

# ISAS Special Report

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Institute of South Asian Studies  
National University of Singapore  
29 Heng Mui Keng Terrace  
#08-06 (Block B)  
Singapore 119620  
Tel: (65) 6516 4239 Fax: (65) 6776 7505  
www.isas.nus.edu.sg  
<http://southasiandiaspora.org>



## Diversity, Equality, Citizenship and Indian Muslims

*This Special Report outlines the trend of discussions that took place during the two-day workshop on the theme of 'Diversity, Equality, Citizenship and Indian Muslims'. The workshop, organised in Singapore on 18 and 19 September 2015, focused on the varied nuances of the socio-economic and political situation of India's significant minority of Muslim population in the light of the Sachar Committee recommendations and the evolving ground realities.*

Riaz Hassan<sup>1</sup>

A workshop on 'Diversity, Equality, Citizenship and Indian Muslims' was held at the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, on 18 and 19 September 2015. It was jointly sponsored and funded by the Institute of South Asian Studies and the International Centre for Muslim and non-Muslim Understanding, University of South Australia. The workshop was attended by 14 participants; 12 papers were presented in six sessions. A number of ISAS scholars as well as invited guests attended the workshop.

The aim of the workshop was to examine and discuss the economic, social and political developments in India and their impact on Indian Muslims. In 2011, there were 180 million

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Riaz Hassan is a Visiting Research Professor at the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS), an autonomous research institute at the National University of Singapore. He can be contacted at [isasriaz@nus.edu.sg](mailto:isasriaz@nus.edu.sg) and [riaz.hassan@flinders.edu.au](mailto:riaz.hassan@flinders.edu.au). The author, not ISAS, is responsible for the facts cited and opinions expressed in this Special Report.

Muslims in India, comprising about 14 per cent of its total population, making them the largest religious minority in India. According to recent demographic projections for the next four decades, while the Hindus will remain the majority in India at 77 per cent, the proportion of Muslims in the country's population will increase to 18 per cent or 310 million, making them the largest Muslim population in any country in 2050.

Economic growth over recent decades has delivered significant developmental dividends to India's vast population. Ideally the benefits of economic development should remove inter-group inequalities in the country. While there have been general improvements in the living conditions in India, these benefits have not been evenly distributed. Indian Muslims have not been equal beneficiaries. Their status was not very different from that of the Dalits in the mid-twentieth century, whose conditions led to constitutionally-mandated affirmative action in their favour. If we take 1947 as the base line, Indian Muslims have suffered downward mobility. It was this realisation that led to the establishment of the Prime Minister's High Level Committee on Muslims in India in 2004, popularly known as the Sachar Committee.

The workshop papers and discussions sought to contextualise welfare initiatives and policy responses following the publication of the Sachar Committee Report in 2006, which sparked widespread awareness of such socioeconomic disparity and the relative exclusion of religious minorities in India, especially Muslims. The Sachar Report was the first comprehensive evaluation of policies for minorities. The report assessed existing initiatives, policy promises and unaddressed needs. The theoretical framework was predicated on India's constitutional promises of 'equal opportunity' for citizens of a secular democracy. Given this broad objective and context, the workshop brought together 14 social scientists and policy practitioners, including the Retired Chief Justice of the High Court of Delhi, Mr Justice Rajinder Sachar, Chairman of the Sachar Committee, and two other members of the committee, to discuss the implications of the report and the implementation of its recommendations over the past decade. The following offers a brief overview of the workshop.

### **Day 1: Welcome and Keynote Address**

Professor Subrata Kumar Mitra, ISAS Director, opened the workshop with his welcome address. Mr Justice Rajinder Sachar delivered the keynote address in which he highlighted

the aspirations and ideals of India's founding fathers and mothers, encompassed in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution, namely the ideals of socialism, secularism and democracy that must govern any government programme. Secularism as highlighted in the Preamble is one of the foundations of the Indian Constitution. It is implicit in the secular character of the Indian state that no religion can claim superiority of status over any other religion. All religions have equal acceptance and status under the Constitution. A uniform citizenship is assured to all persons irrespective of their religion. It is self-evident that, to the extent there is a failure by the government in following these directives, it will be guilty of not discharging its duty. Justice Sachar emphasised: "It is meaningless to speak of democratic society where men and women are divided into social classes differing grossly in wealth, opportunity, status and education".

### **Day 1: Session 1**

Following Mr Justice Sachar's keynote address the workshop opened with Session 1 on 'Diversity, Equality and Citizenship' moderated by Professor Amitabh Kundu, Chairman of the Kundu Committee and Professor at the School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. The first presentation in the session was by Dr Sanjeer Alam, titled 'Religious and Caste Differentials in India's Job Market: Does Education Matter?' Dr Alam explored the relationship between educational attainment and gainful employment for members of different social groups in India. In particular, his paper focused on the under-representation of Muslims and lower-caste Hindu groups in regular salaried employment. Based on the National Sample Survey data (68<sup>th</sup> round, 2011–2012), the paper tested two hypotheses: whether the relative lack of access by the socially disadvantaged communities is a function of their low educational attainment ('attribute disadvantage') or whether the job market penalises these communities on the basis of their position in the social hierarchy, irrespective of educational attainment. The findings showed differential outcomes in regard to the education factor in the labour market for different social groups. At the micro-level, compared to higher-caste Hindu groups, lower-caste Hindu groups notified as Other Backward Classes (OBC) were shown to be less likely to be able to convert their education into jobs appropriate to their qualifications. This scenario was slightly positive at the macro or regional level. Conversely, lower-caste Hindu groups notified as Scheduled Tribes and Castes (STs/SCs) were able to convert their educational qualifications into commensurate

employment opportunity. Muslims tended to be worse off than the Hindu caste-groups. By implication, affirmative action is likely to have a positive impact on reducing unequal employment outcomes with regard to educational attainments as the factor.

The second presentation in the first session was made by Professor Riaz Hassan, Dr Mikhail Balaev and Dr Abusaleh Shariff, with their paper titled ‘Spatial Dimensions of Muslim Well-Being in India: A Comparative Study of Indian Districts’. The paper deepened the analysis of the Sachar Report, which showed a significant inverse correlation between the proportion of Muslims in villages and access to basic infrastructure. Using the Human Development Index (HDI) to investigate the relative well-being of Muslims in 599 districts in India, the paper demonstrated that Muslim HDI decreases as their proportion in the district population increases. At the same time, once the Muslim proportion exceeds 50 per cent, the HDI values increase. Thus, a statistically significant U-shaped relationship exists between the proportion of Muslim population and the HDI index values. This relationship was absent for other social groups analysed. Well-being was measured in terms of economic well-being, education and health. The paper also showed that the index values for Muslims tended to be much worse than those of ‘Hindu general’ or Hindu upper-caste groups, somewhat worse than those of Hindu backward classes (OBC), worse than those for other minorities, and only better than those for Hindu backward castes (Scheduled Castes and Tribes). With an overall increase in well-being, Muslims experienced a smaller increase in HDI values than all other groups. Conversely, with an overall decrease in well-being, Muslims experienced a larger decline in HDI values than all other groups.

### **Day 1: Session 2**

The second session of the workshop, on ‘Intergroup Relations’, was moderated by Prof Robin Jeffrey, Visiting Research Professor at ISAS. The first presenter was Dr Raheel Dhattiwala. Her paper, titled ‘Next-Door Strangers: Explaining “Neighbourliness” Between Hindus and Muslims in a Conflict-Affected Setting’, explained the survival of heterogeneous neighbourhoods in the riot-affected city of Ahmedabad (western India). It began with the premise that religious segregation demonstrates the tendency of like-minded people to gather in the same places. In conflict-affected places, such tendency also serves the added purpose of safety in numbers. Yet in the face of rapid urbanisation and escalating land prices, people

are sometimes unable to relocate to neighbourhoods of choice and find themselves restricted to living in mixed neighbourhoods. How do these neighbourhoods survive and what mechanisms generate cohesive neighbourliness? The initiating point of debate was whether geographical proximity is sufficient to guarantee positive or beneficial contact – an assumption that anchors arguments about associating inter-ethnic civic ties as deterrents to future violence. The analysis made an innovative use of cognitive maps to self-assess the concept of a ‘neighbour’, and compared neighbourhoods with varying levels of violent conflict. The findings challenged the intuitive perception of what it means to be a neighbour. Typically, a neighbour is defined as one who lives next door or nearby – that is, spatially proximate. However, the findings demonstrated that members of one ethnic group did not identify contiguous households of the other group to be neighbours. Respondents were more likely to identify spatially-distant co-ethnics (not kin) as neighbours. Crucially, despite the lack of positive social relations between proximate households, a construction of superficial friendliness among these proximate residents ensured the survival or collective efficacy of the neighbourhoods – residents came together with a common collective goal to resolve civic issues. One implication of these findings, Dr Dhattiwala argued, was that conflict-affected societies prime people to avoid routine conflict by maintaining superficial relations with contiguous neighbours, especially when residential mobility is constrained. Further research can show whether similar behaviours occur in other conflict-affected societies and differences in behaviour occur, if at all, in societies without conflict.

The second presenter in this session was Dr Raphael Susewind. His paper titled ‘Muslim Segregation in Urban India: A Decade after the Sachar Report’ departed from conventional narratives of Muslim segregation in India that situate ‘Muslim ghettoisation’ primarily as an outcome of individual discrimination. Instead, using ethnography and disaggregated quantitative data from Uttar Pradesh, the paper drew attention to more complex reasons for sustained Muslim segregation: the role of the state in structuring the political economy and the moral aspirations of middle-class India. Productive practices of networking and collusion generate pull and push factors that enable a building boom in ‘traditional’ Muslim neighbourhoods. Findings suggested that, rather than a blanket disenfranchisement, Muslim segregation is a reflection of both their exclusion *and* their inclusion in the political economy and moral aspirations of middle-class India. Whereas Muslims are indeed marginalised in middle-class India in some ways, they also replicate particularistic norms and middle-class

ways of fashioning the self, which allow them to partake in a political economy built on patronage. On a broader level, this highlighted not just the spatial repercussions of social change, but also the intersection of class with other dimensions of stratification.

### **Day 1: Session 3**

The third session, following the evening tea break, was moderated by Dr Ronojoy Sen, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies. It began with Prof Rakesh Basant's presentation titled 'Discourse and Perspectives on Muslims in India: Has the Sachar Committee Report Made a Difference?' Prof Basant argued that, while the Sachar Committee Report (SCR) highlighted the relative deprivation of Muslims in India, its wider implications have largely been of a political rather than analytical nature. Politically it became evident that the pro-Muslim stance of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) had yielded little tangible benefits for the community, and Muslims were, indeed, one of the most deprived social groups in India, contrary to the arguments of the Hindu Right about Muslim-appeasement. The paper proposed to fill in the analytical vacuum and provide key areas of focus, namely those related to gender, education, identity, security and equity. It emphasised, firstly, that the SCR recommendations applied to all disadvantaged socioeconomic groups in India, not to Muslims only. The SCR had identified three key initiatives: setting up an Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) to counter discrimination for all underprivileged social groups (including Muslims); evolving a Diversity Index (DI) to enhance diversity on the basis of socio-religious community status, gender and other characteristics; and setting up a National Data Bank and an Assessment and Monitoring Authority to maintain publicly-available information about all disadvantaged social groups and monitor their participation in society. None of these initiatives went beyond cursory discussions, despite more comprehensive reports released in 2008 – of the Menon Committee and the Kundu Committee – that proposed to flesh out the structure and functions of the EOC and the DI respectively.

Other SCR recommendations that have gone unnoticed include those with implications for gender. Despite their relative deprivation, infant and child mortality among Muslims is lower than in other communities and the child sex ratio is higher. Further studies have found a link between lower son preference, a non-vegetarian diet, and general physical well-being of Muslim women to account for this survival advantage. These were important findings, given

the focus on gender injustice towards Muslim women in India and arguments of the Hindu Right about data manipulation in the SCR. The SCR data would have been put to more beneficial use in breaking down the myths about Muslim fertility rates (which are falling) and use of contraceptives (which is increasing) rather than getting caught up in political sloganeering.

The presenters of the next paper, Dr Amir Ullah Khan and Dr Abdul Azim Akhtar, were unable to attend the conference. Their paper titled ‘Caste among Muslims in India’ provided a historical perspective into the conceptualisation of ‘caste’ and caste-based stratification among Muslims in India – primarily for the *ashrafs* (elite), the *ajlafs* (‘unclean’) and the *arzals* (backward). It also examined a contemporary social movement of the so-called Pasmanda (backward) Muslims in India. It argued that, while the struggle for equity continues for a majority of backward Muslim groups in India, thereby raising important concerns about affirmative action for Muslims, it ought to be understood whether reservations should be viewed in terms of class or in terms of Muslims as a single, composite social group.

The final paper of the day, titled ‘Pathways to Link Communities with Governance at the Grassroots in India: A Report from Recent Field Visits in Selected States’ by Dr Abusaleh Shariff narrated a two-stage ‘research cum action’ programme undertaken in 20 urban and rural locations from 10 Indian states. This initiative of the Centre for Research and Debates in Development Policy, jointly with the US India Policy Institute, proposed to identify the pathways that linked communities with governance at the grassroots level and created networks of access to government resources. In the first phase, four human development dimensions were developed, constituting the District Development and Diversity Index: economic index, education index, health index and material well-being index. These indices set the base for a previous paper presented in this conference by Hassan, Balaev and Shariff. The findings highlighted the limited access to benefits from government programmes for all minority groups, and especially for Muslims. The second phase aims to ensure that the excluded communities are brought back into the fold of governance at the grassroots level, through total utilisation of allocated funds. The project has commenced in Haryana and Rajasthan. Focus group interviews have revealed several concerns: poor quality of education, difficulties in accessing micro-finance credit, poor access to government labour schemes, poor access to child health facilities, etc. Targeted outcomes of the programme include

preparing manuals on selected welfare programmes; training civil society organisations to negotiate with the bureaucracy; and community mobilisation to ensure full utilisation of funds, among others.

## **Day 2: Session 4**

Day 2 of the conference began with the session on ‘Education and Health’ moderated by Prof Subrata Kumar Mitra, Director, ISAS. Prof Amitabh Kundu was the first presenter with his paper titled ‘Education and Health Facilities and the Indian Minorities: Issues of Access, Utilisation and Outcome’. Prof Kundu argued that a shift in the provision of health care in India from public to private entrepreneurs is expected to adversely affect the vulnerable sections of society in India, who are dependent largely on public resources. Within these vulnerable groups, one would expect Muslims to fare worse than others, given their history of deprivation. Using survey data, the paper analysed the access of different socio-religious groups to public and private health care and their outcome indicators of health. The main sources of data were the National Sample Survey, National Family Health Surveys and District Level Household Surveys. A similar analysis was conducted to explore the access of these vulnerable groups to education. The findings revealed that Muslims have much lower access to medical facilities in the public sector than other minority groups, including the Hindu Other Backward Classes and the Scheduled Castes. Interestingly though, Muslim households, on average, could translate healthcare inputs into better outcomes than other socio-religious groups. Outcome indicators for Muslim women and girls turn out to be better than for upper-caste Hindu groups. One plausible explanation for the better health outcomes for Muslims was the relatively higher gender equity; a Muslim girl child is as likely as her male sibling to be taken to a doctor in case of illness, unlike in Hindu households where gender plays a role in denying access to health care. Other indicators showing better outcomes for Muslims were age of marriage – 56.9% of Muslim girls marry after 18 years, higher than the national average of 56.5%; the incidence of child marriages is the least at 2.2%; and the Muslim sex ratio at 936 is higher than the national average of 933 (the child sex ratio for Muslims is also higher). In terms of education for Muslims, especially women, there was a distinct disadvantage because of their location and concentration in economically deprived regions. The paradox of high levels of poverty among Muslims and their relatively better health outcomes, argued Prof Kundu, deserves deeper understanding.



The second team of presenters consisted of Khursheed Siddiqui and Prabir Ghosh, with their paper titled ‘Progress of School Education among Socio-religious Communities in India: Post-Sachar’. The paper explored educational attainment of Muslim children in India during the period following the Sachar Committee Report. Using National Sample Survey data on education from 2004–05 and from the 64<sup>th</sup> round (2007–08) and the 71<sup>st</sup> round in 2014, the analysis measured the changes in educational attainment of Muslim- and other socio-religious communities (SRCs) in the period before and after the Sachar recommendations were released. The findings suggested an upward shift in the levels of literacy among all SRCs, although a marked distinction is observed between rural and urban areas – rural areas showing lower rates of literacy. However, compared to other SRCs, Muslims and Hindu Scheduled Castes and Tribes (SCs/STs) fared worse in terms of high school non-enrolment and drop-out, particularly for children in the age group of 15–18 years. In the school age group of 5–14 years, non-enrolment of Muslim children was the worst at 16%, compared to 13% for SCs/STs and 10% for all. The situation failed to improve for children in the school age group of 15–18 years. About 35% of the total did not attend secondary schools; about half of Muslim secondary school children and 43% of those from Hindu SCs/STs reported as either never enrolled in school or dropped out.

Rather than quality of education, the reasons for high levels of school drop-outs, argued the presenters, were household environment, financial constraints and engagement in economic activity. By implication, the 93<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Indian Constitution that calls for elementary education as a fundamental right of every child in India needs focused implementation.

## **Day 2: Session 5**

Session 5 on ‘Muslim Segregation/Religious Demography’ began with Prof Riaz Hassan’s paper titled ‘Religious Demography of the World and the Indian Democracy’. Prof Hassan presented the recent global population projections by the Pew Research Centre, which predicts Islam to be the only religion likely to witness a rise in its world population in the next three-and-a-half decades. That is, in the period from 2010 to 2050, Muslims are likely to increase from 1.6 billion or 23% of the world’s total population to 2.76 billion or 30%. The Muslim population in South Asia will increase as well, with the largest and most

consequential change being in India. Whereas the Hindu population in India will go up by 35% (77% of the total population in 2050) the Muslim population will increase by 76% (18% of the total population in 2050). What will this mean for Indian democracy? The first impact would be developmental challenges related to the provision of public services, given the economic deprivation and relatively greater exclusion of Muslims in India from public sector employment, as starkly set out in the Sachar Committee Report. There would be more complex concerns, primarily perceptions of Indian Muslims. Indian Muslims carry a dual burden of being labelled both anti-India and targets of appeasement, despite their dismal economic status. However, the Hindu Right's consistent slander of Muslims ignores the realities of Muslim demography: in the Census of India, 2011, although the Muslim population showed an increase in total growth in the previous decade, the rate of growth of both Hindus and Muslims declined in this period. This rate of decline is far greater for Muslims than for Hindus. The politically-motivated concealment of data, matched with anti-Muslim propaganda strategies meant to devalue and humiliate religious minorities in India, especially Muslims, is an ominous sign for the future of Indian democracy. The paper further explained the social and psychological implications of humiliation, as an intense emotion experienced when historically- and culturally-grounded perceptions of self-worth and dignity are destroyed and revealed as illegitimate affectations. Unless strategies of humiliation are not curbed, the projected rise in the population of Indian Muslims by 2050 – a community already debilitated by extreme levels of deprivation – could create avenues for radical political movements, thereby disturbing the robust multi-ethnic democratic state that India is today.

The next presenter, Prof Christophe Jaffrelot, could not attend the conference. His paper was presented by Dr Raheel Dhattiwala. The paper titled 'The Socioeconomic Situation of the Muslims of Gujarat During Narendra Modi's Chief Ministership' traced the origin and legitimisation of anti-Muslim prejudice in the western Indian state of Gujarat, noted for its long history of Hindu–Muslim conflict as also for being the current Prime Minister Narendra Modi's native state where he governed as Chief Minister for over a decade. It crucially highlighted the duality of the situation of Muslims in the state. An analysis of data for the period after the release of the Sachar Committee Report confirmed that the socioeconomic status of Muslims had not improved compared to other minority groups – with the exception of the Dawoodi Bohra sect within Muslims. This deprivation assumed greater significance in the light of the heightened presence of the Hindu Right in the state. Muslims of Gujarat have

explicitly been victims of discrimination, beginning with the anti-Muslim pogrom in 2002 and the unequal distribution of compensation for the victims thereafter, or of educational funds and schemes marked for Muslims (sometimes by the Centre) in the years that followed. The paper moved on to examine deeper concerns, of the banality of Hindutva (Hindu nationalism) and a sustained propaganda of ‘othering’ the Muslims, particularly during the state elections of 2012. The duality came forth stronger when Chief Minister Modi’s political campaign of promoting communal harmony, ‘Sadbhavana’, was compared with his nuanced anti-Muslim rhetoric in election speeches. The increasing residential ghettoisation of Muslims in the past decade, which the author documented in detail in his book chapter (Christophe Jaffrelot and Charlotte Thomas, 2012, ‘Facing ghettoisation in ‘riot-city’: Old Ahmedabad and Juhapura between victimisation and self-help’ in *Muslims in Indian cities: Trajectories of marginalisation*, eds. L. Gayer and C. Jaffrelot, 43–80. HarperCollins) makes a strong case for the condition of Muslims in Gujarat to be viewed distinctly from other Indian states. Commenting on the paper, Prof Mitra observed that the rise and popularity of Mr Narendra Modi in Gujarat was more likely a consequence of a deeply prejudiced and segregated Gujarati society than a cause of it. The two need not be mutually exclusive.

## **Concluding Session**

The workshop ended with a panel discussion by the members of the Sachar Committee, presided over by Justice Sachar and moderated by Prof Mitra. The panel revisited important points made by Prof Basant in his paper – the wider implications of the Sachar Report had largely been of a political rather than analytical nature, and the measures that could be taken to fill the vacuum created by misplaced political interests. One key recommendation was to push for making available the large data on religious populations to the general public, a step that would help scholars conduct rigorous empirical research that would help in shifting the now politicised angle of the Sachar recommendations to a more nuanced and analytical one.

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