

Post-Sachar Reservation Politics

MANZOOR ALI

The recent attempt to pass a 4.5% sub-quota for Muslims under backward classes has drawn the community into the reservation framework. In this light, it is important to recognise castes within Muslims that are poor and socially downtrodden. A change in our understanding of the homogeneity of the Muslim community is the key to understand the issues at hand.

On 5 March 2013, Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind held an *Insaaf* march to press for reservations for the Muslim community. The social, educational and economic backwardness provide the context for such a demand. The community has evolved its position vis-à-vis reservation in educational institutions and government jobs and now believes that without progressive quotas upliftment of Muslims would not be possible as they face discrimination at every level. The two commissions designed to map the socio-economic status of minorities and to recommend measures to improve their conditions were the Sachar Committee and the Ranganath Mishra Commission. The first diagnosed the problem and the second recommended measures. They can be credited with rejuvenating the debate surrounding minorities and their relationship with the state in the context of inclusive growth.

Key Issues

Minority backwardness, especially among Muslims, in terms of health, education and employment, was widely discussed across the country. Political parties and civil society, along with Muslim organisations, participated in the debate. The debate forced politicians and political parties to take position vis-à-vis Muslim backwardness. The Congress Party endorsed its traditional view backed by the customary understanding of Muslims as

a homogeneous community – the Muslim problems of identity, security and equity are uniform, and there is no marked difference. The Sangh parivar too took ideological positions vis-à-vis the findings and suggestions of the two commissions. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the political face of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, argued that the Sachar Committee findings have been manipulated for electoral gain and it could sow the seeds of another Partition. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) – CPI(M) argued that

the Sachar Report has blown the myth of minority appeasement by presenting scientifically collated evidence, which shows that minority communities, especially Muslims, face deprivation and discrimination in myriad forms (*People's Democracy* 2007).

However, the Muslims' educational backwardness and low representation in government jobs in West Bengal under the CPI(M) sullied the progressive image of the party.

Further, poor inclusiveness of Muslims in the developmental process in various states ruled by parties of different ideological hues forced Muslims to believe that no political party was good enough to deal with their grievances. Consequently, they argued for a separate party for Muslims. Hence, the period after the release of the reports has witnessed the mushrooming of Muslim-centric political parties. Table 1 (p 14) lists some of the parties formed after the release of the Sachar Committee report.

Politicking

Sensing deep frustration among Muslims, the Congress sought to use the opportunity to regain lost ground within the

Manzoor Ali (manzooral.ali@gmail.com) is with the Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability, New Delhi.

Table 1: Muslim Political Parties in India Formed after the Sachar Committee Report

Sr.No	Name of the Party	Formation Year	Remark
1	Peace Party of India	2008	Split in 2011. Faction named as Rashtriya Peace Party
2	Welfare Party of India	April 2011	
3	Awami Vikas Party	1 May 2012	Focus on the unity of dalit and Muslims
4	Popular Front of India	November 2006	Formed after the merger of three political outfits, i.e., Karnatak Forum for Dignity, National Development Front and Manitha Neethi Pasarai
5	Rashtriya Ulema Council	4 October 2008	Maulana Amir Rashdi Madni floated it to forward the interest of eastern Uttar Pradesh
6	People's Democratic Conference of India (West Bengal)	-	It was led by Maulana Siddiquallah Chaudhary

community. It is in this context that in 2011, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) II cabinet approved in a slapdash manner the 4.5% sub-quota for minorities within the existing reservation of 27% for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) just before five state elections.

The Muslim reaction has been varied. Some believe it is a betrayal of the community, and to others the offer is inadequate. The Tamil Nadu Muslim Munnetra Kazagham (TMMK) planned a show of black flags to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh during his visit to Chennai in December 2011. The party argued that with 4.5% reservations Muslims will now have to compete with forward minority communities like Christians and Sikhs. Table 2 shows a comparative socio-economic status of major minority communities. The TMMK proposed the implementation of the Ranganath Mishra Commission recommendations of a 15% minority quota. Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam Member of Parliament, M Abdul Rahman argued that it is a welcome step but inadequate for Muslims.

Table 2: Comparative Socio-economic Status of Major Religious Groups at All-India Level

Source	Measure	Muslim	Christian	Sikh
Census 2001	Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000)	95	77	82
Census 2001	Literacy rate (%)	59.1	80.3	69.4
SCR and Report on Notified Minority Communities (other than Muslims, 2008)	Landless population (%)	60.2	54.81	66.50

Source: Sachar Committee Report, 2006.

However, reactions on the 4.5% Muslim sub-quota do not critically analyse the question of “who would be the beneficiaries”. Reservation based on religion has no precedent in the history of affirmative action. In case of Muslims, even if the sub-quota is implemented, the major proportion would be appropriated by the Ashraf castes (noble, high castes). For instance, the Indian Institute of Technology-Joint Entrance Examination (IIT-JEE)

Admissions Committee has decided to implement the sub-quota. Following the reservation, around 430 minority candidates were expected to get admission in the 17 IITs across the country going by last year's figure of a total of about 9,500 seats. The result of the IIT exam reveals that 392 Muslim candidates were selected. Out of this total, only 172 were OBC Muslim candidates, i.e., 44%. The remaining 56% belonged to forward castes. Only one Scheduled Tribe Muslim was able to secure a seat.

Going through the Motions?

The UPA II government was aware that the cabinet decision would be challenged, as it happened previously in the case of 5% minority reservations in Andhra Pradesh. The petition was filed by Andhra Pradesh Backward Classes Welfare Association president R Krishnaiah and others. The bench, comprising Chief Justice Madan B Lokur and Justice P V Sanjay Kumar declared that this action of the central government was based on religious considerations and not on any other intelligible consideration.

The question arises as to why the UPA government is indulging in misadventures on such an important issue. Various factors are affecting the government's decision. One obvious answer is the ostensible sympathy towards Muslims. The Congress opinion on Muslims is actually a view advanced by Ashraf Muslims and their interests. Salman Khurshid and Ghulam Nabi Azad at the centre are the co-opted poster boys of Muslims. Both belong to

Ashraf castes. Similarly, various state leadership positions are Ashraf dominated. The agenda set by them is considered as the agenda for the entire community.

Moreover, the Congress believes in a piecemeal process of democratisation. Whenever Muslims started moving away from Congress, it came up with some populist measure to show its concern for minorities. For instance, there was Indira Gandhi's 15-point programme, the UPA government's new 15-point programme, and the Sachar Committee report. The policies generated from these programmes, while noble in intention, have not been implemented in a holistic way and have ended up pacifying the anger against the government without any concrete improvements in most of the community.

Budgeting for Muslims

According to a study conducted by the Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability it was found that

The share of Ministry of Minority Affairs (MMA) in the total allocation at 0.79% of total central sector plan is insignificant...Out of the total allocation, the four components of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) constitute 70% of the total funds for the minorities.

Most of these allocations made under JNNURM are notional as the scheme does not report actual expenditures and beneficiary data for minorities. The inclusion of minorities in JNNURM is found to be almost non-existent at the state and district levels...With regard to the MMA, the average utilisation of funds is around 78% of the total outlay for MMA in the 11th Plan period (total plan outlay for MMA was Rs 8,690 crore). Of the total tentative allocation of Rs 3,747 crore made in the 11th Plan for Multi-Sectoral Development Programme (MSDP), the proportion of expenditure of total projects approved (80 out of 90) was only 34%...The overall utilisation of funds under scholarship schemes has not been up to the mark, although, the physical targets have been overachieved in the plan period (CBGA 2012: 4).

Need of the Hour

The lack of seriousness in implementing the Sachar Committee report can be gauged from the discussions in the Seventeenth Report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment (2011). This report, which was tabled in both houses of Parliament on 4 August 2011, has rejected the

government's claims that it was according high priority to the execution of decisions based on the Sachar Committee's recommendations. A monitoring body should have been formed to look into the implementation in a time-bound manner. Instead, UPA II has drawn the entire community into the quota framework. The tactic is doing no one any good, particularly Muslim OBCs and poorer Ashrafs. Muslim OBCs are neither

getting a sub-quota within the 27% OBCs reservation, nor are the schemes meant for poor Muslims (including Ashrafs) being implemented properly. Yet, the government projects a pro-minority image.

First, the government must stop indulging in gimmickry and implement the Sachar Committee report in totality. Second, it must bring in a sub-quota exclusively for Muslim OBCs. Third, it must declare Presidential Order (1950) null

and void and bring dalit Muslims into the scheduled castes category.

REFERENCES

- CBGA (2012): *Policy Priorities for Development of Muslims in the 11th Plan: An Assessment*, Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability.
- Ministry of Minority Affairs (2011): "Seventeenth Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment" (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat)
- People's Democracy* (2007): "Implement Sachar Committee Recommendations", *People's Democracy*, 8 July, viewed on 23 August 2013 http://pd.cpim.org/2007/0708/07082007_delhi.htm