

## **Barriers of Modernisation for Indian Muslims: An exploration through caste and Poverty**

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### **Abstract**

*Modernisation has two aspects - one related to the technological advancement and materialistic conditions of life, and the other related to social values. Muslims in India are generally considered as constituting the most backward section of the society. Many a times the reasons behind this backwardness are attributed to Islam. The reality however, is more attached to poverty and the vicious cycle of the caste system. The author is trying to relate the poverty among Muslims with systemic discrimination, whereby the former seems to hamper the materialistic growth of the community. The other aspect of modernisation relating to the development in social values seems to bear no fruits for the Muslim community as well; perhaps, due to the prevailing caste system in India.*

**Key Terms:** Modernisation, Caste, Indian Muslims, Poverty

### **Condition of Muslims and Concept of Modernisation**

The people of Allah in India characterized by their conspicuous nature and their sheer number, they constitutes the 13.4% of the total population, according to the 2001 Census, which making India third largest Muslim country in the world. As far as the process of modernisation is concern Muslims placed slightly above the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, if we say more appropriately they are closer to SCs and STs in economic terms in comparison to social values. If we define the concept of modernisation as a cultural response-“it involves attributes which are basically universalistic and evolutionary; they are pan- humanistic, trans-ethnic and non-ideological. Modernisation may in this respect be treated as kind of ‘cultural universal’, not at the level of universal elementary needs or the bio-psychic unity of mankind as understood by social scientist, but at a higher level of manifestation – a level at which the of a higher order of culture is possible” (Singh,1972).

“Modernisation is rooted in scientific world view; It has deeper and positive association with levels of diffusion of scientific knowledge, technological skill and technological resources in particular society. But what may be essential to modernisation is the commitment to scientific world view, the internalization of humanistic and philosophical view-point of science on contemporary problems and not merely the technological advancement. It is possible that a society as also a person might command a maximum of scientific skills and resources but a minimum of its necessary psychic and emotional requisites. It is possible that a successful may be a failure as modern human, and a most affluent or technologically advanced society may also be the one which is most tyrannical (Singh).”

The Swedish Nobel prize-winner Gunnar Myrdal has discussed about ideals of modernisation such as the rationality efficient institutions and attitudes that are conducive to an increase in productivity and to develop in general and improvements in the standard of living. He also supports the decline in social and economic inequality, increment in production per capita and production per worker, primarily through industrialisation and increased capital intensity of worker. (Myrdal 1968)

### **Modernisation and its relation with poverty**

Concept of modernisation emphasized upon the two aspects one is related to the quality of, life, that is materialistic conditions of human life and the other aspect is related to the development of rational attitude toward issues. The concept of poverty is directly related to the first aspect of modernisation. We cannot define the poverty in a single definition; there is a wide range of discussion regarding poverty. It may be considered an unstable concept (Goddard, 1998; Saeed, 2003). It means not having enough money to buy oneself out of deprivation of the basic means of livelihood. Broadly it may be viewed as the inability to fulfil the basic requirements to attain a decent life and therefore obtain adequate nutrition, housing and clothing. In this respect, the majority of definitions described poverty from an individual perspective. However towards the mid 1970s the definitions began to include additional factors such as a lack of education and health care (ILO, 1976; World Bank, 1978). In this manner the notion of poverty was not confined to physical survival, but became a social and institutional issue. During the end of 1980s notions of poverty as a lack of ‘control’ over economic, social and political forces also began to emerge as the following passage demonstrate:

“Community can exercise the political power on the basis of their resources and a community may face subordination due to the poverty, for example, upper caste groups in India.”

Oxfam believes that people’s poverty is characterised not only by material deprivation but by the denial of basic human rights: the natural and social resources such as land and education, to participation in the decisions which affect their lives as households community, national and international levels, and to freedom from the discrimination and oppression which prevents which prevents people from living in peace( Fade and Williams, 1995: 481) The concept of poverty also include notions of powerlessness, isolation and vulnerability(Maxwell,1999).

Above discussion of poverty, tracing its relationship with first aspect of modernisation, that is, standard of living and marginalisation.

### **Discrimination, poverty and backwardness among Muslims**

In the context of Indian Muslims Sacchar Committee Report proved that Muslims of India are poorer. Report also proved that there is a widespread discrimination against them. In Indian society for the Muslims inequity may be perceptual or a result of discrimination. Report also quoted that Muslims parents often face overt discrimination from school authorities when trying to get admission or availing of get scholarship. The feeling of being a victim of discriminatory attitudes is high amongst Muslims particularly among youths. From poor civic amenities in Muslim localities, non representation in position of political power and the bureaucracy, to police atrocities committed against them- the perception of being discriminated against is overpowering amongst a wide cross section of Muslims. Besides, there is a perception that the socio-cultural diversity of India is often not articulated in school textbooks. This sense of discrimination combined with issue of identity and insecurity has led to an acute sense of inferiority in the community which comes in the way of its full participation in the public arena and results in collective alienation (Sacchar-15). Discrimination against the Muslims and collective alienation of community leads to the acute condition of poverty consequently Muslims are the slightly above than SCs and STs in per capita income, this low level of per capita income directly related to low living of standard. According to the National Sample Survey of India, Muslims have the lowest living standard among all religious groups with the average per capita expenditure just Rs. 32.66 in a day( The Hindu, New Delhi, August 20, 2013). The average monthly expenditures of urban Muslims was 800 Rupees according to the 2004-05 report by The National Sample Survey, which is very low in comparison to general Hindus (1,469 Rupees) (Sacchar Committee Report, 2005, 153). Above analysis shows that Muslims of Indians are backward because of poverty. But it is only the half story, other half is related to the social values. Generally the madarsa Education(In India only 4% of enrolled Muslim students go to madarsas) and Islam blamed for the educational and ideological backwardness of Muslims but the reality is that in comparison to any other religion Great traditions of Islam are supportive to modernisation, and ideally modernisation is a utopia, which cannot be achieve by a society in reality. Forerunners of modernisation (America and Western countries) are not fully modern as they claimed.

### **Great Traditions of Islam and unbreakable traditions of caste groups-**

The Great Traditions of Islam founded on the world-view which is apparently non-hierarchical (Singh 1972:63). If we speak strictly, Islam has no clergy, as any Muslim may lead a central congregation in prayer. Ideologically in comparison to Hinduism Islam has a more developed orientation towards the holistic principle in its conception of social order. Despite the rigidity of Islamic traditions, it is found that the religion as a whole is favourable to the acceptance of modernity. Process of Islamisation in India leads to the development of cultural syncretism between Hindus and Muslims but it was never a mutual acceptance. The non-hierarchical traditions of Islam unable to break hierarchical order of Hinduism, that is, caste

system and its associated cultural patterns remain a challenge for Islamic Great Traditions but besides this the conception of equality and brotherhood remained its ideals. "Convert Hindus retained their traditional skills and callings and did not change their status economically" (Singh, 1972). The caste system of India is responsible for the backwardness of Indian Muslims, although bulk of Hindu OBCs came into the fold of Islam, but in their cultural patterns, for example, regarding marriage, property and for various other local customs they remained same. And what is the most important to be discuss here? Attitude toward education of Hindu OBCs...although they came into the fold of Islam. Process of conversion in India has had a number of cultural implications such as cultural syncretism and diversification of culture. Anthropologists reported that, the Muslim Rajputs strictly attached to their early caste norms. The same was also true for other castes. Continuous process of Islamisation (some members of Jamat-i-Islami and tableegh Movement) in India trying to change the nature of hierarchical value-preferences through inter-caste marriages and rules regarding marriage, but it almost remain same.

### **Conclusion**

Above discussion shows that Muslims of India are backward most probably because of the poverty, and there are various socio-historical reasons also which have not been discussed, but it is the caste system of India which braked the ideological modernity of Islam in social sphere, although the Islamic Great Traditions remained the ornaments within the sphere of Quranic Schools or they still surviving within the mind of some Muslim intellectuals.

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