card
And thus no vote, no identity card;
With nothing to offer, I cannot marry
I have remained a bachelor, desolate and solitary;
If only my father had had the foresight
To remain a bachelor too, to save me this plight.
[English rendering of a poem]

How is Indian Muslim in the land of Gandhi? What is their socio-economic and political condition? Let us discuss the life style and the environment in which the Indian Muslims are living. What is their position in the main body politic of the Indian society, not in any particular region but throughout India? Let us discuss their position in different important sectors compared to other religious communities. How far they have made progress in education, trade, business and industry compared to other religious communities in India? What is their representation in the services, in public and private sectors? How is the Muslim community represented in the parliament and in the leadership of different political parties? These are the important criterions for a minority community is not identified by its numbers but decided by its socio-economic conditions. How backward the community is? Does the community lagging behind other communities as far as empowerment is concerned? In this article I shall use the statistics provided by the report on the Minorities Commission headed by Dr. Gopal Singh that was appointed by Indian Prime Minister Indra Gandhi in 1980 and report on 'Socio-economic Status of India's 150 Million Muslims' prepared by seven member committee headed by Justice Rajinder Sachar that was appointed by the current Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh in March 2005. This report has

been prepared by the committee after visiting 13 most Muslim populous states and tabled in the Indian Parliament on 30 November 2006. Press reports alleged that there are discrepancies between leaked copies of the report and the final version suggesting that some parts of the Sachar Committee findings have been deleted before making them public.

Muslims represent 13.4 percent of the Indian population. Their total number being 150 million, unofficial figure is however considered still more. Muslims are marginalized in all sectors in India. In the Lok Sabha which consists of 544 members, for instance, according to the population of Muslims they should have 83 members; but in every election their number has steadily declined. Today it stands at only 17. Likewise, in the Rajya Sabha which consists of 250 members, where because of indirect election, political parties could easily redress the imbalance; the Muslims' share is far below their population strength. Their number today is 11. The representation is going down everywhere, from Panchayat Samities to Zilla Parishads, from municipalities to corporations, from Zilla Parishads to Vidan Sabhas and to the Lok Sabha.

Muslims however are not bothered whether they had a Muslim President or Minister, what they wanted was the removal of economic disparities and social inequality.

The same is true with regard to employment whether in agriculture, trade or industry. In the police and armed forces, their number is negligible. In the Indian Foreign and Administrative service, the percentage of Muslims is abysmally low; this is so in other public services too. They have hardly any share in the management of public sector, which is largely managed by non-Muslims. In the private sector, their position is worse. All in all, the condition of Indian Muslims has considerably deteriorated after Partition of the sub-continent in 1947; they have literally touched rock-bottom. The recurrence of communal riots allows the Muslims no respite; the police give them hardly any protection. Also, being vastly outnumbered in most areas, their sense of insecurity is enhanced with every passing disturbance.

In 1980 Prime Minister Indira Gandhi set up a high powered panel to go into the condition of minorities headed by Dr. Gopal Singh. They collected data pertaining to the actual condition of the minorities, in particular their participation in schools, colleges and professional institutions on the one hand and their employment in public sector undertakings, private enterprises, state and union services, cooperative and banking and such allied sectors on the other. In over four years, after intensive investigation by the staff of the panel and on the basis of the facts and figures that they have collected, it was found that the plight of the minorities was worst, especially of Muslims. However the report was so startling that Indira Gandhi shelved it. The report however saw the day light when Prime Minister V. P. Singh presented it to the Parliament. Unfortunately no Indian government bothers about the uplift of minorities in concrete terms. The occurrence of communal riots

paralyzed the Muslims not only politically but also economically. The minorities have become subdued and hurting them is no longer even politically productive.

The number of Muslims in government services is steadily declining; hardly one or two secretaries in the Centre or States, there is no chief secretary in any state, one high court judge or so in some states; no chief justice in any state. The number of district judges and magistrates don't exceed even two percent of the total; in the armed forces the position is still worse; in industry they have a marginal existence. In public sector undertakings, out of 481 directors, only 6 are Muslims- no chairman, no managing director. In IB and RAW Muslims are debarred.

According to Sachar report the presence of Muslims has been found to be only 3 percent in the IAS, 1.8 percent in the IFS and 4 percent in the IPS. These services constitute the core of civil service responsible for implementing all policy decisions, development programmes and national and state activities. They have done more to deprive the Muslims of their legitimate share. The share of Muslims in employment in various departments is abysmally low at all levels. Muslim community has a representation of only 4.5 percent in Indian Railways while 98.7 percent of them are positioned at lower levels. Representation of Muslims is very low in the universities and in banks. In no state does the representation of Muslims in the government departments match their population share. Their share in police constables is only 6 percent, in health 4.4 percent, in transport 6.5 percent.

According to the Sachar report the share of Muslims having government jobs is just 4.9 percent. Muslims constitute just 3.2 percent of those in India's elite civil service corps.

The situation is worse in states with large Muslim populations. For example, in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and Assam, where Muslims form 25.2 percent, 18.5 percent and 30.9 percent of the population, respectively, their share of government jobs is 4.7 percent, 7.5 percent, and 10.9 percent, respectively.

In the **private sector**, including the top business and industrial houses of Tatas and Birlas, it was found that Muslim employment come to 8.16 percent. Muslims did not get even 50 percent of what their population entitles in the various schemes involving small farmers, marginal farmers, agricultural laborers, landless laborers, training schemes under Integrated Rural Development, rural artisans programmes such as forestry, horticulture, nurseries, pest control, veterinary services, tractor, pump services etc. Likewise, the picture of Muslim employment in National Rural Employment Programme was not encouraging.

In the **small-scale sector**, the Muslim ownership figures were almost 15 percent of the total. However they did not obtain much benefit from the government's package assistance and consultancy services, bank credits, allocation of raw materials, etc. They received only 8.14 percent of the benefits as compared to their population of about 13.4 percent. Only 4.4 percent of the industrial units were owned by Muslims,

while 16.21 percent were owned by SCs. Their share in the allotment of industrial plots came to 6.69 percent.

Grant of Bank loans: There is evidence that India's banks, both public and private, also discriminate against Muslims. According to the Sachar report, the average bank loan disbursed to a Muslim is two thirds of the amount disbursed to other minorities. "Some banks use the practice of identifying negative geographical zones on the basis of certain criteria where bank credit and other facilities are not easily provided".

In terms of intending borrowers, the Muslims numbered 9.41 percent, but the actual disbursement of loans to them came to 3.73 percent. For SCs the intending borrowers were 20.7 percent and they received loans to the extent of 12.7 percent. The loans never extended one hundred thousand Rupees.

According to the Sachar report, Muslims in India have less access to **education** than other religious groups. As a result, the literacy rate among Muslims is only 59.1 percent while the national average is 64.8 percent. School enrollment among urban Muslims boys is only 80 percent, as compared with 90 percent of SC/ST boys. Only 68 percent of Muslim girls attend schools, while the figures for Dalit girls and girls categorized as non-Dalit are 72 percent and 80 percent respectively.

The gap between Muslims and the general average is greater in the urban areas and women. 25 percent of Muslim children in the 6-14 age group have either never attended school or have dropped out. Drop out rates among Muslims are higher at the level of primary, middle and higher secondary. The disparity in graduation attainment rates is widening since 1970s between Muslims and all other categories in both urban and rural areas. When it comes to higher education, the Muslim presence is even lower. The report says that in the elite Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) and Indian Institute of Technology (IITs), the Muslim students constitute only 1.3 percent and 1.7 percent respectively, of the student body. In premier colleges only one out of 25 under-graduate students and one out of 50 post-graduate students is a Muslim. Only 3 percent of Muslim children among the school going age go to Madrassas.

70 percent of the Muslims live in villages and barely able to make ends meet and they are forlorn and rudderless. 150 million Indian Muslims live in a miserable existence; they are looked down upon by the dominant majority who are happy to see them in miserable condition. Not a semblance of care and concern for Muslims. As years passed the condition of the Muslims further deteriorated and they became hewers of wood and drawers of water.

This article will not be complete and I shall not be doing justice to subject I am dwelling in unless I discuss the communal situation in India and the perception of Indian Muslims in resolving the problem. The helplessness of the Indian Muslims is

reflected in the statement of celebrated novelist Arundhati Roy who cried out: "It must be terrible for Muslims to be in India". No one can deny that the odds against Indian Muslims are heavy; these have mounted, year after year. Justice Rajinder Sachar in his report on 'Socio-economic Status of India's 150 Million Muslims' tabled in the Indian Parliament on 30 November 2006 conceded that "India's Muslims are a socially deprived and victimized minority". Indian Muslims has steadily declined and they have been reduced to a level, which has been worse than that of Scheduled Castes. Educationally, they are most backward; economically, they are at the bottom of the ladder; socially they are outclassed. Indian leaders claim that under Indian secularism no citizen can be discriminated. Still followers of the minority religions do suffer discrimination in practice in all walks of life. Eminent Indian intellectual Khushwant Singh rightly debunked Indian secularism 'a big sham'. He warned the minorities 'not to live in a fool's paradise and believe in what was being told to them'. Here it will be sufficient to mention what is happening in occupied Kashmir even today and what happened in Gujrat only the other day.

The less is said about Indian held Kashmir the better. Kashmir is bleeding just because of India's refusal to hold promised plebiscite under U. N. supervision to determine the status of Kashmir. Everyday innocent young Muslim boys are kidnapped by the Indian security forces and their dead bodies are found the next day lying in a street or in a valley or in a terrain. Young Muslim girls are also violated by the security forces. Where are the human rights?

According official report released on 26 March 2007 from Srinager, 42,147 persons died and 33,885 seriously injured in Kashmir during 1990-2007 because of violence. Human-rights organizations in Kashmir claimed the report as untrue. They claimed that the number of deaths is minimum double of the official figure. According to Jammu-Kashmir based Coalition of Civil Society, in Kashmir more than 80,000 people, excluding Army and Police personnel, lost their life because of valance. Kashmir Hurriat Conference leader Syed Ali Shah Jilani claimed that over 100,000 people lost their life in Kashmir freedom movement.

As a result of February 2002 riot in the India's western state of Gujrat 5000 Muslims were killed (officially the Government of India acknowledged that 2000 Muslims were killed by the anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujrat) of which 122 brunt alive including a Muslim former member of the Indian parliament, 100,000 became homeless (Muslims were forced to live in 56 makeshift camps including one camp established within the Muslim graveyard in south Ahmedabad), 350 mosques were demolished, property worth of U.S. \$ 500 million destroyed and 250,000 Muslims became destitute in 40 cities and 2000 villages. Still central government of India did not sack State's Chief Minister Naarendra Modi, for failure to stop pre-planned violence to massacre Muslims and protect their life and property, which the central government could do exercising constitutional authority and take over state administration on law and order ground.

In fact there have been more riots in Free India than in the 150 years of British colonial rule. The governments, both at the Centre and States, irrespective of party affiliation, wake up only when disputes erupt, discontent mounts and riots occur but instead of solving the problem try to pacify it temporarily. To-date no officer was charge-sheeted for dereliction of duty, much less punished. They do little to win the confidence of the people by concrete measures, never candid to denounce communalism but play the gallery.

Not one of the recommendations of the commissions, set up after every riot, has been implemented by any government. All these measures have been merely palliatives to appease Muslims, rather than provide them any substantial protection, assistance or relief. What is more, every government has put the recommendations of every commission to the shelf. The situation is so bad that Justice V.R Krishna Iyer of the Indian Supreme Court lamented: "In all major communal riots, the members of the minority community have been invariably the worst sufferers and they got no justice". Neither the government or the commission and the courts have provided the Muslims any relief. In fact the political leaders and bureaucrats lack the will and determination to shun communal tension and establish communal harmony. It must be clearly understood that neither pious declarations nor half-hearted measures, however well meaning, are going to clear the mess.

Indian Muslim problem is not law and order problem, they are basically an outcome of economic malaise which turns into a political problem because of religious factor. In this regard the recommendations to improve the communal environment submitted by All-party 45 Muslim MPs to the Indian Government and later released to the press is noteworthy which inter alia states:

1. The defense and protection of the minorities against violence should be the responsibility of the Central Government and to be treated as a national issue, and not simply as a law and order problem in the same manner as atrocities against Harijans are, through a constitutional amendment, if necessary.
2. The police force and the intelligence machinery must be purged of communal elements and restructured to provide due and effective representation to all communities. Special anti-riot task forces should be constituted both at the Central and State levels for exclusive deployment in riot situations. Until such forces are raised, the CRPF and BSF should alone be deployed and not state armed constabularies.
3. The record of senior police and executive officers should be screened for communal bias and for performance during communal disturbances and anyone suspected of communal bias should not be posted to sensitive districts. In such districts, there should be a proper mix of officers to generate all-round confidence.
4. If communal disturbances do not stop within 24 hours of the first loss of life, the Chief Minister must personally rush to and camp in the area till normalcy is

restored. The D.M. and the S.S.P. should be held responsible and immediately suspended and replaced by a pre-selected team officers, known and tested for their efficiency, integrity and non-communal outlook and for commanding the confidence of the weaker sections.

5. The victims of the violence should be appropriately compensated for loss of life and limb, in accordance with a uniformly prescribed scale. All property, movable or immovable, lost or damaged, should be replaced or reconstructed at State expense. Compensation so paid should be recovered by imposing a punitive fine from those involved in the riot in inverse proportion to the loss suffered.

6. The criminal cases arising out of the communal disturbances should be expeditiously investigated by Central Intelligence Agencies and tried by Special Courts.

7. All militant and extremist organizations preaching communal hatred such as Vishwa Hindu Parishad and R.S.S. should be banned.

8. During the riot all newspapers and periodicals should be screened and malicious and mischievous writing should be dealt in accordance with the law. Rumors of wrong information should be officially contradicted on a daily basis. Detailed information about casualties, including the names of those killed, hospitalized and arrested should be published in daily bulletins in order to catch misinformation and to appraise the nation of the truth.

9. Text books should be screened and materials that preach hatred between communities be dropped from the books.

Other noteworthy recommendations suggested by Indian Muslims include arming the state to put the offender under detention under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act by appropriate legislation and censoring all such news and comments which inflame communal passions, if necessary by amending Indian Constitution. The recommendations also include the demand for special budgetary provisions for the development of the Muslims, like the Schedule Caste, in the Five Year Plan and to keep at least one Muslim representative in all appointment boards. Until now the Indian Government did not make any sincere effort to implement the recommendation by its senior citizens and MPs.

To sum up, what is happening to the Muslims in India is all part of a broader tendency towards curbing civil liberties and scapegoat cultural minorities in an aggressive effort to impose dominant Hindu nationalism on one of the world's most culturally diverse societies. This is proved further by the fact that only in occupied Kashmir Urdu is the official state language. Urdu is discriminated in educational institutions although a sizable people of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh speak Urdu. More than fifty percent of the Indian Muslims have declared Urdu as their mother tongue according to census report and there is a tendency to systematically erode its

influence from the society to de-link Muslims from their religious and cultural treasures. What is the way out of this impasse? Muslims of India must realize that they must make headway in education, science and technology. They must prove that there is no way for the dominant Hindu community to ignore them by making their services indispensable. This however they can do if they also make progress in the private sector as entrepreneurs, which I think is possible even without the help of Indian Government given their experience and expertise. There is also no meaning for Indian Muslims to wait for Government help and assistance. No doubt the future of Indian Muslims is bright provided they give emphasis to socio cultural and economic realities of Indian life and at the same time take a fresh look to the Indian national political scenario and work within pragmatic limits. *

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