

Socio-Economic Status of Muslims in India: Exploring the Reality of Child Labour Growth Among Muslims

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Abstract:

The study of socio-economic status of Muslims in India with specific focus on the growth of child labour among the Muslim community is very significant. Despite having various constitutional provisions and policy frameworks that aimed at safeguarding children's rights and liberty, a significant number of children are engaged in labour activities. This paper tries to study the situation of Muslims in economy, family status of Muslim, status of education and societal status. It is an attempt to describe the historical marginalization, economic deprivation, lack of access to quality education along with social exclusion which has contributed to the increasing number of child labour among Muslims. In this study both the qualitative and quantitative method is used to analyze the data collected through government reports and academic literatures.

Keyword: Child Labour, Muslim, Socio-economic, Minority, India.

INTRODUCTION:

Child is the future of a nation. A nation development depends on the existing youth power in that particular country. It mainly depends on how the nation has shaped their children and prepared them to make a good citizen. The issue of child labour continues to be very significant socio-economic concern in India, where most of the children are deprived of their due rights and liberty. Various communities have been affected by the issue of child labour throughout the time. The Muslim community is significantly a religious minority which constituted 14.2% of India's total population (Source-Census of India, 2011).

The socio-economic status of this community is vulnerable to other community. The prevalence of child labour among Muslim community is mostly linked to their socio-economic status which is vulnerable to that of other communities. The socio-economic status of the Muslim community is often characterized by limited access to quality education, poor economic condition or low level of income, poor housing conditions, superstitious beliefs and systematic marginalization (Sachar Committee Report, 2006).

The Sachar Committee Report, 2006 highlighted the alarming socio-economic disparities which were faced by Muslims in India. The committee has also highlighted the over-representation of Muslim population in informal sectors. Most of the time this type of structural inequalities compel this community to push their children into various workplace as a means of survival. The Sachar committee

report shows that Muslim children are more likely to engage themselves as child labour in home based as well as other informal sectors (Hasan&Menon, 2004).

However, systematic and structural neglect as well as underrepresentation in the state welfare schemes along with lower levels of educational attainment, high level of dropout rates etc. has provided impulse to the cycle of poverty and child labour within Muslim community (Jha & Pushpendra, 2012).

Socio-economic status of Muslims in India:

The economic status of Muslims in India divulges the significant disparities compared to other communities especially in the areas of education, employment and access to infrastructure. As we know that a substantial portion of Indian population is constituted by Muslims, they have been facing some sorts of challenges in achieving parity with other groups.

Socio-economic development indicators of Indian state don't portray any fancy picture on growing number of Muslim population. In most of the time, the data collected by different government and non government organizations and different surveys shows one thing that Muslims are lagging behind in almost all the human development indexes. Since, the social acceptability of Muslim community in Indian society is problematic, hence it is a very tough task to achieve overall economic and social equality for them. Most of the time statistics show that in Indian society Muslims are economically more deprived than other religious identities. A report in Economic Times revealed that chances of living under below poverty line are bigger among Muslim population rather than other community people in India. That survey was conducted by National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER). About 31 percent of Muslim population lives in below poverty line as compared to 26 percent of overall Indian populations (Source- NCAER Survey, 2022).

Many reasons are there behind the economic backwardness among Muslim community in different society in India. One of the vital causes of growth of child labour among Muslims is illiteracy. Backwardness is there on the side of parents due to lack of interest in modern education. Most of the parents are pessimistic in sending their children to educational institution rather they prefer to send them Madrassa education (Shahabuddin S., 1983-34).

The survey of NCAER revealed that "Muslims are most likely to generate income from small family business, partly because of educational differences across the community. It said social group differences in enrollment are striking" (NCAER Survey, 2022).

The Sachar Committee report explained that the situation of Muslim population in school education is highly a concerning issue. This committee also noted that educational standing and attendance levels of Muslim population are low in contrast to all other communities except SC's/ST's in some cases (Sachar Committee Report, 2006)

In Higher education institutions the enrollment of Muslims is lower than other Scheduled Caste (SC's), Scheduled Tribes (ST's) and Other Backward Caste (OBC's). The following table contains the data that are collected by AISHE-All India Survey on Higher Education Reports and it was conducted by the MHRD, Government of India (MHRD, GOI).

Table -1 Indian Muslims Enrollment in Higher Education

Years	Muslim (%)	STs (%)	SCs (%)	OBCs (%)
2010-11	3.8	4.4	11.1	27.6
2011-12	3.9	4.5	12.2	30.1

2012-13	4.2	4.4	12.8	31.2
2013-14	4.3	4.	13.1	32.4
2014-15	4.5	4.8	13.4	32.8
2015-16	4.7	4.9	13.9	33.7
2016-17	4.9	5.1	14.2	34.4
2017-18	5.0	5.2	14.4	35.0
2018-19	5.2	5.5	14.9	36.3
2019-20	5.5	5.6	14.7	37.0
2020-21	4.6	5.8	14.2	35.8
2021-22	4.8	6.3	15.3	37.8

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education Reports (AISHE), conducted by MHRD, GOI.

After the adoption of neoliberal economy per capita income of Indian were expected to boost. The result in the last three decades per capita income of Indians had increased. However, the Muslim population once again couldn't able to reap the benefits of the national growth. Also the National Sample Survey Organizations statistics revealed the difference in annual income of Hindus and Muslims in 1990's that was very marginal. However this difference between Hindus and Muslims has increased in the first decade of twenty century. It has highlighted that Muslims economic deprivation is not only the result of state's discriminatory policies but also it is the result of their own ideological and faith related insecurities (Khanum, 2012).

Table: 2 Annual Income of Religious Communities According to NSSO

Category	50th Round 1993-1994	61st Round 2004-2005
Hindu	24691	72618
Muslim	22786	63943
Christian	33,178	1,03,453
National	24,980	73,145

Source: Syed Najiullah, The Status of Muslims in India,
<http://www.indianmuslims.info/statistics/economic.html>

Table: 3 Annual Per Capita and Household Income of Different Religious Minorities

Category	Muslims	Christians	Other Minorities
Annual per capita Income	3,678	5,920	2,9427
Household Income	22,807	28,860	30,330

Source: A study by the National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) August 2006,
www.minorityaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/sachar_comm.pdf

A large number of Muslim populations in India are mainly engaged in temporary labour work. The

employment of Muslims in public and private sector jobs is notably less than Schedule Castes (SCs) and Schedule Tribes (STs) in India. In this context, Hindu, Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes have almost 25 percent of regular salaried jobs whereas Muslims have only 13 percent engagement in regular salaried jobs. The Sachar Committee Report highlighted the key earning sources of Muslim community people. These are mainly- “(i) Merchants and shopkeepers (especially for males and in urban areas); (ii) Sales persons and shop assistants (especially for males and in urban areas); (iii) Tailors, dressmakers and the like (especially for women in urban areas); (iv) Transport equipment operators (especially for males and in urban areas); (v) Tobacco preparers and tobacco product makers (especially women); (vi) Spinners, weaver, knitters and dyers (especially for males in urban area: and (vii) Machinery fitters, assemblers and precision instrument makers (especially for males and in urban areas)” (Sachar Committee Report, 2006).

Besides the negligence on the part of government regarding empowerment of Muslim minority this community has been facing constant threat of anti-Muslim rioting. In this regard anti-Muslim rioting is prevalent in the areas where they have their own small scale business as well as well doing income and comparatively profitable market (Shakir, 1983). Also in the last few decades different communal riot in various parts of India has revealed one thing that economic interest is basically involved in each confrontation. In most of the time Muslims were the soft target for Hindu right wing rioters. Sometimes, the Hindu right wing rioters profile Muslims as traitors and anti state/nation population in India. This tactics has always been used to deprive this community from economic and political opportunities (Jaffrelot, 2002).

Socio-economic deprivation of Muslim leads the population of this particular community to more vulnerable section of society. It ultimately leads to more backwardness among them. Therefore, the various problems like child marriage, child labour, unemployment, poverty is growing day by day. Also there is lack of political will, lack of leadership, organizational weakness and under representation has further added to their miseries.

Interlink between the Socio-economic Condition of Muslims and the Prevalence of Child labour in India:

India is home of world's second largest Muslim population as it constitutes approximately 14.2% of the population (Census-2011). While the issue of child labour is become widespread across the world, India is also becoming a hub of child labour due to various socio-economic causes. It has affected children of not only the backward classes but has affected minority community children also. The prevalence of child labour among the Muslims is a concerning issue in India. There is significant interlink between the socio-economic conditions of Muslims and the prevalence of child labour among the Muslim community. Most of the time like other minority communities of India Muslim community has also been facing various socio-economic inequalities. The prevalence of illiteracy, poverty, religious norms, gender dynamics, discrimination and marginalization lead them more vulnerable situations in society. Also in many times it is seen that illiterate parents of poor economic background that have negligence towards the modern education system pushing their children into the workforce to earn daily bread. Due to intersection of poverty, marginalization and lack of educational opportunities they opt for the engagement of children in various activities rather to send them to take school education. However, in 2006 Sachar Committee Report highlighted that Muslims are legged behind other social communities in different human development indicators.

Various significant root causes are interlinked regarding the socio-economic condition and growth of child labour among Muslims in India. It can be elaborated as- i) Poverty and economic vulnerability: A large number of Muslim populations in India are often living in below poverty line with a chronic vulnerability. While family survival is at stake for them education of children doesn't matters for them. Most of the time children are compelled to go for workforce to make contribution to family income; ii) Lack of quality education: The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) routinely finds that a large number of children in poor Muslim communities face different barriers such as lack of schools in reliable distance, absence of suitable medium of instruction, lack of proper communication and lack of other institutional facilities. Dropout rate is also notable; iii) Parental illiteracy and negligence towards the Modern education system: Illiteracy among the parents is another vital cause of growing number of child labour among the Muslims. In many times parents are negligible towards the modern education system. In this context, parents are more interested to engage their children as daily bread earner for family rather to send them to take school education; iv) Gender dynamics: In many Muslim families girls are surviving at vulnerable position. Sometimes girls are not only denied to take school education but forced to being marriage at an early age so that parents make themselves free from various kinds of social responsibilities. Also in some cases girls are being engaged in domestic work to cut the overload of parents work. Sometimes parents decided to send their son to take school education rather than their daughters; v) Religion, ideology and culture: Cultural practices and values system may be another reason that provides impulse to the growth of child labour in Muslim community. Religious traditions may also create situations like children are being engaged in religious activities or rituals that might be harmful for them e.g. earlier Devadasi system in India, where young girls are handed over to religious shrines.

Conclusion:

The prevalence of child labour among Muslim children in India cannot be seen in isolation. Despite the enactment of laws like the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016, enforcement remains weak. Schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Skill India, and National Child Labour Project (NCLP) have limited reach in Muslim-majority areas due to bureaucratic apathy and underfunding. Civil society organizations such as Bachpan Bachao Andolan and Jamia Teachers' Solidarity Association have emphasized the need for inclusive, community-specific interventions, recognizing the socio-religious context of marginalization. It is rooted in a complex web of poverty, systemic discrimination, and inadequate public policy. Addressing it requires not just stricter laws but an empathetic approach that empowers marginalized communities. Only then can India ensure a fairer future for all its children.

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