

# Social Mobility Among Indian Religious Minorities: Structural Support Versus Internal Barriers

**Dr. Iranna Mulgund**

Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Karnatak Arts college, Dharwad-58001 State: Karnataka  
India

## Abstract

India is a plural society comprising of different types of religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities. There is an urgent need to study the social mobility among minority groups for many reasons. In some countries, specifically theocratic states and dictatorship and communist states minorities have been subjected to a lot of discrimination in many walks of life. However, India since her political emancipation from the colonial powers adopted secularism as the bedrock of governance. Hence, many constitutional safeguards and welfare measures have been designed and implemented to improve the living conditions of minorities. Our constitution shows a great concern for minorities. Ours is a biggest democracy in the world. Naturally, all national level and regional parties have resorted to appeasement politics. Appeasement of minorities and majorities are equally bad. However, it indirectly has helped the minorities to get some legitimate share in the fruits of development. The present paper seeks to examine the role of “external support provided by state” and “internal obstacles inherent among minorities” in moving up in social ladder.

**Keywords:** Minorities, state intervention, upward mobility, educational mobility, social mobility,

## Introduction

In India studying the mobility pattern is not an easy task. Indian society is comprised of heterogeneous groups. It is a plural society comprising of religious minorities, ethnic minorities and linguistic minorities. Different minorities use different channels of mobility. Some are in advantages position while some are in disadvantages positions as far upward mobility chances are concerned. Hence studying the mobility pattern among them is herculean task.

Minorities in India are six religious communities that have been notified by the Central Government under the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992. They are **Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis, and Jains**. They have special fundamental rights for their protection and advancement in the Constitution of India, which does not define the term "minority".

The percentage of minorities in the country is about 19.3% of the total population as per the Census 2011. Some states have set up Minorities Commission to look after the issues related to minorities in their respective states. Among these minorities some of the minorities are not marginalized. Parsis for example have very good literacy status and they contributed greatly to the industrial development of the country. Christians too gave notable contribution to medical and educational sector.

Jains have very good literacy status. Among these minorities Muslims are lagging behind other minorities in all respects.

### Objectives

The objectives of the present paper are:

- to examine the role of education in promoting occupational mobility among minorities ;
- to explore the role played by migration and political parties in the mobility process ; and
- to understand the part played by state and political parties in promoting mobility among religious minorities of India

### Analysis and Discussion

#### Role of Education and Literacy in promoting in the Occupational Mobility among minorities

As per 2011 census, Jains, Christians and Buddhist have literacy rates above the national average. However, the literacy level among Muslims is just 68.54%. It is much below the national average.

Now, Indian minorities are getting Metric and pre-metric Scholarship. The students pursuing higher studies get different fellowships like *Moulana Azad* National Fellowship. They are getting coaching facilities. *Naya Savera, Pado Pardesh, Seeko Aur Kamao, Nai Majzil, Ustad, Nai Roshni* are some of the initiatives introduced in India. They in the past have helped the Indian Minorities in getting higher education. They helped them improve occupational status and move upward in social hierarchy.

The following table gives information about the literacy rate of these communities. It is related to 2001 census.

Parsis	<b>97.9 %</b> (It is from other source)
Jains	<b>94.1%</b>
Christians	<b>80.3%</b>
Buddhists	<b>72.7%</b>
Muslims	<b>59.1%</b>
<b>Hindus</b>	<b>65.1%</b>
Other Religions	<b>47.0%</b>
<b>Over all Lit. Rate</b>	<b>64.8%</b>

**Source:** Distribution of Population by Religions-Census of India, [Censusinindia.gov.in](http://Censusinindia.gov.in)>catlalog>Download> Drop\_in\_Articles04

The literacy rate of Parsis was 97.9%. It is highest among all Indian minorities. Jain community is another microscopic minority group of India. The literacy rate among Jain men is 97.4% and among women is 90.6% and overall literacy rate is 94.1%. In the same way Indian Christians too have better literacy rate. It is over and above the national literacy rate in 2001. In 2001, the national literacy rate was 64.8 %.

The Census commission clearly writes, as per Census 2011, the literacy rate of the Minority Communities namely Christians, Jains, Sikhs and Buddhists is higher than the National Average of 72.98% except Muslims which is 68.54 %. Even among Hindus, the literacy rate was not so impressive. The literacy rate of Hindu SCs and Hindu STs is very low among Hindus while Upper Caste Hindus

have very impressive literacy rates. It is because of this fact the literacy rate among Hindus appears to be less impressive.

After 1947 or after our political emancipation from colonial power, all minorities took the best use of reservation facility given to them. They acquired education and moved up in social hierarchy. They have entered different sectors of economy. Unfortunately, the Muslims are lagging behind other minorities. According to Sachar Report, the literacy rate among Muslims is very low and dropout rate is very high. Thus, the minority status in India has changed a lot after independence. Some of the minority groups have improved their status with help of constitutional support and positive discrimination policy adopted by the state. They are moving towards middle class position. The movement of minorities from BPL (Below Poverty Level) status to APL (Above Poverty Level) can be explained in the light of education and literacy.

### Occupational Mobility among Minority groups

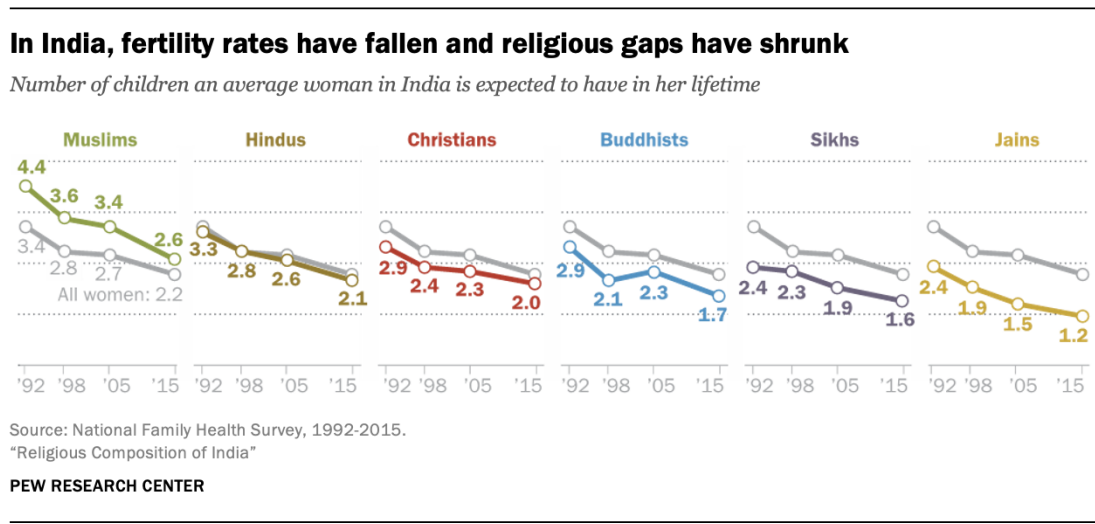
With the help of education and skills many minority groups have escaped from poverty trap. Their status as BPL has changed. Some of highly educated minorities are now serving in Indian Administrative Service, Private Sector, Karnataka Administrative Service jobs. Some are employed in Central Ministries and central government offices. The following table gives information.

### Ratio of Minorities in Central Ministries, Departments and Organizations

2009-10	7.28
2010-11	10.18
2011-12	6.24
2012-13	6.92
2013-14	8.53

However, their representation central ministries and departments is far from satisfactory. Hence, their underrepresentation in government jobs has to be interpreted in the light of fertility or birth rate and literacy.

### Decline in Fertility and Birth Rate and Its impact on social mobility of Minorities



*Stephanie Kramer, Religious Composition of India, Pew Research Center September 21, 2021, in Religious Composition of India writes : All religious groups in India show major declines in fertility rates*

**Decline in Fertility Rate among different Religious Groups**

Year	Muslims	Hindus	Christians	Buddhist	Sikhs	Jains
1992	4.4	3.3	2.9	2.9	2.4	2.4
1998	3.6	2.8	2.4	2.1	2.3	1.9
2005	3.4	2.6	2.3	2.3	1.9	1.5
2015	2.6	2.1	2.0	1.7	1.6	1.2

Source: National Family Health Survey, 1992-2015

India’s fertility rate has been declining rapidly in recent decades. It is really healthy trend. The NFHS results compiled by PEW Research Center clearly reflect this trends and patterns. Today, the average Indian woman is expected to have 2.2 children in her lifetime, a fertility rate that is higher than rates in many economically advanced countries like the United States (1.6) but much lower than India’s in 1992 (3.4) or 1950 (5.9). The decline in fertility has double advantage. First, it gives a women folk to move up in social hierarchy. Second, it can help the whole family and community to become upwardly mobility. Hence, declined fertility has to be analyzed in the light of these two advantages.

Every religious group in the country has seen its fertility fall, including the majority Hindu population and Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist and Jain minority groups. Among Indian Muslims, for example, the total fertility rate has declined dramatically, from 4.4 children per woman in 1992 to 2.6 children in 2015, the most recent year for which religion data is available from India’s National Family Health Survey.

Muslims still have the highest fertility rate among India’s major religious groups, followed by Hindus at 2.1. Jains have the lowest fertility rate (1.2). The general pattern is largely the same as it was in 1992, when Muslims had the highest fertility rate at 4.4, followed by Hindus at 3.3. But the gaps in childbearing between India’s religious groups are generally much smaller than they used to be. For example, while Muslim women were expected to have an average of 1.1 more children than Hindu women in 1992, the gap had shrunk to 0.5 by 2015. The minority that has better control over the fertility rate has better chances of moving up in social hierarchy. The families having lesser number of children generally give better education and training to their children than the families having large size. The intergenerational social mobility and intra-generational mobility (career mobility) can be explained in the light of fertility or family size.

Fertility rate has its own impact on India’s religious composition. India’s Muslim population has grown somewhat faster than other religious groups because of fertility differences. But due in part to declining and converging fertility patterns, there have been only modest changes in the overall religious makeup of the population since 1951, when India conducted its first census as an independent nation.

**Population Growth among different Religious groups as Indicated by PEW Research Center.**

**% increase of India’s Population sizes between Census years**

	All	Hindus	Muslims	Christians
1951-61	21.6	20.7	32.7	29.0
1961-71	24.8	23.7	30.9	33.0

1971-81	24.7	24.0	30.7	17.0
1981-91	23.9	22.7	32.9	17.8
1991-2001	21.5	19.9	29.4	22.6
2001-2011	17.7	16.7	24.7	15.7

Source : PEW Research Center Analysis of Indian Census Data, 1951-2011

#### \*Religious Composition of India

According to data extracted from Indian Census Reports, population growth rates have declined for all of India's major religious groups, but the slowdown has been more pronounced among religious minorities, who outpaced Hindus in earlier decades. Between 1951 and 1961, the Muslim population expanded by 32.7%, 11 percentage points more than India's overall rate of 21.6%. But this gap has narrowed. From 2001 to 2011, the difference in growth between Muslims (24.7%) and Indians overall (17.7%) was 7 percentage points. India's Christian population grew at the slowest pace of the three largest groups in the most recent census decade – gaining 15.7% between 2001 and 2011, a far lower growth rate than the one recorded in the decade following Partition (29.0%).

Some of the Indian Minorities namely Jains, Parsis, Christians gave good education to their children and have followed small family norm. They have small family and controlled their birth rate. On the other hand, Muslims even today have big family size. And the school dropout rate is still very high among them. Poverty, high birth rate, gender bias, low literacy, high “school dropout rate”, early marriages of girls deterred them from participating in upward mobility process. These are not the structural barriers created neither by the state nor by the majority. They are the internal barriers evolved, created and perpetuated by their own convictions.

According to some scholars and reports, the average size of Muslim family in the world is 6.4 persons and Jewish family is 3.7. In India, in 2011 the average size of the family was 4.45 persons. (For Muslims it was 5.15 persons). Except Muslims all religious communities have small family size.

Among Hindus, the family size is declining. Highly educated Hindus, Christians, Jains consider children as obstacle to upward mobility. They generally control family size and birth of children. High fertility can be considered as internal barrier to upward mobility process.

#### Political Mobility of Minorities: Some Obstacles

The Indian Parliament is still dominated by Hindus (90.4%). 5.2% parliamentarians are Muslims and 4% belong to other religious categories. In India because of democracy and practice of adult franchise it is not an easy task for minorities to contest election and win the election. It is only in some of the urban wards they can win the election. In state level and national politics they have poor chance of winning the election. Even if they contest election they may not win. In democracy their role is more or less confide to casting of votes. In 2018 Ameeruddin writes : in 2018 there were total 224 MLAs in Vidhan Sabha. In 1978 election the number of Muslim Legislatures was just 16. In 2013 it further declined to 11 members. In 2023 it was declined to 9 members. The representations of Muslims in politics is not satisfactory.

For example in 2011, the total population of Muslims in Karnataka state of India was 12.92%. However, only 4% Muslims got elected as MLAs. Thus, minorities have very poor chances of coming up in politics. In politics, reservation is given only to SCs and STs. It excludes Minorities. Hence, it is only through some Parties like Congress they can shine in politics and can shape their career. It is clearly evident that in democracy minorities can play important role as voters not as representatives of people.

### **Role of Political parties in Promoting Upward Mobility of Minorities**

In India majority of minorities have identified themselves with one or the other political parties. Such names of such political parties are : All India *Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen*, All India Minorities Front, All India Muslim Forum, All India Muslim *Majlis* (Dr. Faridi), All-India Jamhur Muslim League, All-India Muslim League, Assam Valley Party

The Indian Sikhs have identified themselves with The *Shiromani Akali Dal* (SAD) (translation: Supreme Army of God).

The Indian Christian Front (ICF) is a Christian political party in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

The political parties have given upward mobility channels to minorities. In Karnataka, Congress Party has given priority to Christians and Muslims. Using the Party name Minorities contest the election, work as party members, president and secretary etc.

### **Role of Migration in Promoting Upward mobility of Minorities**

Some of the Muslims now are working in Gulf countries. Similarly Kerala Christians and Muslims migrated to other countries of the world. Migration has helped them to rise up social scale. In Bhatkal, a famous coastal town of Karnataka(India) many Muslims migrated to Arab countries and sending their remittances to India. Nurses from Kerala dominated an estimated number of 60,000 Indian nurses working abroad in the Gulf countries [Percot, 2006. General Nursing and Midwives data was reported at 288,971.000 Person in 2020. This records an increase from the previous number of 275,544.000 Person for 2018.]

### **Efforts of the State to Promote Upward Mobility among Minorities**

In India, the many safeguards were given to minorities. Article 15, 16,38, 29 and 30 helps the minorities to assert for equal treatment by the state and protect their distinctive culture and language. The secular principles adopted by our constitution helped the Indian minorities to lead comfortable life on par with others.

### **Other Measures Undertaken by the State**

In order to promote and protect the rights of minorities' central government has appointed Minority Commission in 1978 itself. It gives advice to the central government in all matters relating to minorities. In order to protect the interests of linguistic minorities the state took many measures. In 1993, 15 Point Program was implemented to achieve the welfare of minorities. Since 1992-93 free coaching facility was being given the minority students. In order promote the economic interest of minorities, National Minority Development Corporation is established. All these measures have helped the minorities to move up in socio-economic hierarchy. Constitutional and Welfare Measures together have made positive impact on lives of minorities.

### **Conclusion**

Social mobility in general upward mobility in particular takes place among minorities in response to two factors. First one is the external support given by the state apparatus. State helps the mobility of minorities through the constitutional safeguards and welfare measures. Political parties not only in India but all over the world generally consider minorities as vote banks and through appeasement



politics they seek to polarize their votes. Even in Western Countries having democracy as system of governance do appease minorities to win the election.

Kerala Christians and Muslims in some parts of Karnataka state migrated to European and gulf counties. This international and intercontinental migration helped them to move upward in social hierarchy. However, in spite of all these channels, the relatively high birth rate or fertility rate hindered the upward mobility of some minorities of India, specifically Muslims. Even today among Muslims there is little encouragement to get formal education and training. The school dropout rate among them is very high. Women discontinue their education because of early marriages. Among Muslims and Hindus (though major community) even today the age at marriage is very low than the Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis and Jains. Hence, upward mobility of minorities has to be analyzed in the light of Exogenous and endogenous factors operating around and within communities.

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