

## Marginalization and Stratum of Dalit, Muslim in India

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**Abstract:** Marginalisation, it means when a certain group of people are excluded from the normal course of life and are forced to the edge of society because they speak a different language or follow different social customs or do anything which is not in sync with the views of the majority. It is unfortunate in a developing country to be marginalised but it is worse to be marginalised, vulnerable and unprotected. The marginalised are most affected even by slightest disruptions or shocks. It was during the nationwide curfew to contain the spread of COVID-19, the economically disadvantaged people were the most affected. In India, groups of people are also Marginalised because of their poverty or because they belong to a different caste, different sex, ethnicity, occupation etc. In case of Indian Muslims as a religious marginalized community, these two concepts overlap. However, concern with 'marginalization' is relatively recent and it is imperative to check the development trajectory on the marginalized groups. As considerable evidence exists, a process of 'marginalization' of minority communities exists in almost all societies and nothing warrants that the same is not true of Muslims in India to a greater or a lesser degree. While discussing social structure of Indian Muslims prominent scholars like Imtiaz Ahmad and Zoya Hasan brought forth the theoretical debate "Can there be a category called Dalit Muslims" (Imtiaz, A, 2007; Zoya, H, 2009). This paper will explore the systemic processes through which Muslims are being marginalized step by step in different zone of life.

**Keywords:** Caste, Marginalization, Religion, Minority, Dalit Indian Muslim.

### INTRODUCTION

In simple words, 'marginalization' is a set of process which ignores or relegates individuals or groups to the sidelines of political space, social negotiation, and economic bargaining. Homelessness, age, language, employment status, skill, caste, race, and religion are some criteria historically used to marginalize. Muslims being the largest religious minority community in India faces difficulties, spatial differences, intolerance, and physical insecurity and so on under the fabric of social, economic and political development. Also, how the processes of 'marginalization' either give birth to their socio-economic inequalities or overlap in various domains of deprivation.

"But caste and untouchability is a lived reality for Muslims living in India and South Asia, and untouchability is the community's worst-kept secret." (BBC, 2016)

Even though Islam is egalitarian in its social ethics, Indian Muslim society is characterised by cast- like features, consisting of several caste- like groups (*jatis, biraderis*). Despite the conversion to Islam, the social and economic conditions of the Muslims in each caste hardly changed, and they remained tied down to their traditional occupations.

As the increasing democratization, citizenship, globalization and development swell the ranks of those "included" in the social order, so the plight of those who are at the road of margins becomes problematic. Therefore, based on secondary

sources/data, this paper attempts to assess or reassess the pre and post-Sachar committee report of the situation of Muslims in Indian society in the context of historical, social, economic and political aspects/parameters in order to have a comprehensive analysis of the processes of marginalization and inequality. It will try to locate this argument through conceptual framework of socio-economic and spatial marginality to trace those processes of deprivation, exclusion and marginalization. According to 2011 Census, Muslims constitute about 14.2 percent of India's total population. But we do not know much about the sociopolitical dynamics of this theoretically monolithic and empirically diversified community due to lack of sufficient research. There has been an attempt to represent Muslims as a single, monolithic, homogenous group not only in political terms, but also in social science discourses. These kinds of representations have been facing a serious challenge in recent times owing to the emergence of the perspective of understanding Muslim society from below. Indian democracy, despite its various pitfalls, has over the year's unleashed forces of democratization among various social groups including marginalized ones. (Kohli, A, ed, 2001) However, it has not unleashed forces of democratization within the Muslim community. Thus, the initiation of wider social and educational reform within the community is yet to start. Therefore, it is essential to look at the issues related to the silence imposed historically, socio-economically and politically on

Muslims, especially Muslim women and how Muslim women have been marginalized, excluded and discriminated throughout the processes of democratization and trajectories of development.

### **Pre and Post Partition of Indian Muslims: Inequality, Identity and Marginality**

Indian history of Muslims depicts how they have been visibly invisible in the processes of democratization and prone to significant decline in socio-economic as well as political terms. History is itself a mirror-process which puts various narratives in the world picture of marginalization, exclusion and inequality. Indian Muslims being the lost children of India's partition bear the stigma of the past throughout the history and perceived as the main culprits for Divided India. This has resulted in unprecedented sufferings of deprivation and marginalization process of Indian Muslims. Therefore, this section tries to explore what role has Indian history played in the process of 'marginalization' of Muslims. With the invasion of Muslim rule, the generally accepted belief was that the exclusion of Muslims had its roots in the conversion of Dalits and backward classes to Islam but with the imposition of caste system among Muslims. The frequent fight between the Muslim rulers with that of Hindus had widened the communal divide. Though conversion to Islam gave them a sense of identity and equality but it didn't make difference to their socio-economic situations. Rather it pampered the sufferings causing inequalities on the basis of caste structure. For instance, the Hindu dhobi became a Muslim dhobi and he still remained a dhobi. The Varna system of Hinduism became the jamaats of Muslims or what Muslims call it 'zat' or 'biradari'. Of course, one cannot forget the momentum of the Partition that shook the very existence of Indian Muslims. Since then the vibrations of communal passions turned Muslims into a mere suspicion of Pan-Islamic leanings. In fact, Muslims marginalization was a complex condition of disadvantage that this minority community had experienced before and after the independence in the hands of both, Britishers and Hindu forces. Because of their troubled legacy and vulnerabilities, the systemic marginality of Indian Muslims was created by socially constructed inequitable forces of bias. Muslims who stayed back still face the general suspicion and their loyalty is continuously questioned by different sections such as state, media and political class. They also categorically dub them as "agents of

Pakistan". Therefore, it is important to question that why even after 72 years of independence, the stereotypes about Muslims in general and women in particular continue to prevail not only in the minds of political class, media, opinion-takers but in the whole discourse of the processes to democratization, change, equity and development. When Indian polity was on the way of democratization and processes of development, various official reports and surveys highlighted the socio-economic backwardness of Muslim community such as Panel on Minorities and Weaker Sections headed by Gopal Singh, (Gopal Singh Committee Report on Minorities, 2011) the 43<sup>rd</sup> round of the National Sample Survey (1987-88), the Programme of Action, the New Education Policy, 1986 and the Planning Commission Survey of 1987-88. According to New Education Policy, 1986 (National Policy on Education, 1986) "the Muslims along with neo-Bodhs are the most backward component of the Indian population today, in the field of education they are far behind the other sections of society". (The Government of India, 1986) After analyzing the 43<sup>rd</sup> round of the National Sample Survey (1987-88) data on a comparative inter-religion studied, Abu Saleh Shariff concluded, "the Muslims are relatively worse-off than the majority of Hindus which include the STs, SCs, and Christian population in both the rural and urban areas in India" (The National Sample Survey, 1987-88). In fact, Muslims are poorly represented in public employment, occupying only six per cent of state government jobs, four per cent in the central government, three per cent in the Indian Administrative Services and less than one per cent in senior bureaucratic posts. (Zoya, H, 1994) These empirical surveys and data depict that how Muslims as a religious minority has been marginalized in the history of Indian formation. However, it portrays that Muslim community is often at discontent and dismayed with such a process of marginalization as it deprives them of many opportunities in life. They face unfair treatment in terms of employment opportunities, business opportunities, educational opportunities, housing among various others. Such process further molds into inequality that creates distinct feelings of being left out or being exploited. It is also worth mentioning that a parallel process also takes place alongside marginalization. Cultural chauvinism or religious bigotry intensifies the former process. Cultural chauvinists tend to promote their own culture or religious bigots promote their own religion against the other

culture or religion in such a manner that the other feels threatened and fails to find enough space to exist in the society. In such circumstances, the women of the community become extremely important symbols. The incidents of unprecedented wave of communal riots of 1990s, the Gujarat pogrom of 2002 and contemporary issues (recent Dadri lynching of 2015) have seriously destroyed/undermined the fabric of the Indian state's secular and democratic credentials. In the communal – ridden society of India, most of the employers, industrialists and middlemen are Hindus, whereas most Muslims work as employees, workers and artisans.(Singh, K.S, 1998)This ominous development has posed a great threat to the Indian Muslims and quest of survival.

### **Socio-Economic and Educational Status**

The determining factor about changing patterns of marginalization relates to the socio-economic status of Muslims' religious minority community. It is evident that disadvantaged sections in India including the Muslims are awakening in recent times and organizing movements for equality and social justice under forward-backward, sociopolitical set-up of the country.(Gopal Singh Committee Report on Minorities, 2011; Ali, A, 2001) In fact, it is widely assumed that during partition, the heaviest migration of Muslims that took place were from upper and middle strata of society but still there is lack of such empirical or statistical data. This left the remaining Muslim population in India more disadvantaged than before. Subsequently, it has led serious setback in development and progress of Muslim society and even downtrodden their social, economic and educational backwardness. Like education, employment and income (economic marginalization) are important tools to understand dimensions of Muslims marginalization. It is crucial to understand that marginalization in education lies in various forms of persistent disadvantage which is rooted in underlying social inequalities. Hence, to examine the educational backwardness plays a determining role in planned development of a country. Historically educational backwardness of Muslims is seldom a cause and consequence of their marginalization and discrimination. There is a significant disparity between the educational status of Muslims and that of other socio-religious categories (except SCs and STs).(Ali, A, 2001) The constitution of a High Level Committee to prepare a report on the social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community of India formed and submitted its

report in 2006 with Justice Rajinder Sachar as its chair. This Report finds "that Muslims are at a double disadvantage with low levels of education combined with low quality education; their deprivation increases manifold as the level of education rises. In some instances, the relative share Muslims is lower than even the SCs who are victims of a long standing caste system. Such relative deprivation calls for a significant policy shift, in the recognition of the problem and in devising corrective measures, as well as in the allocation of resources".(Government of India, 2006)

According to the Sachar Report, the literacy rate among Muslims in 2001 was 59.1 % which was far below the national average (65.1 %) and other SRCs (70.8%).(Government of India, 2006) In general, the state level estimates suggest that the literacy gap between Muslims and the general average is greater in urban areas and for women; Muslims in urban areas, especially Muslim women, have a larger literacy deficit vis-à-vis the average condition prevailing in the state.(Ibid)On the other hand, a comparison across SRCs both by gender and by place of residence also reveals consistently lower levels of Mean Years of Schooling (MYS) for the Muslim community.(Ibid) According to the Sachar Committee's findings, 25per cent of Muslim children in the 6-14 age groups either never went to school or else dropped out at some stage.(Ibid) It is highlighted that the gap between Muslims and other SRCs increases as the level of education increases, whereas only 3% as a whole is lagging behind in end of Muslim children among the school going age go to Madarsas.(Ibid) This disparity reflects that how Muslim community education sector, which directly or indirectly perpetuates inequalities in this regard. This disparity as a result of exclusion from mainstream depicts the picture of societal marginality of Indian Muslims. Now the question arises when this is the case with Muslim community as a whole, then what can be the various critical conditions of a Muslim woman who is doubly marginalized and excluded group from mainstream arena. NSSO data 1987-8 clearly shows that Muslim women in urban India are much worse off than their rural counterparts, not only in terms of their overall educational status as citizens of India, but also in terms of their relatively poor educational status when compared to Hindu or Christian women.(The National Sample Survey, 1987-88)The interaction between marginalization in education and wider

patterns of marginalization operates in both directions. Through case studies one can have a larger picture of the marginalization of Muslim women in the education sector. In a Case study 'Muslim Women and Girl's Education: A Case Study from Hyderabad', Rekha Pande tries to look at the educational status of Muslim women and their attitude towards the education of their girls in three slums of Hyderabad. (Rekha, P, 2006) According to this survey, the overwhelming finding is of conspicuous and continuing disparities in education for the Muslim women. While 28.66 per cent men were illiterate, 38.66 per cent women were illiterate. (Ibid) Even at the all India level most Muslim women have never been to school. Close to 58 per cent of women reported themselves to be illiterate and the school enrolment rate for the Muslim girl is high at the primary level that is 53.46 per cent, but as we move up the education ladder, there is a significant drop in the proportion of the higher education. (Ibid) The reasons found were economic backwardness of Muslim community and they do not see that the formal system of education providing them livelihood because they are miniscule in government jobs. Of course, through the lens of women, they are at most disadvantage due to cultural norms as well as family livelihood strategies through making the very socialization of women. Through the Case Study of Jammu & Kashmir where majority of population is Muslims shows that the educational status of Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular is quite dismal. In a paper titled 'Islam, Gender and Education: A Case Study of Jammu and Kashmir', Fayaz Ahmad Bhat and others reveal that though Muslims constitute the majority community of the state with 67 percent of the total population are at the bottom with 47.3 percent literacy rate. (Bhat, F.A, et al., 2011) It is clear from this survey that Muslims are educationally a marginalized community in the state of J&K and the situation of Muslim women is much more disappointing. The present educational scenario in the state of J&K clearly reveals that gender disparity exists and disparity between religious groups in education and Muslim women being the worst sufferers in this context. (Ibid) This study further reflects that it is not out of the religious compulsions or Islamic teachings that make the basis for this backwardness and marginalization but due to the lack of social awakening and political consciousness. Hasan and Menon (Zoya, H, et al., 2004) in a survey carried out across the country on Muslim women found that near about 60 percent

of Muslim women reported themselves as illiterate. Therefore, there is immediate need to develop various platforms and channels to deal with educational backwardness of marginalization in Muslim community as whole and exclusively Muslim women. Education of women is one of effective tool and channel of measurement to reduce socio-economic inequalities, tackle discrimination and contribute in the process of equity and development. Various studies (Zoya, H, et al., 2004; Roy, S, 1979; Menon, I, 1981; Agrawal, M, 1986) have shown that education has made a significant contribution in improving the status of women.

### **Segregation of Muslims and Dalit**

One of the most striking feature and element of marginalization of Muslim community in India is the influence of space itself, i.e., ghettoization of Muslims. Gradually, the creation of 'otherness' plays a determining role in the process of ghettoization of Muslims and quest for identity. This 'otherness' is being created not only by society but also by state. The labeling of Muslims as 'terrorist' has been one of the vital factor for their physical estrangement while producing housing market and sentiment of insecurity fostered by communal riots. The explanation of the spatial dimension of marginality is primarily based on physical location and distance from centres of development, lying at the edge of or poorly integrated into system. (Larsen, J.E, 2002; Larsen, J.E, et al., 2003) But one must point out that why this ghetto is formed? Is it important to be accumulated spatially to counter physical as well as cultural insecurity posed by government or any other groups of the society? This has become a matter of concern and quest for identity for deteriorating the conditions and deprivation of already marginalized Muslim community. An ambitious effort has been made in order to present an untold story of Muslim ghettos in Indian cities by Laurent Gayer & Christophe Jaffrelot in their book "*Muslims in Indian Cities: Trajectories of Marginalization.*" This book supplements an ethnographic approach to Muslims providing a different angle and insight vision into a little familiar but highly consequential subject. While examining the 'ghettoization thesis', this book tries to look into the Muslim localities and the way they relate to the wider reality of their city. In this book, Gayer, in his excellent study of Abul Fazal Enclave in Delhi, highlights the ambiguity of choice in situations where individuals are bound by multiple constraints. In the perception of

physical security and residential security, this area represents the case of self-segregation rather than ghettoization. To sum up, she concludes that the larger discourse that perceives Muslim women as being oppressed by their own culture (and male relatives) obscures the fact that this same discourse exacerbates the restrictions that Muslim women experience. It also obscures the fact that Muslim men as much as Muslim women are excluded from public space. (Ibid) Therefore, it shows that how ghettoization plays a key role in the processes of marginalization with adverse social, psychological and political consequences. The above mentioned case studies demonstrate that spatial marginality or topographical divide based on religion persist in the process of marginalization of Muslims. An emerging & prominent argument can put forward in this regard is known as 'surveillance'. Because the physical watching has implications for inequality and for justice, surveillance studies also have a policy and a political dimension, says David Lyon. (Lyon, D, 2002) They are excluded by both society and state as well. Thus we can say that, they are feeling not only insecurity from society but also by state, thereby, creating a kind of social exclusion and political exclusion as well.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the above empirical data and case studies, it is evident that issues of discrimination, exclusion and marginalization of Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular is complex and marginalization of Muslims in India is a harsh reality but a serious matter of concern. The rigid social stratification among Muslims has deepened their vulnerabilities and sufferings. The case of Muslim women is unimaginable in this regard especially women from lower caste. While imparting education to all Muslims is very much required, the causes and consequences of spatial marginality reflects the negative image of the society, which needs to be assessed and examined. It all leads to their severely stigmatised and extremely excluded conditions. Therefore, an effective and inclusive policy is urgently needed to open up various platforms for absorbing religiously marginalized minority communities to develop a more democratic and secular India. Since it is clearly visible that Muslim Indians share an economic and educational predicament with their vulnerable non-Muslim fellow citizens, therefore, economic and educational welfare are the predominant concerns in the process of democratization of Muslims. However we should look at the growing consciousness,

democratization, assertiveness and political mobilization of lower caste Muslims on order to examine the politics, programmes and broader agendas that advocates of this new identity seek to put forward on behalf of a large section of India's Muslim population.

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