THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN INDIA: THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SACHAR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

The Prime Minister's High Level Committee to "Report on Social, Economic and Educational Status of Muslim Community of India" under the chairmanship of the venerated civil rights activist and former Judge Rajinder Sachar was set up in March 2005. The report of the commission, submitted in November 2006, deals with the three inter-related issues of concern to India's 156 million Muslims: identity, security and equity. All being important, the Committee however, given its terms of reference, chose to focus specifically on equity.

INEQUITY AND THE INDIAN MUSLIM COMMUNITY

On identity-related issues, the report admits to a near-absence of "spaces of interaction" between Muslims and other socio-religious communities. For instance, in the understanding of "patriotism," Indian Muslims carry the double burden of being labelled as "anti-national" and, at the same time, as being "appeased." While Muslim cultural markers *i.e.* beard, skull-cap etc. are a source of suspicion and ridicule, gender issues get a typical Muslim slant. When talking of Muslim women, almost no one talks of their life – their health, education, income, etc. The gender-based discourse remains almost exclusively confined to issues like *hijab*, marriage and divorce. The problem gets compounded when Islam is berated for its backwardness with no effort whatsoever to identify factors of discrimination, marginalization and exclusion of Muslims from the developmental-democratic processes. The Committee itself had only two tasks before it: to highlight the relative deprivation of Muslims vis-à-vis other socio-religious communities; and secondly, to identify possible areas of state intervention.

On security-related issues, the report laments the constant fear of communal violence: its deleterious economic impact on "opportunity structure" for Muslims; an "inferiority complex" bred by being branded as anti-national, with more police stations than schools in Muslim localities; and ghettoization, specially in the aftermath of the 2002 Gujarat pogrom, which has further shrunk the spaces for interaction and denied them necessary physical and social infrastructure.

THE SACHAR REPORT: EDUCATION AMONG MUSLIMS

How can we explain the inability of Muslims to access political representation and resources for development? The Sachar Committee presents a wide data range culled mainly from government sources and presents few perspectives in the light of equity issues. In fact, its methodology can be questioned; relying on bare-bone data does not reveal the entire complexity of marginalization and exclusion. Nevertheless, equity key aspects that the report deliberates upon pertain to population, education, economy and employment, infrastructure, and government employment.

Refuting the myth of a Muslim population explosion and of Muslims overtaking all other religious communities somewhere in the not-so-distant future, the report confirms that population growth among Muslims has declined in most states during the 1991-2001 period. The Committee further opines: "Given the current trend, Muslim population will not increase beyond 18-19% by the end of the 21st century", compared to their present 14% of the total Indian population.

It is not conservatism but the failure of state to provide secular educational institutions in Muslim-dominated areas that explains the pathetic condition of access to education. Muslim communities are mainly rural but compared to other socio-religious communities have a higher ratio of urbanization; yet the literacy rate among Muslims is at 59.1% compared to the national average of 65.1%. It is more glaring in the case of Muslim women. Drop-out rates are higher among Muslims (25% of Muslim children, in the age-group 6-14 years, either never go to school or drop out); and incidence of child labour is higher among Muslims compared to all other socio-religious

communities. It cannot be blamed on poverty every time; the truth is schools have not been set up in Muslim areas. For example, in more than one thousand Muslim-dominated villages in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, there is nothing by way of a mainstream educational institution.

In "premier" educational institutions, Muslim enrolment is only at 4% at undergraduate and at 2% at post-graduate level. Worst, the disparity in the graduate attainment rates between Muslims and all other socio-religious communities has been widening since 1970. It is neither religion nor culture but the absence of state-funded schools and Muslim yearning for education that explain the establishment of *Madrasas* (Muslim-oriented religious schools which some time combine a modicum of secular education). Still however, no more than 3% of children in the school-going age attend *Madrasas*.

Article 30 of the Indian Constitution allows the establishment of minority-run educational institutions; Sachar bemoans the state's antipathy towards recognition of minority educational institutions. Over a period of four years (April 2002-March 2006), only 106 crore (1 crore=10 million) rupees were allocated under the much-touted programme of modernization of *Madrasa* education. Sections of the Indian society including well-informed ones continue to brand *Madrasas* as breeding ground of fundamentalism, even terrorism. One would find more unemployed graduates among Muslims than in other communities; as a result, mainstream Muslims do not see education as a road to social mobility.

THE MUSLIMS AND THE ECONOMY

Sachar finds very low participation of Muslims in formal sectors of the economy. Most Muslims are self-employed in petty trading and manufacturing and traditional crafts; this makes their economic fortunes more vulnerable to political disruptions and violence. Their concentration in informal sectors makes them particularly vulnerable to market-oriented economic policies. With access to banking largely denied, either because banks shun opening branches in Muslim-dominated areas or simply find Muslims "ineligible" for credit, opportunities opened by economic liberalization remain beyond reach; while the negative effects of economic liberalization on traditional occupations and crafts are witnessed in the daily lives of the Muslims. In other words, Muslims are unable to enter the "opportunity structure" under economic liberalization, while their "inherited asset structures" get dwindled and decimated by the forces of globalization.

Muslims have not benefitted from the average annual growth of about 6% during the years 1993-94 and 2004-5 to the same extent as other communities. They remain essentially hewers of wood and drawers of water. While incidence of poverty among them dropped noticeably in rural areas as a result of general rural poverty alleviation programmes, it fell only marginally in urban areas; still however, a significantly higher ratio of Muslim households is in the less than five hundred rupees expenditure bracket. On average, poor Muslims consume only 75% of the poverty line expenditure, which is the lowest of all socio-religious communities. More seriously, one finds an inverse relationship between physical and social infrastructure in the Muslim localities, villages and towns. They have a very poor rate of benefitting from government programmes; for instance in UP where they constitute 24% of the poor, their share in various government programmes is limited to 3% to 14%. Their lower participation in professional, technical, clerical and managerial work, both in public and private sectors, indicates their inability to access social security, status and power.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

As for their representation in top echelons of civil services, Muslim representation is only 3% in the Indian administrative service, 1.8% in Foreign Service and 4% in the police services. This was in 2003-04 and remains almost the same in 2011-12. Significantly, the proportion of Muslim representation in civil service has declined since 1960. Thanks to the electoral cartography, representation of Muslims in legislative and other decision-making bodies at the national, state and local levels is not only low, compared to their population and their high electoral participation, it is also on the decline. Sachar points out that several electoral constituencies with sufficiently large Muslim electorate are simply declared as "reserved" for SCs (*i.e.* certain Hindu castes which are declared eligible for the benefits of "reservation" because of their historical deprivation and marginalization and exclusion); raising the invidious prospect of conflict between Muslims and the Dalits (historically and socially deprived, marginalized and excluded castes among Hindus).

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SACHAR REPORT

To reverse the process of marginalization and exclusion in terms of access to political representation and developmental resources, Sachar recommends the strengthening of legal and public policy provisions; the establishment of a national data bank covering all socio-religious communities; the establishment of an autonomous assessment and monitoring authority to assess the degree of benefits of various government programmes reaching to different communities; an equal opportunity commission to scrutinize the grievances of the marginalized sections; and providing of incentives with a diversity index. On denial of political representation, it suggests eliminating anomalies in the identification of the so-called "reserved" electoral constituencies. Sachar goes on to recommend the path of nomination so as to bring Muslims in the process of

governance; evaluation of textbooks writing; more inclusive admission to education institutions; teachers' training programmes and hostel facility for minority students.

THE MISRA REPORT AND OTHER STEPS TOWARDS EQUITY FOR MUSLIMS

Another report, commonly known as Ranghanath Misra Report, came out in 2007, and recommended 10% reservation for all Muslims, irrespective of their social stratification, in educational institutions and public sector employment. Further, it recommended inclusion of Muslims, identified by certain markers as "outcastes" (*Arzal*) to be included in the list of Scheduled Caste, since by occupation and social status they share discrimination and exclusion almost similar to the so-called "low-caste" Hindus; and called for inclusion of more Muslim communities (both from the *Ajlaf* and *Arzal* stratifications) in the list of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) so as to also extend to them the benefit of reservation under the Mandal formula of extending reservations to the Hindu OBCs.

A broad-based three-tier social stratification characterizes the Muslims in the entire Indian sub-continent, covering the present-day India, Bangladesh and Pakistan: *Ashraf* are those who claim descent from high lineage foreigner Muslims who entered the Indian sub-continent centuries ago; *Ajlaf* are believed to be descendants of converts from Hinduism and other religions who mainly belonged to intermediate castes; and *Arzal* are converts from castes which are hereditarily engaged in menial work. Since the Indian Constitution does not allow religion-based reservation, the Misra Report has generated more political heat with diametrically opposite viewpoints being expressed. On one hand, the argument is that religion-based reservation is against the very tenets of Indian secularism or, that it is a recipe for national disintegration. The contrary view is that reservation alone can redress the political under-representation of Muslims; reservation in educational institutions and jobs for all Muslims including their inclusion in SC and OBC lists alone can bring them out of the morass of marginalization and exclusion, for which the public policies of the last 60 years are clearly responsible.

In the initial years after the Sachar report came out, the incumbent coalitional United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government responded with seeming alacrity and sincerity. Madhav Menon led an expert group to "examine and determine the structure of an Equal Opportunity Commission"; the group submitted its report in February 2008. Amitabh Kundu was asked to "propose 'diversity index' and to work out the modalities for implementation"; he also submitted a report in June 2008. Besides, a National Data Bank has been set up in the Ministry of Statistics and Programme implementation to collect data on the socio-economic facilities for various socio-religious communities; a high-level committee was constituted, which has also since submitted its report, on the delimitation law which has allowed gerrymandering; and an Autonomous Assessment and Monitoring Authority has also been created in the Planning Commission of India to analyze data in order to formulate appropriate policies.

In the aftermath of the Sachar report, a series of immediate steps were taken, mostly in the education sector. A Lunch scheme was extended to upper primary schools in all 3479 educationally backward blocks – an administrative sub-unit in a district; similarly, 77 blocks where large populations of Muslims are concentrated have been identified to establish institutes for teachers' training; some initiatives have been proposed to provide girl hostels in minority concentration districts and proposals have been mooted to establish polytechnics with hostel facilities in all such districts. It is also agreed to undertake revision of the *Madrasa* modernization programme and preparation of the textbooks – based on the themes of secularism and multiculturalism – under the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in light of the National Curricula Framework. Still some other initiatives include the opening of more public sector banks in minority-dominated areas; the establishment of centres for the study of inclusion-exclusion of minorities, SCs and STs in 35 universities, including one in JNU; and a training programme to sensitize government officials.

The much-publicized Prime Minister's 15 Point Programme for the Welfare of Minorities including Muslims has been in place since before the submission of the Sachar report. The 15 Point Programme focuses on a certain percentage in the allocation of developmental funds for minority-dominated areas. The Programme addresses mainly the questions of scholarships for minority students; of raising the corpus fund of Maulana Azad Educational Foundation (intended to promote modern education among Muslims); extending the *Indira Avas Yojana* to help in housing for those below the poverty line; and raising the capital outlay of the National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation for generating more self-employment among minorities. Leadership training programmes for minority women, computerization of the state-level *wakf* boards (government-mandated bodies to administer and manage Muslim denominational properties such as mosques, mausoleums, Madrasas, graveyards and other assets), etc. were also mooted.

CONCLUSION

How can we respond to the Sachar report and the various other reports and measures dealing with the iniquitous conditions of Indian Muslims? Some, among the liberal sections of scholars and other public figures which includes a section of Muslim intelligentsia, see the findings of the report as a severe indictment of Indian state and all that has not been right with Indian secularism. Nevertheless, the report, as the first one to be made public, has been widely appreciated for its frankness in dealing with the critical issue of equity for India's Muslim minority. Sceptics, comprising again sections of Muslim intelligentsia, dub it as a political ploy of the ruling United Progressive Alliance; it is an eye-wash, and yet one more attempt to hoodwink the gullible Indian Muslims. The right-wing political parties, mainly those belonging to the so-called *Sangh Parivar* (political parties and varieties of other organizations claiming to be cultural, religious, etc. who subscribe to the ideology of a majoritarian Hindu nation as espoused by the parental Rashtriya Swyam Sevak Singh (RSS – National Voluntary Service Organisation)), described the report as one more instance of appeasement of the Muslims and yet another case of pseudo-secularism of the UPA government.

In fact, one need not comment; the report calls for some introspection regarding its outcome. Due to maybe political apathy, bureaucratic antipathy, indifference of larger society or even the inertia of the Muslim elite, truth is there is not much to be seen by way of outcome. For instance, efforts at banking and credit facilities under the 15 Point Programme have so far benefitted minorities other than Muslims, with banks taking credit for providing loans to minorities while still manoeuvring to keep Muslims out of the game. Perhaps wanting to steer clear of any political controversy, Sachar also does not contextualize the issue of equity with the politics that produce insecurity – both physical and social – and the processes of discrimination and exclusion. Without ensuring security and citizenship in letter and spirit, the concern for equity remains confined more to words than deeds. On the positive side however are the myriad efforts made by the community itself to improve its socio-economic lot. But these may or may not be related to the awareness generated by the Sachar Committee report.

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LA COMMUNAUTÉ MUSULMANE EN INDE: LA MISE EN ŒUVRE DES RECOMMANDATIONS DU RAPPORT SACHAR

En mars 2005, le Premier Ministre a mis en place un comité de haut niveau dirigé par Rajinder Sachar afin de produire un rapport sur le statut socio-économique et sur le niveau de scolarisation de la minorité musulmane. Le rapport, présenté en novembre 2006, se penche surtout sur les questions d'équité pour les 156 millions d'Indiens de confession musulmane. Le comité devait cerner les causes expliquant leur incapacité à accéder aux ressources et aux institutions qui favoriseraient leur développement économique et leur donneraient accès à une meilleure représentation politique. Le comité devait aussi identifier les domaines dans lesquels l'État pourrait éventuellement intervenir. En ce qui a trait à l'équité, le comité a abordé les thèmes suivants: la population, l'éducation, l'économie et l'emploi, les infrastructures, et les emplois dans la fonction publique. Les données recueillies ont permis de réfuter certains préjugés. Ainsi, le rapport a montré que la croissance de la population musulmane ne menace aucun autre groupe en Inde, puisqu'elle ne représentera que 18-19 % de la population indienne à la fin du siècle courant. D'autres résultats ont montré que tout n'est pas rose avec la laïcité indienne. En effet, 25 % des enfants musulmans (âgés de 6 à 14 ans) ne vont pas à l'école ou ont abandonné l'école et seulement 3 % des jeunes musulmans fréquentent les madrasas, car les écoles laïques sont absentes ou inadéquates dans les secteurs habités par les Musulmans. En plus, le nombre d'enfants de cette communauté qui travaillent est plus élevé que dans les autres groupes. Par ailleurs, le taux d'alphabétisme des Musulmans se situe sous la moyenne nationale et est tout simplement pitoyable chez les femmes de la communauté. On trouve plus de diplômés sans emploi chez les Musulmans que dans les autres communautés. Ils ne perçoivent donc

pas l'éducation comme un outil de mobilité sociale. En outre, le pourcentage d'étudiants et de professeurs musulmans dans les collèges et les universités réputées se situe entre 2 % et 4 %.

Le pourcentage de Musulmans dans le secteur formel est négligeable. Ils travaillent plutôt dans le secteur informel comme petits marchands, artisans et petits manufacturiers ce qui les rend vulnérables à l'agitation politique et à la violence communale. La libéralisation économique a accentué leur vulnérabilité face aux forces du marché. Ils ne semblent pas profiter de la croissance économique de l'Inde. Sachar remarque que les Musulmans n'ont pas bénéficié autant que les autres communautés de la croissance économique annuelle de 6 % de 1993-1994 et de 2004-2005. Ils semblent incapables de s'intégrer aux nouvelles structures favorisant la croissance alors que leurs structures traditionnelles sont menacées par la mondialisation et la libéralisation économique.

Plus sérieusement, le rapport note une relation inversée entre les infrastructures physiques et sociales dans les localités, villages et villes de la communauté musulmane. En outre, la communauté ne profite pas des programmes sociaux de façon équitable. Une grande proportion de foyers musulmans vit avec moins de 500 roupies par mois. Les dépenses des Musulmans les plus pauvres se chiffrent à 75 % du seuil de pauvreté. Ce pourcentage est le plus faible de toutes les communautés religieuses. Leur présence anémique dans les domaines d'emploi professionnels, techniques, administratifs et de gestion, à la fois dans les secteurs public et privé, montrent à quel point il leur est difficile d'accéder à la sécurité sociale, à un certain statut social et au pouvoir. Ainsi, les Musulmans n'occupent que de 2 % à 4 % des postes les plus importants de la fonction publique, et ce nombre est en déclin depuis les années 1970 tout comme leur représentation aux assemblées législatives et à tout autre forme d'organes décisionnels. Plusieurs circonscriptions électorales comprenant un nombre important d'électeurs musulmans sont simplement réservées pour les castes répertoriées.

Le comité a aussi identifié des interventions possibles pour l'État: renforcer certaines dispositions des lois et des politiques publiques, établir une banque nationale de données et une agence d'évaluation et de suivi indépendantes afin d'évaluer dans quelle mesure les divers programmes sociaux gouvernementaux profitent aux communautés culturelles et religieuses auxquelles elles sont destinées, ainsi que de mettre sur pied une commission sur l'égalité des chances. Il suggère aussi d'instaurer un indice de la diversité, qui permettrait d'encourager les initiatives publiques et privés visant la diversité. Finalement, il suggère aussi d'éliminer les anomalies dans l'identification des circonscriptions électorales *réservées*.

Dans la foulée de la publication du rapport, on a observé une abondance d'activités sous forme de comités et de commissions, de rapports et de projets. Parmi ceux-ci, il faut mentionner le rapport Ranganath Misra de 2007 qui recommanda de réserver 10 % des places dans les établissements d'enseignement publics et des postes de la fonction publique pour les Musulmans de tous les statuts socio-économiques ; d'inclure des communautés musulmanes hors-castes dans la liste constitutionnelle des SC, et d'inclure davantage de communautés musulmanes dans la liste des « Autres classes défavorisées » (OBC). En fait, le rapport Misra a généré plus d'activités politiques que le rapport Sachar, puisqu'il a soulevé la possibilité que des Musulmans et des Chrétiens de basses castes puissent avoir accès au système de quotas. Cependant, comme par hasard, après six ans, le rapport Sachar a été oublié. En dehors de certains changements cosmétiques et d'un intérêt académique occasionnel, l'équité pour les Musulmans n'est pas un enjeu important dans la politique nationale. Le comité aurait dû être acclamé pour son travail ; mais sur le terrain la réalité demeure plus sombre que ce que montrent les données obtenues de sources gouvernementales. Il faut également porter un jugement critique sur la méthodologie du rapport qui ne met pas en relation la question de l'équité et les politiques responsables du sentiment d'insécurité et des processus de discrimination et d'exclusion. Puisque la sécurité et la citoyenneté pour tous sont garanties sur papier, mais non dans les faits, l'équité pour les Indiens musulmans demeure une idée utopique.